

**The Rise of the Media-Real:  
Representation, the Real and September 11, 2001**

**By**

**Jodie Florence Vaile**

**BA (CS) University of Newcastle**

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## Abstract

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2001 the world witnessed an unparalleled type of catastrophic event; the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre, the Pentagon and the attempted attack on the White House.

One of the key factors making these attacks so unprecedented was that the second plane was caught live on television as it struck the second tower, as were the subsequent collapses of the two towers. To a large degree the events of this day were broadcast live to a mass global audience and it was this mediation that set the event apart. The mediation of this event was, on so many levels, more important than the event itself. It was not the first terrorist attack on a Western country, it did not cause the greatest loss of life of any catastrophic event, in a hypermediated world it was not even the most spectacular thing to appear on a television screen, yet no other event in recent history comes close to the level of effect that September 11 has had. This is the central concern that began the journey of this thesis, how did the representation of this event shape what possible societal perceptions of reality were available?

This thesis is an exploration of why this event in particular has had the impact that it has and it is through this exploration of these issues that I propose this new model of the communication of spectacular catastrophic events – the media-real. The media-real, arises from the conjunction of four key elements; the triadic forces of the spectacle, the *'unheimliche'* and the abject which converge and then travel through the conduits of unpreparedness. This convergence and acceleration of convergent elements allows for the re-emergence of the Lacanian real, that, like an eruptive wound, produces a rupture in the societal perception of reality and allows the event to escape from its representation. It is here that we find the media-real, at the fringes of what it is possible to understand. Existing in fleeting glimpses, in

moments within larger events but always a part of this process never a discreet product in its own right.

The concept of the media-real is proposed as an analytic tool for the analysis of mediated catastrophic events because of the conceptual inadequacy of current media theory to deal with the extent of the impact of such an event.

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This thesis is dedicated

To my father

David Strafford Vaile

30 September 1954 – 22 October 2010

Rest in Peace

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## Foreword

In early September of 2001 I went to visit my grandparents in Taree for a week. On the second last evening it was getting late, about 10.30pm, and I was thinking of going to bed when my grandfather called out to me to come and see the TV. I hurried through in time to see a shot of one of the World Trade Center (WTC) towers bleeding smoke and debris. The vision cut to a female voice calling the Television station from Central Park saying that there was a plane flying incredibly low overhead. Cut back to the original shot, except now there was a dot in mid-air that was getting bigger. Then the dot impacted on the building and a massive fireball leapt from the side of the tower. It was about this time that the TV started to use the phrase 'terrorist attack' – up until this point they suggested it may have been an aircraft accident. With the second plane, those suggestions disappeared from the coverage.

About an hour later the same shots were being repeated again and again and they were lasting for what seemed like a long time, so I decided to stop watching. As I was getting into bed I turned the radio to BBC World, just in case there was some major development. Then it was announced that the first tower had collapsed. I raced back to the television in time to see the first tower collapse in a torrent of smoke, dust and debris. I phoned my brother Josh in Melbourne. One of the first things that he said was "I can't believe this is real, that this has actually happened." I called my Father who had been sleeping on the couch and woke up to see the footage. He had yawned, muttered to himself about Hollywood disaster films and wandered through to the kitchen to get a drink. While he was in the kitchen he could hear the news presenters talking and so he went back to see what was happening. When the same shot was repeated again and again (for extended periods of time) and the news anchor kept on coming on, Dad finally realised that the attacks were not movie depictions but images of actual events.

The next day the whole of Taree and probably the world was talking about the attack on the World Trade Centre. What struck me about peoples' reactions was their disbelief, their feelings of distance from reality. So many people had initially read the event as being yet another Hollywood disaster film. I started to pay very close attention to the news, even taking some notes. I started to ask myself how the 'real' is constructed, how the media helps to shape our perceptions of reality, and what is 'real' anyway?

# Introduction

## *The Media-Real*

Many people viewing the media depictions of the 'September 11' attacks on the World Trade Centre thought at first that they were watching a movie, or at least registered a feeling that the representations were similar to scenes from movies. This thesis proposes that such reactions of disbelief and distance helped produce a qualitatively new phenomenon that I have termed the *media-real*. This concept, which is a model of the media representation of catastrophic events, answers the central question dealt with by this thesis, how the representation of this event shaped the possible societal perceptions of reality. What made this event so prone to 'misreading'? What made the mediation of this event so different?

It is important to note at the outset that the concept of the media-real cannot be conflated with the 'life-real' or with 'lived reality'. Rather, the media-real pertains only to representation and involves the eruption of a 'Real' into the more usual forms of media representation, but it is still a mediated representation of an event. It is not, and can never be, the same as a life-real experience of an event. Representing an event, even an unexpected one, still effects subtle changes, however the unpremeditated, unpredictable nature of certain occurrences often precludes the use of the usual ways of framing and mediating what has happened.

This thesis argues that the media-real comes about when the real erupts through, or escapes from, the superstructure of represented reality. This can only occur when the three 'forces' of the spectacle, the uncanny, and the abject are all present and working in conjunction with the 'conduit' of unpreparedness<sup>1</sup>. This eruption both

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<sup>1</sup> The use of the terms 'forces' and 'conduits' delineates the difference between two different types of factors that are examined throughout this thesis. 'Forces' refers to the three key theoretical concepts used in the thesis to

causes, and is caused by, the level of spectacle found in the coverage of September 11 2001. This level of spectacle provides a moment where the image becomes paramount and disturbs the more usual relationship between the spectator and the event. This in turn causes and reinforces a sensation of uncanniness because of the way that it destabilises the boundary between what is considered to be 'real' and its representation. In disturbing this boundary, I argue that the media-real works to destabilise the boundaries between other accepted binaries, such as true/false, good/evil, animate/inanimate, alive/dead, heaven/hell and so forth. The third force of the abject provides more impetus towards eruption due to the violent revulsion and rejection produced by the representation. This disturbance of binaries, as well as the spectacular disturbance of the relationship between the image and the spectator, adds to the repulsion of abjection, which begins to cause a rupture in the fabric of societally reinforced perceptions of reality.

In order for the event to escape from its representation, the eruption needs to travel through the conduit of unpreparedness and a major part of this conduit comes about through 'live' broadcast. This 'liveness' means that there is no time for repackaging the event and, more importantly, that the lapse in the symbolisation and consequent framing of the event is apparent. This temporal blip in our symbolisation processes is a key requisite for the media-real to appear because it is the failure of the symbolisation system that alerts us to the fact that something unusual has occurred. It also helps to bring about the uneasy sense of *unheimlichkeit* that the appearance of the media-real produces. This uncanniness is emphasized by the fact that we are witness to an unfamiliar event reproduced in an unfamiliar way through a very familiar medium.

Yet, 'liveness' by itself is not enough to propel the forces described above through the fabric of our perceptions of reality. This conduit is also comprised of a lack of premeditation and preparedness in the representation of the event. Media content is

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illustrate how this event was different while 'conduit' or 'subconduit' refer to factors that provided a 'pathway' or played a contributory, more minor role, in why this event was so different.

usually highly structured, scheduled and streamlined; it is timed down to the last second. The media-real occurs in those moments where something unexpected happens and the planned nature of media programming breaks down. Elements of 'liveness' or immediacy and unpreparedness are interconnected with the issues of technological hyperefficiency. The ubiquitousness of visual technology has become such that there is a much higher chance of capturing any given event 'live' than ever before. Mobile phones now include both video and still photographic abilities and there has been a corresponding development of increasingly small digital cameras that also record moving images. Mass production of such technology has meant that this technology is affordable for an increasing percentage of the population. This also means that events that in the past would have been carefully 'packaged' for audience consumption now go to air much faster than before. They also reach unprecedentedly mass audiences through satellite transmission technology. The cumulative effect of this is that it is now possible to witness events as they happen even when they occur on the other side of the planet.

It is necessary that the aforementioned forces and their corresponding conduits are present for this eruption of the Real through its representation, because it is only the combination of all these factors that allows the media-real to escape from the boundaries of the symbolisable. A spectacle, by itself, will not necessarily become a media-real. This is because it requires the repulsion and rejection (as well as a strange kind of longing) inherent to the abject, as well as the *unheimliche* confusion and transgression of boundaries to surpass (and hence render unsymbolisable) the representation of itself. Additionally the media-real requires the transmission of the event happening 'live', that is, it is immediate and 'is happening as we speak'. Likewise something that comes from the abject cannot itself become a media-real without the impetus of a moment of sheer spectacle (and of course *unheimlichkeit*).

The rupture caused by the formation of the media-real can be seen as a wound in the normalised, societally constructed perception of reality. The subsequent repackaging of the event fits with this analogy as the process of stitching the wound

back together again. A part of this stitching process is repetition of the most spectacular instances, because through repetition the impact of the rupture is made to feel more controllable, and it reaffirms our technological supremacy through making the event obey us. It also serves the purpose of desensitising us because with each repetition it becomes more familiar and less uncanny. As Geoff King argues in his book *The Spectacle of the Real: From Hollywood to Reality TV and Beyond* “[t]elevision coverage of catastrophe has a therapeutic effect...while producing anxiety, it also discharges it, especially through constant repetition...”(2005:55). Like a wound however, this area is considerably weakened in the aftermath and must be vigorously protected so as to avoid a further rupture. Even after the stitches themselves have healed, the wounded area will still maintain a high degree of sensitivity because of its rawness and the memory of the injury itself.

### ***Some brief definitions of key concepts***

There are a number of recurring key concepts that will be used throughout this thesis and it is appropriate to provide a brief definition of these concepts early in the thesis to aid in maintaining clarity of meaning and understanding.

The concept of an ‘event’ is one used frequently throughout this thesis and deserves specific attention. An event, in the sense that it is used in this thesis, is taken from the Deleuzian interpretation and thus represents a *process* of becoming (Deleuze 1990) as opposed to the more standard usage as the *product* of a set of causal factors or the end link in a causal chain. The meaning of this concept and the way that it is utilised in this thesis is examined in more depth in the early stages of Chapter One.

The concept of ‘discourse’ is also used frequently throughout the thesis. The meaning ascribed to it within this work is taken from the Foucauldian

understanding of it and refers to the rules governing what it is possible to say in a given situation or as Sara Mills puts it in her book *Discourse* “...regulated practice(s) which accounts for a number of statements” (1997:7). This concept is explored in greater detail in the second half of Chapter One.

Each of the three forces theorised as integral to the model of the media-real, the spectacle, the *unheimliche* and the abject also deserve mention here due to their extensive use throughout the thesis.

A spectacle as used within this thesis can be defined as a visual extravaganza designed to stimulate the eye and possibly the viscera rather than the intellect (Darley 2000). The view of spectacle as a tool of distraction and isolation, as explored in Chapter Two, is drawn from the work of Guy Debord.

The concept of the *unheimliche* or the uncanny as used in this thesis is taken from the work of Sigmund Freud and can be best defined as a feeling that something is not quite right, that something which is familiar has somehow become unfamiliar (Freud 1975). A detailed definitional framework for the *unheimliche* can be found in Chapter Three.

The concept of the abject is drawn from the work of Julia Kristeva and is used throughout this thesis to describe that which breaches the boundaries and provokes rejection and repulsion but also a curious longing and *jouissance* (Kristeva 1982). Kristeva described the abject as occurring at “...the border where exact limits between the same and other, subject and object, and even beyond these, between inside and outside...[disappear] – hence [becoming] an object of fear and fascination” (Kristeva 1982:185). This concept is further explored throughout Chapter Four.

## ***Foucault's Toolbox as a Methodology***

I would like my books to be a kind of tool-box which others can rummage through to find a tool which they can use however they wish in their own area...(Foucault 1994:523).

All my books are, if you want, small *tool* boxes. If people are willing to open them, to use such a phrase, such an idea, such an analysis...[as] a screwdriver or a loose-bolt...well, that's good (Foucault 1994:720).

This idea, taken from Michel Foucault's *Dits et Ecrits* (1994), that theories can be 'rummag[ed] through' and selected for use like a tool due to their appropriateness for a particular case, is the methodological concept underpinning this thesis. The thesis draws upon a wide array of different concepts, taken from different theories and uses, in some cases, very disparate approaches. It does so because no single theory satisfactorily 'fits' the case being studied. So while the representation of the September 11 attacks could be analysed by using psychoanalytic film theory alone, for example, this would only provide a partial picture of what is really being examined, the way that the representation of this event shaped what possible societal perceptions of reality were available.

Akin to the idea of the toolbox is Heather D'Cruz's idea of a 'fractured lens' model of methodology found in 'The Fractured Lens: Methodology in Perspective' (2001). This model again places the utility value of a concept higher than the coincidence of the theories from which the concepts have been drawn. D'Cruz states that a "...fractured lens allows for multiple, if somewhat disjointed, ways of seeing a fractured reality..."(D'Cruz 2001:27) and one of the central ideas explored within this thesis is the idea that the representation of the September 11 attacks, certainly in the initial coverage, can be seen as a time when a socially shared perception of reality was shattered or fragmented by the event and its mediation. When dealing with a fragmented and dissociative event and its representation, it is appropriate to approach the analysis from more than one theoretical position. By doing so it allows

for the broadest level of understanding even if, as D'Cruz points out (2001), this understanding can itself be somewhat disjointed at times.

In taking on this toolbox and fractured lens style of methodology, concepts have been drawn from several sources. The aetiology of some particular groups of theorists and their key concepts is quite clear. For example this thesis draws upon a number of concepts from within the very broad field of psychoanalysis. A key concept, the uncanny, is taken from Freud, while others are taken from Lacan and Žižek (the real and Žižek's reworking of the real) and Kristeva (the abject). Concepts are taken from Marx (commodity fetishism), Debord (the spectacle), Benjamin (authenticity) and Jameson (critique of postmodernity), and a reworking of DeBord by Kellner is employed as well.

Concepts have also been drawn from theorists that can be broadly grouped as postmodernist/post-structuralist. Deleuze' concept of the event is used as is Foucault's concepts of discourse and biopower. Derrida's deconstruction approach is discussed as is Baudrillard's concept of simulation and the hyperreal and Virilio's notion of dromocracy. Each of the concepts drawn from these theorists adds to the exploration of the key question central to this thesis, how the representation of this event shaped what possible societal perceptions of reality were available.

The obvious problem with using this methodology, as was mentioned above, is the fact that what often emerges is a somewhat disjointed understanding of the case being examined. However the central argument of the thesis, which is outlined in the following section, mitigates against negative impacts of disjointedness. By fitting these disparate concepts within a broader model of communication, and acknowledging the places where they disconnect or disagree, an overarching argument can be raised that, while relying on a multiplicity of views, provides one particular way of understanding the case under examination. While recognizing the problem of 'disjointedness', this approach is illuminating on many levels.

## ***Significance of this study***

The significance of this study is that it provides a new model of the communication of catastrophic events through the application of a number of key theoretical concepts to the case under examination. It is argued that the convergence of these concepts – the spectacle, the uncanny and the abject – together with the unpreparedness of the media for dealing with such an event led to a type of coverage qualitatively different to more standard televisual coverage. This in turn shaped what possible societal perceptions of reality were available.

In applying a ‘Foucault’s toolbox’ approach to methodology this thesis utilises a range of concepts drawn from different theoretical approaches that have not been used together in the form argued by this thesis, nor have they been applied, *in toto*, to the case being studied here. In saying this, there are certain theorists who have used some of these theories together, and occasionally a theorist who has applied some of these concepts to the event of September 11 2001.

The book, *The Spectacle of the Real* (2005) edited by Geoff King, is one example of a theorist similarly applying concepts to the event of September 11 2001. For example Rodney Lee’s chapter ‘Real Time, Catastrophe, Spectacle: Reality as Fantasy in Live Media’ applies some of Žižek’s work on the concept of the real to the case of September 11. He also uses Virilio’s notion of ‘dromocracy’ and some of the various theories on spectacle. However, none of the psychoanalytic concepts contained within this thesis are applied and nor does the chapter attempt to set forth a new model of this type of crisis communication. Both Douglas Kellner’s chapter ‘Media Culture and the Triumph of the Spectacle’ and Geoff King’s chapter ‘“Just Like a Movie”: 9/11 and Hollywood Spectacle’ examine theories of spectacle and apply them to September 11, again however there is no reference to either the uncanny nor the abject.

Catherine Belsey's book *Culture and the Real* (2005) looks at notions of the Lacanian real and the ways in which it can be understood. She critiques some aspects of social constructivism and is particularly critical of the Žižekian reworking of Lacan's concept of the real. She also briefly examines Freud's account of the uncanny. However these theories are not applied to the case of September 11 and nor are the issues of spectacle and the abject touched on.

Derek Hook's article 'Language and the Flesh: Psychoanalysis and the Limits of Discourse' (2003) uses the concepts of the uncanny, the real and the abject as well as discussing the idea of the limits or boundaries of discourse. However, Hook uses these concepts in a very different way to the path taken by this thesis. His article shows the similarities between these concepts and argues that it may be possible to collapse these concepts together in some ways. This runs counter to the argument of this thesis that sees these concepts as quite distinct from each other, though able to be used in a complementary fashion.

It is argued that this thesis represents a distinct contribution to knowledge within the field of communication/cultural studies because it provides a new way of understanding the communication of catastrophic events. This understanding is grounded in the application, via a 'Foucault's toolbox' methodology, of a number of different theoretical concepts in an original and distinct manner.

### ***The structure of this thesis***

This thesis explores the reasons how the representation of this event shaped what possible societal perceptions of reality were available. It proposes that a new model of communication, one that deals with the representation of catastrophic events, is required to fully explain why and how this event's representation shaped what possible societal perceptions of reality were available. The model that is proposed

consists of a convergence of three major forces; the spectacle, the uncanny and the abject with the 'conduit' or pathway of unpreparedness. In proposing such a model this thesis draws upon a 'Foucault's toolbox' methodology whereby a number of concepts are drawn from different theoretical areas due to their utility and are used together to provide an explanation for why this event seemed to escape from its representation and in doing so destabilised a socially shared perception of reality.

It is important to note from the outset that this thesis is not trying to examine the entirety of the media coverage of September 11 and nor is it concerned with media coverage of events that have a causal link with September 11 such as the invasions of Afghanistan or Iraq. This thesis is focussed solely on the first 48 hours of the television coverage of the events of September 11. The reasons for this relatively narrow focus are twofold. The first reason is that the argument of this thesis concerns the way that this coverage differs from the coverage of other events and, it is argued, the vast majority of this difference is only seen in the first 48 hours of the television coverage of the event. The second reason is that trying to include all of the 'follow on' events that have happened in the 9 years since September 11 is clearly an impossible task. Even looking at more than the first 48 hours becomes imprecise and adds little of value to the task at hand.

The first chapter of this thesis examines different ways of understanding reality and problematises the concept of 'an event'. It also looks at the concept of the Lacanian real where the symbolic falters and representation collapses. From here the chapter investigates the concept of discourse and deconstruction, drawing upon the work of both Foucault and Derrida. Additionally it examines the ways that language and symbolisation failed during the coverage of September 11 and shows how the visual language of television also faltered. This first chapter finishes with an exploration of Benjamin's concept of authenticity and how this relates to the event of September 11.

The second chapter deals with the first of the triadic forces that form the 'backbone' of the model of the media-real, the spectacle. It begins with a discussion of Debord's concept of the society of the spectacle and shows how spectacle is one of the defining characteristics of the representation of September 11. This second chapter also includes an examination of the notion of the spectator and Freud's concept of scopophilia. It also draws upon Benjamin's conceptualisation of the relationship between the subject and a work of art to propose that the representation of September 11 involved a reversing of the relationship between subject and representation due to the re-emergence of what Benjamin terms the 'aura'

In the third chapter Freud's concept of the uncanny is explored and the different 'themes' that Freud proposes are applied to the representations of September 11. Also included in this chapter is the concept of the 'uncanny valley', which comes from the work of Mori, and whereby the closer that robotics come to 'real-life', the more uncanny they seem. The fourth chapter introduces Kristeva's concept of the abject, the third of the triadic forces that, it is argued, converge to become the media-real. In this chapter the different ways that Kristeva conceptualises the abject are examined and applied to the representation of the event. Additionally the idea of the limits of discourse is investigated as the place where the Lacanian real exists, that which negates the symbolic. Finally this chapter considers the potential 'crossovers' or similarities between the concepts of the uncanny the abject and the real and rejects any attempt to collapse them together as too simplistic.

The fifth and final chapter of this thesis deals with the pathway or 'conduit' of unpreparedness. This chapter deals with the elements that 'accelerate' the event allowing for its eventual escape from its representation. The way that the representation of September 11 did not fit into the standard televisual structures is the key theme of this chapter. This chapter begins with a discussion of the impact of 'live' transmission and how this meant that there was little time for more usual framing of the event and how this led to the representation of the event being so indeterminate and confusing. The chapter proposes that there were two key issues

or 'subconduits' that show the differences between the representation of September 11 and other events, and hence how the representation of this event shaped what possible societal perceptions of reality were available. The first of these subconduits looks at the narrative structure, framing and genre characteristics of the initial coverage of September 11 and the way that it did not follow any of the standard conventions of narrative, framing or genre making the coverage difficult to 'read' and causing a degree of 'reality confusion'. The second subconduit looks at the way that the representation of September 11 broke many of the standard televisual codes and conventions, adding to difficulties in 'reading' the event.

This thesis argues that it is the combination of all of the factors outlined above that made the representation of this event so different from other events and shows how the representation of this event shaped what possible societal perceptions of reality were available. It caused a situation where the Lacanian real re-emerged to allow the event to escape from its representation and in doing so shattered the previously held perceptions of societal reality.

## Chapter One – Foundational Concepts

The event of September 11 left many unanswered questions in its wake. This thesis is, to a large extent, an attempt to answer questions pertaining to the way that the representation of this event shaped societal perceptions of reality. What made this event so prone to ‘misreading’? What made the mediation of this event so different? It is these questions that the model of the communication of catastrophic events, the media-real, that is developed throughout this thesis is designed to answer.

This first part of this chapter begins the building of the theoretical foundations for the concept of the media-real through an exposition of the conceptual areas of the event and the real. The *event* will be looked at first because it provides the initial impetus for the research: it is the things that happened on September 11 2001, namely the terrorist hijacking and subsequent crashing of the two airliners into the twin towers of the World Trade Center that initiated this enquiry and which led to the formulation of the theoretical concept of the media-real. Importantly, this thesis is primarily an examination of the *mediation* of the event rather than the physical event itself.

In discussing the Deleuzian conceptualisation of the event, the event as a process of becoming rather than as the end product of a causal chain, there is also an interesting juncture with the work of Paul Virilio on technology and the accident which is explored towards the end of the section on the event. What this subsection highlights is the way that an event, as part of a process of becoming, intersects with the idea of a particular technology potentialising the accident that can arise from it. In other words the invention of a technology contains within it the potentiality of the accident which comes from it.

The various ways of understanding reality and the real is the second of the key conceptual pathways of the media-real that will be examined in this chapter of the

thesis. In many ways it is one of the cornerstones of Western theoretical thought and is of fundamental importance to the concept of the media-real because of the nature of the questions that this model is attempting to address. The central of these questions is how the representation of this event shaped what possible societal perceptions of reality were available.

The concept of the media-real is a theoretical model of the mediation of a specific event in a specific circumstance and as such it requires an examination of the foundations upon which it is built. This examination allows for a deeper and more contextual understanding of the concept itself as well as clarifying the theoretical framework within which this model is positioned. Of course, because of the nature of the methodological approach undertaken, there is not enough space within the limits of a thesis for a detailed analysis of every theoretical concept that could form a part of the basis for the media-real. However, key issues will be examined and their place in underpinning this new conceptual framework will be made clear.

On a day-to-day basis concepts such as 'reality', 'the real' and 'the event' seem self-evident and given. Reality just is. It is the physical world around us, and our physical existence within that world. Similarly the event is something that has happened (or is happening), it just is or was. On closer examination these concepts become far more difficult to understand and more complex than initially thought. Part of the reason for this is that there are millennia of thoughts and concepts that have come together to form the commonplace, 'everyday', almost *blasé* way of discussing them. This is not to say that this generic understanding represents just the teleological process of ideas being replaced by brand new ones, but more that these theoretical concepts are built upon the foundations of what has been thought, said and written before. Even if an idea represents a radical departure from previous ideas and concepts, it is still juxtaposed against the earlier notions, and to some extent is built upon or related to earlier ideas. Again, it is important to qualify that this does not imply a steady or even progression of ideas and understandings, rather it is important to keep in mind that ideas do not occur within a vacuum and that, to some

extent, they are interrelated with the ideas that have come before. This is a point that will be followed up in the second part of this chapter when Foucault's concepts of discourse and his focus on the 'genealogy' of ideas will be examined.

The second part of this chapter is focussed around three core ideas: discourse, language and authenticity. These concepts are, like the concepts covered in the first part of this chapter, foundational to an understanding of the model of the media-real that is proposed by this thesis because they provide the basis for the analysis of the ways that the symbolic was harnessed to attempt to counter the eruption of the real. Language can be argued to be the key means of communicating or shaping a shared understanding of reality. By taking a weak social constructivist viewpoint on the formation of perceptions of reality, the importance of language is highlighted. In light of this, the analysis that is included in this chapter is directly related to the re-formation or reconstruction of a societally shared understanding of reality after the rupture caused by the eruption of the Lacanian real. This reconstruction process can be most clearly identified in the speeches and appearances made by public officials in the aftermath of the attacks.

Foucault's concept of discourse is the next concept to be explored. Discourse is of central importance to the media-real because it provides the boundaries of what is possible to say within a specific context, hence also provides the limits of what can be heard. This is important to the formulation of the media-real because it arises at the boundaries of the discursive. That is to say that the eruption of the Lacanian real inherent to the concept of the media-real necessarily involves the shattering of the symbolic because the real is precisely that which cannot be symbolised. Discourse cannot exist in the real, because the real cannot be symbolised and discourse is inherently symbolic. As will be further explored in Chapter Four, the real exists outside the limits of discourse.

Foucault's 'archaeological' method of enquiring into issues within specific historical periods is predicated on the division of historical periods into epistemes whereby

certain rules and orders enforce or authorise particular ways of speaking or discourses to emerge. This is of key importance to this thesis because of the way in which the episteme of what Jameson termed 'late capitalism', encourages particular understandings of representation and this is one of the understandings challenged by the event of September 11 and its mediation. It is important to keep in mind that what is being examined in this thesis is specific to dominant 'Western' culture in the current context.

In examining the concept of discourse and the use of language the aim of this section is to aid further understanding of how the representation of this event differs from others that have come before. On some levels what was of key significance about the September 11 attacks was the use of discourse (and more broadly language) by leading officials, and to some extent by the media themselves, in attempting to repair the damage done through a process of re-binarisation. The importance of the use of binary oppositions is theorised through the use of the Derridean concepts of *différance* and deconstruction. These concepts lay the groundwork for the subsequent analysis of language and provide an understanding of the importance of the use of binary oppositions in the formation of understandings of reality. Hence, their importance in the rebuilding effort that occurred in the immediate aftermath of the event.

In addition to a succinct analysis of the reconstruction of a shared social reality after the attacks, there is a discussion of the idea of visual language and how this too was mobilised in the reconstruction exercise. Visual language comes with its own conventions, codes and structures, though obviously still containing within it both spoken and written language. What this section of the chapter posits is that the event of September 11 broke many of the usual 'rules' of visual language and this, as will be discussed in later chapters, was one of the reasons for what a number of commentators, witnesses and audience members described as a feeling of reality confusion or disbelief at what was occurring.

The final part of this chapter examines Benjamin's concept of authenticity and how this relates to the concept of the media-real. This section is important to the overarching argument because of the way in which Benjamin discusses the nature of the authentic and its aura. His key point is that the mechanical reproduction of an object breaks apart the relationship of the subject and the object, freeing the subject from the object's influence. The argument that this thesis makes is that, although the attacks of September were technologically reproduced, the eruption of the real through this representation meant a return to the aura of the authentic, a return to the real. This meant that the positioning of the subject in relation to the object reverted to that relationship described by Benjamin as existing prior to technical reproducibility, where the object subsumes the subject. It is because of this change in the relationship of subject and object that this thesis claims that the coverage of the event was so mesmeric.

### ***The Event***

The Deleuzian conception of the 'event' occurs at the intersection of a number of different theoretical approaches. Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* described this intersection as the meeting of signification and subjectification and felt that it was at this point that the human face appears (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:167). This human face is not static and fixed, rather is forever shifting and morphing, nor is it a particular individual because:

Faces are not basically individual; they define zones of frequency and probability, delimit a field that neutralizes in advance any expressions or connections unamenable to the appropriate significations. Similarly, the form of subjectivity, whether consciousness or passion, would remain absolutely empty if faces did not form loci of resonance that select the sensed or mental reality and make it conform in advance to a dominant reality (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:168).

This emphasis on the face as a loci of intersecting theories and understandings is interesting in its appropriation of both semiotic ('significance') and psychoanalytic ('subjectification') terms to describe how the human face allows for the expression of these abstract ideas. Deleuze's theories can be seen as the meeting of semiotic theories with psychoanalytic, critical school and cultural theory analysis. This juncture of theory provides ample opportunity for the creation and exposition of theoretical concepts, and it is in this arena the media-real occurs.

Deleuze's work, as Paul Patton discusses in his article 'The Event of Colonization', revolves around his understanding of the 'event' (2006:109). In many ways all of his work can be seen as a theoretical exploration of the process of becoming for it is this emphasis on the notion of becoming *as a process* rather than as a product that typifies his philosophical method. It is also what makes it so vital for this thesis to problematise the notion of the 'event'. To a large extent this thesis is dealing with 'an event' (this being the terrorist attacks of September 11 2001) and on a basic level there is no problem with defining this as the moment where the plane(s) hit the towers, however, as the discussion shifts into more abstract, theoretical conceptions of the interrelationship between the individual and how their understanding of reality is formed, it becomes clear that viewing the attacks of September 11 as simply the end point or product of a causal chain is much too simplistic.

An event, as we have seen above, is a process of becoming. It can never be regarded as a fixed point in a causal chain, or the end product, because it is always a part of the continuous flow of time. In part this comes from the Deleuzian view of time as existing only in the present, yet paradoxically at the same time the present consists of both past and future flowing both away from and into each other endlessly. As Deleuze elaborates:

*Alice and Through the Looking-Glass* involve a category of very special things: events, pure events. When I say "Alice becomes larger," I mean that she becomes larger than she was. By the same token, however, she becomes smaller than she is

now. Certainly she is not bigger and smaller at the same time. She is larger now; she was smaller before. But it is at the same moment that one becomes larger than one was and smaller than one becomes. This is the simultaneity of a becoming whose characteristic is to elude the present. Insofar as it eludes the present, becoming does not tolerate the separation or the distinction of before and after, or of past and future. It pertains to the essence of becoming to move and to pull in both directions at once (Deleuze 1990:1).

A moment does not belong to itself; it is inextricably linked to both the moment before and the moment yet to come. There is no way to separate it from what it was and what it will be. This particular moment cannot exist without the chain of moments that led to it nor can it exist without the series of moments yet to be. They are all part of the same stream of time. While it is true that a water molecule can be removed from a moving body of water, as soon as it is removed that molecule no longer exists as a part of that stream. It becomes less than what it was even though it retains the same physical characteristics. This paradox is signalled in Deleuze's characterisation of Plato's second form of becoming:

...a pure becoming without measure, a veritable becoming-mad, which never rests. It moves in both directions at once. It always eludes the present causing future and past, more and less, too much and not enough to coincide in the simultaneity of a rebellious matter (Deleuze 1990:3).

It is the paradoxical nature of this idea of becoming that requires an intensive examination of what is actually meant by 'this event happened'. Or even more problematically 'this event happened at such and such a time'. Both of these statements rely on a conceptual understanding of reality that is tied to a materialist, empiricist point of view. By following the 'flow' of the process of becoming rather than the fixed point of 'product' it is possible to form an understanding predicated on incompleteness, on the impossibility of understanding everything that surrounds the individual, on the fragmentary nature of all knowledge because knowledge is based on *perception*. This point will be looked at in more detail later in this chapter when

different ways of understanding reality are discussed. Indeed, one can perhaps even see a linkage to the Lacanian real, which will be examined in detail later in this chapter, in Deleuze's writing on becoming:

Pure becoming, the unlimited, is the matter of the simulacrum insofar as it eludes the action of the Idea and insofar as it contests both model and copy at once. Limited things lie beneath the Ideas; but even beneath things, is there not still this mad element which subsists and occurs on the other side of the order that Ideas impose and things receive? (Deleuze 1990:4).

This 'mad element' that Deleuze describes can on some levels be seen as being congruent with an understanding of the Lacanian real as a remainder, as what is left beyond the realm of the symbolic, what is left of the pre-language world of the subject. This point will be explored in greater detail elsewhere but for the moment what is important is that the idea of becoming is a complex and paradoxical one. In terms of the becoming of an event, what must be remembered is that becoming has no beginning and no end, but is all part of a process.

The key problem that needs examination here is how to conceptualise the event under examination. If September 11 is regarded as a part of a process then it becomes very difficult to delimit a specific part of this process for analysis. For instance if the *process* of September 11 includes the terrorists entering the United States or the planning sessions at Al Qaeda headquarters in Afghanistan then it becomes a far more difficult task to specify a particular section of the process and term it an 'event' or as a *product* in its own right. Similarly part of the *process* of September 11 includes the invasions of both Afghanistan and Iraq and US foreign affairs policy since September 11. Under the Deleuzian view of an event it becomes impossible to regard these issues as separate, isolated products rather than factors in an ongoing process.

A significant issue requiring reinforcing at this point is that this thesis is dealing with the *mediation* of the 'event' rather than the physical process of the planes crashing into the building. This means that this thesis is dealing with a somewhat different entity because it has been 'captured' from the flow of becoming that the happenings of September 11 represent, but at the same time forms its own 'flow of becoming'. Like the example, used earlier, of the water molecule taken from a stream, the mediation of the event is different from the physical occurrence of the event even though both are interrelated and can have significant impacts on each other.

By choosing to focus on the mediation of the September 11 attacks some of the complexity surrounding an analysis of the 'event' is negated. This is because there are already a number of arbitrary decisions that have been made. Choices such as: the framing and selection of shots, the inclusion of eyewitness accounts, the selection of sound tracks, and other televisual production choices already delimit and segregate the mediation from the process of becoming of the physical event. In addition, simply by being a mediation, there is a removal from the level of concrete physical action to digital/mechanical representation. Deleuze makes the point when speaking about cinema, and in particular cinematic framing that:

Framing is the art of choosing the parts of all kinds which become part of a set. This set is a closed system, relatively and artificially closed. The closed system determined by the frame can be considered in relation to the data that it communicates to the spectators: it is 'informatic', and is saturated or rarefied. Considered in itself and as limitation, it is geometric or dynamic and physical. Considered in the nature of its parts it is still geometric or physical and dynamic. It is an optical system when it is considered in relation to the point of view, to the angle of framing: it is then pragmatically justified, or lays claim to a higher justification. Finally it determines an out-of-field, sometimes in the form of a larger set which extends it, sometimes in the form of a whole into which it is integrated (Deleuze 1986:19).

In other words what is being dealt with is already a delimited set. There are a number of factors that have already isolated these particular sets of representations

and this means that a further delineation, or setting the boundaries of the subsets to be used for analysis, is less problematic. The above quote also discusses how the borders placed around a set point to the ways in which it belongs to a larger 'external' set or a 'whole' in which it forms a part. This is useful to the case of the mediation of September 11 and the event of which it is a part. In this case the mediation of the event is being treated as a subset of the event of the September 11 attacks themselves, however there is also the limiting (primarily) of the subset itself into a narrower subset, that of the first 48 hours of the coverage<sup>2</sup>.

An important part of the considerations of this thesis is the relationship of the mediation to the event from which it has been drawn. Brian Massumi (2002) explores many Deleuzian concepts, the event being one. In terms of the relationship of mediation to the originary event, Massumi describes:

Media transmission as the becoming *of the event*. All of the operations on the playing field refigure in the striking field. Refigure, and reconfigure: induction, transduction, catalysis; signs, part-object, part-subject; expression application (folding back), coding; capture and containment. When the event-dimension migrates to a new space, its elements modulate. There is no general model for the catalysis of an event. Every time an event migrates, it is re-conditioned (Massumi 2002:81).

In many ways it is these 'modulations' of the original elements of the September 11 attacks that are being studied here. This thesis is looking at the reconfiguration or reconditioning of the possible socially constructed realities available that the event of these attacks provoked because it is this process of modulation or reconfiguring that raises the initial questions that prompted this research.

One of the most important points made by Deleuze about the concept of the event, for the purposes of this thesis, is his notion of 'crisis points'. As he outlines:

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<sup>2</sup> The set is further delimited by the choice of channels to analyse. These were CNN, abc (US), BBC and CBS. These channels were chosen due to the availability of the coverage for analysis and the fact that they represented a cross section of the major US and International channels available.

There are critical points of the event just as there are critical points of temperature: points of fusion, freezing and boiling points, points of coagulation and crystallisation. There are even in the case of events states of superfusion which are precipitated, crystallised or determined only by the introduction of a fragment of some future event (Deleuze 1990:53).

It is these critical or crisis points of the attacks of September 11, or more specifically, the mediation of these critical points, that are the subject of this analysis. And it is these 'critical points' that show most clearly how the attacks can be seen as 'fragments' of future events. They presuppose the rest of the *process of becoming* that the event of September 11 signifies. In other words they are the moments, where like Alice, the subject is paradoxically both bigger and smaller at the same time, or in this case where it is possible to be both at peace and at war, both attacked and attacking, both mediated and mediating.

### **Critiques of Deleuze**

There are a number of critiques of Deleuze (and Guattari's) theories that should be acknowledged and examined. Like many of the loosely grouped 'poststructuralists', Deleuze has been extensively critiqued for obscurantism or the meaningless use of words. Scientists such as Sokal and Bricomont in their book *Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals' Abuse of Science* (1997) have attacked his work for being vague and for sliding between idiosyncratic use of technical terms and accepted usage (1997). Other academics such as Žižek, in his book *Organs Without Bodies: Deleuze and Consequences* (2004) have critiqued his work for "masquerading as radical chic" all the while concealing the fact that on some levels he can be seen as "an ideologist of today's digital capitalism" (2004:xii).

Likewise Baudrillard critiqued Deleuze's work alongside his extensive critique of Foucault, in *Forget Foucault*, which will be further explored later in this chapter, as

“floating theories...[which] serve as signs for one another...It merely signifies that any theory can from now on be exchanged against any other according to variable exchange rates, but without any longer being invested anywhere...” (1994:44). Baudrillard particularly posits this in relation to Deleuze’s use of desire and Foucault’s analysis of power “...yet everything still comes back to some kind of power...just as with Deleuze everything comes back to some kind of desire” (2004:49) in fact he goes so far as to say:

Foucault is part of this molecular intertwining which sketches out all of the future’s visible hysteria: he has helped establish a systematic notion of power along the same operational lines as desire, just as Deleuze established a notion of desire along the future forms of power. This collusion is too beautiful not to arouse suspicion, but it has in its behalf the quaint innocence of a betrothal. When power blends into desire and desire blends into power, let’s forget them both (2004:36).

Critiques of Deleuze’s concept of being and of the event are also available: Alain Badiou in *Deleuze: The Clamour of Being* (2000) criticises Deleuze for the monadic nature of the concept of the event, commenting:

And let us also remind those who naively celebrate a Deleuze for whom everything is event, surprise and creation that the multiplicity of ‘what occurs’ is but a misleading surface, because for veritable thought, “Being is the unique event in which all events communicate with one another” (The Logic of Sense p180). Being – which is also Sense – is “the position in the void of all events in one, the expression in nonsense of all senses in one” (Ibid). Deleuze’s fundamental problem is most certainly not to liberate the multiple but to submit thinking to a renewed concept of the One (2000:10).

By focussing on this monism Badiou effectively undercuts Deleuze’s claims of multiplicity and multivocality – a critique also levelled at Deleuze by Žižek (2004).

Despite these critiques Deleuze's concept of the event remains useful to this thesis because of the way in which the event is detached from a materialist understanding of time as a one way march of instants or stop frames. In Deleuze this mechanistic understanding is replaced by a flow of time that is not necessarily, and somewhat paradoxically, unidirectional. The *product* is replaced by the *process* as with this conceptualisation of the event no instant can really be isolated from the flow within which it occurs without fundamentally changing the nature, and hence the understanding, of that instant.

### **The event and the accident**

The idea of the September 11 attacks as being part of an ongoing process and the mediation as a tributary of this process fits with both the Deleuzian view of the present as being made up of both the past and future as well as tying in to Virilio's conceptualisation of the accident being presupposed by the technology(s) available. As Virilio writes in his book *The Original Accident* (2007):

To invent the sailing ship or steamer is to *invent the shipwreck*. To invent the train is to *invent the rail accident* or derailment. To invent the family automobile is to produce the *pile-up* on the highway (2007:10).

In the instance of September 11 the particular technologies of note are the aeroplane and the skyscraper, without both of these 'technologies' the attacks of September 11 could not have occurred.

This idea of the accident being preordained by the technology involved forms part of an understanding of becoming as a process and never as a finished product. This is because every 'technology' is made up of other 'technologies' and each of them allows for a different set of accidents. 'Accident' in this case is used in the loosest possible sense. What is most notable, however, in terms of the focus of this thesis on the mediation of the event, is Virilio's emphasis on the speed of the accident and, in

particular, the scale that our telecommunications introduce into this idea of the accident. Virilio highlights the way in which:

Turning on its head the threat of the unexpected, the surprise, becomes the subject for a thesis and the natural disaster, the subject of an exhibition within the framework of instantaneous telecommunications (2007:3).

One of the most significant and remarkable factors in regards to the event of September 11 was the role of the 'accident' in its mediation – or as is discussed in Chapter Five, the *unpreparedness* of the media response to the event. This mediation is therefore predicated on the technologies involved in the capture and transmission of the event by television (and other) cameras. In many ways, taking Virilio's analogy even further, the entire 'accident' or outcome of terrorism, that is, the spectacular event at its basis is presupposed by the communication technologies that enable the communication of the event.

Chapter Five of this thesis will look extensively at issues in part produced by the speed of the global telecommunications infrastructure, and how this impacted on the range of understandings of the event. But what is important here is the relationship between the idea of the accident, Virilio's preoccupation with speed and time and Deleuze's conception of the event. If an event is always in the process of becoming and if Virilio's idea of the accident as always contained within the invention of the technology involved in the propagation of the accident, then the speed of this propagation and the process that it goes through assume vital importance. Further to this is the impact of the accident on perceptions of reality. As Virilio comments:

The local accident, precisely located here or there, has been abruptly replaced by the possibility of a global accident that will involve not only 'substances' – the substance of the world in the age of the real time of exchanges – but also the knowledge that we have of reality, that vision of the world that our various branches of knowledge were, once, founded on. And so after the accident in substance, we are ushering in with the coming century an accident without

parallel, an accident in the real, in space, in time as in substantial matter (Virilio 2007:34).

What this points to is that, in many ways, September 11 can be seen as the beginning of this process; an accident in the real. It is both its own moment but also inextricably tied to every moment before and after, a paradox in true Deleuzian fashion because we cannot separate this event, this accident, from either the socio-historical context from which it arises nor from the temporal stream wherein it occurred nor from the technological processes that birthed its potential. In addition what the above quote intimates is that the local is no longer confined to the local. The local can become global at any time due to the speed and interconnectivity of global communication networks. Further to this, Virilio is making the point that our understanding of reality is changed by the level of interconnection that we have with the global and this change in understanding due to technology leads to a situation where not just substance, but knowledge and to some extent reality itself now is involved in the potentiality of the next accident. This idea of an accident now being possible in terms of understandings of reality itself is something which will be further explored in the following section on the real.

The final point that needs to be made in terms of the Deleuzian conception of what exactly an event is, comes from the classical Stoic distinction between the corporeal – bodies, states of affairs, actions; and the incorporeal – effects, expression, events.

They [the Stoics] drew a fundamental distinction between a material or physical realm of bodies and states of affairs and a non-physical realm of incorporeal entities that included time, place and the sense of, or ‘what is expressed’ in, statements (*Lekta*) (Patton 2005:110).

This proposes a very interesting relationship between bodies, events and their expression – a relationship that is at the core of this research. Patton highlights how “[t]his Stoic metaphysics implies that events stand in an essential relationship both to bodies and states of affairs on the one hand, and to language on the other”

(2005:110) or as Deleuze puts it “[t]he event subsists in language, but it happens to things” (1990:24). This interrelationship of the event with language and more broadly with discourse is the subject of the following chapter where it will be examined in far greater detail. It is the interrelationship of the event with its representation/expression/mediation and the effect that this has on both societal and individual understandings of reality which is one of the driving concerns of this thesis. This concern with understandings of reality leads to the following section that looks at the theoretical concepts that underpin this research’s understanding of reality.

### ***The Real***

Any examination of the characteristics of the media-real requires some interrogation of the concepts of reality and the real. This is, in part, because of the dominant Western notion that if something is happening ‘live’, in the now, then it must be authentic and true. It can be argued that this idea comes from a ‘privileging of the visual’ in dominant Western discourses in regards to claims of originality or authenticity. The phrase ‘seeing is believing’ is one exemplar of this kind of thinking. It is also necessary to explore the concepts of the real and reality because of their centrality to the key question being examined by this thesis; how the representation of this event shaped what possible societal perceptions of reality were available. The social constructivist approach to understanding reality will be examined first as it underpins the question stated above. This will be followed by an exploration of the Žižekian reworking of the concept of the Lacanian real.

### **Reality**

The position taken by this thesis in terms of theories of reality can be categorised as a social constructivist position where perceptions of reality are seen as being drawn

from the society around the subject. Constructivism can be roughly divided into these three positions: weak, strong and radical. The key difference between weak and strong constructivism is that 'weak' constructivism tends to acknowledge some form of factual existence external to the human subject (and therefore sits somewhere in between a materialist and immaterialist conception of reality) while strong constructivists believe that everything is to some degree a societal construction. Anthony Goldman, in his article 'Social Epistemology' argues that:

In discussing social constructivism, it is essential to distinguish between weak and strong versions. Weak social constructivism is the view that human *representations* of reality — either linguistic or mental representations — are social constructs...Strong social constructivism claims not only that representations are socially constructed, but that the *entities themselves* to which these representations refer are socially constructed. (2006).

The radical constructivist approach is particularly noteworthy in regard to the analysis of technology and can be seen to be in opposition to technological determinism. Radical constructivists believe that it is impossible to 'know' how closely an individual's knowledge or perception matches 'reality' meaning that there is no direct comparison that can be made. Each individual only has their perceptions and the social understandings of the world that have been imparted to them. As Eric von Glaserfeld explains in his article 'An exposition of constructivism: Why some like it radical':

To claim that one's theory of knowing is true...would be perjury for a radical constructivist. One of the central points of the theory is precisely that this kind of "truth," can never be claimed for the knowledge (or any piece of it) that human reason produces...constructivism needs to be radical and must explain that one can, indeed, manage without the traditional notion of Truth (1990:1).

It is of particular interest to note a similarity in von Glaserfeld's approach to the idea of truth and that of Foucault – which is examined in greater detail later in this

chapter. The similarity lies in the treatment of truth as problematic and claiming one truth above others exceedingly so. There are also differences, von Glaserfeld's position can be argued to be – ironically enough – more radical in that he questions the possibility of truth *per se* while Foucault's position is more relative, in that a discourse may be 'true' within the institution that gave rise to it yet at the same time not true within other institutions.

### **Critiques of constructivism**

However there are dangers in taking the constructivist path. As Catherine Belsey notes in *Culture and the Real: Theorizing Cultural Criticism* (2005):

Identity is culturally scripted; modes of reading are defined by interpretive communities; facts, like values, are social and political constructs; bodies materialize as the effect of speech acts. And it follows that participating in culture as we do, we lose our individuality in a form of cultural determinism that has, in the end, no way of accounting for dissent, in the same way that it allows no independent place for the real (2005:28).

What Belsey is particularly critical of here is the way that under some forms of constructivism culture becomes deterministic. In the same way that technological determinism sees technology as the chief driver of change in society, in this conceptualisation culture becomes everything and in some ways becomes a totalising force. This leaves no space for, and no account of, the place of dissent in the workings of culture. In a view where culture is so dominant, little space is left for subcultures and the ways in which they interact with a dominant culture. Here Belsey is stating that culture should not be seen as a monolithic structure, rather it is fractured and divided with a plurality of different voices that do not necessarily agree with any particularly dominant voice.

The above quote also indicates a lack of an independent place for the real, a point which will be returned to in the following section. What is important to acknowledge here is that there are some inherent problems with, in particular, the strong, constructivist positions and in constructivist positions more generally. As Irzik outlines in his article 'Back to Basics: A Philosophical Critique of Constructivism':

...the entire plausibility of the causality, impartiality and symmetry theses of the Strong [Constructivist] Programme listed above derives from equating knowledge with belief, or true belief with collectively endorsed belief. It is only on the basis of this equation one can claim that social factors cause "knowledge" and do not discriminate between "truth" and "falsity", and that the same kind of social factors can be invoked to explain both (1998:164).

This critique points to another significant flaw in the strong constructivist position: the question of whether knowledge can be reduced to belief is particularly significant. If all knowledge can be reduced to belief then the existence of all external facts is also thrown into question, meaning that the basis for many sciences, that of the measurement and testing of theory through observable, reproducible experiments which rely on the production of 'known facts' or 'truths', is also called into question<sup>3</sup>. This problem is not so apparent within the weak constructivist position where, as Irzik points out: "although representations are constructed by individuals, they arise as a result of an interactive process among them in a community" (Irizik 1998:159).

### **'Weak' social constructivism**

Within the weak constructivist position more agency is allowed for the subject in that there are always a range of competing subject positions available within a given society and, whilst each will have been influenced by the society from within which they have sprung, there are many different ways in which this influence can be

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that many of the sciences now acknowledge this criticism of positivism.

taken. Subjects have the ability to choose positions that are in reaction to, or totally oppositional to some of the 'normal' or dominant positions within a culture.

Some of the key conceptions of constructivism come from the work of Berger and Luckmann in *The Social Construction of Reality* (1975). Berger and Luckmann's work was particularly influenced by the theories of Alfred Schutz<sup>4</sup>. They suggest that all human perceptions of reality are based on or constructed by the society within which they were formed. Luckmann and Berger do not claim that nothing exists outside of human thought, but rather, the only understanding of the wider world that is possible comes through the senses and the way that the subject has learnt to interpret this sense data comes from the broader society.

One of the key points that Berger and Luckmann make is that "no human thought...is immune to the ideologizing influences of its social context" (1975:21). In this they are making the point that ways of understanding of the world are dependant, at least to some extent, on the values, beliefs and 'common-senses' of the society within which the subject exists. Just as the subject can never be totally free from our subjectivity, nor can the subject ever be totally free from the standards and norms within which they were brought up. They write:

The world of everyday life is not only taken for granted as reality by the ordinary members of society in the subjectively meaningful conduct of their lives. It is a world that originates in their thoughts and actions, and is maintained as real by these (Berger & Luckmann 1975:33).

Berger and Luckmann's theoretical positioning provides the basis for the approach taken within this thesis. This is because, fitting within the 'weak constructivist' position, it still allows for a great degree of agency<sup>5</sup> for the individual at the same

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<sup>4</sup> Schutz's work can be considered to be both foundational to constructivism as well as belonging to the phenomenologist's. His work was deeply influenced by the phenomenology of Husserl (Barber 2002).

<sup>5</sup> Agency is a concept drawn from sociology which describes the power of an 'agent' to act or make choices within a given context. In relation to the media, notions of agency revolve around how much the media influence audience agency (in terms of their ability and willingness to act in the broader social environment) and how

time as acknowledging the powerful influence of society in the formation of ways of understanding the world. More specifically a constructivist position underpins the notion of the media-real arising through the shattering of a shared set of representations of reality.

## **Lacanian Psychoanalysis**

This discussion of subjectivity leads us to a further theorisation of the individual and possible understandings of reality. Psychoanalysis is one of the theoretical frames that can be applied to the analysis of a range of subject positions. Psychoanalytic theory is an area that will provide a number of important concepts to the theoretical argument of this thesis and at this point it is useful to mark out the similarities and differences it holds with the constructivist positions that have been outlined so far. The psychoanalytic focus on the interiority of the subject can be argued to link it, on some levels with the agency ascribed to the individual within the weak constructivist position.

Lacanian psychoanalysis, based on the work of Jacques Lacan and his reworking of Freudian theory, can be seen to deal with some of the problems flowing through the constructivist position by looking at the way that language “reduces the world of things, in itself meaningless, but capable of signification (the ‘signifiable’), to meanings” (Belsey 2005:30). This is an important point because “...there is a price to pay.” In so far as the language always comes from outside, from the other, as Lacan puts it, “these demands return to us alienated” (1978: 286). More explicitly “Borrowing from an existing system of differences, dependent on other peoples formulations, we cannot say exactly what *we* mean” (Belsey 2005:30). It is this loss of the particular through the generalising aspect of language that marks out the loss

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much the audiences’ agency influences the media (in terms of the choices made available to the audience and the ways of presenting those choices) (Couldry 2006).

of the real that is essential to much Lacanian thought. This is a point that will be visited later in this chapter in the discussion on language.

Belsey's interpretation of Lacan (2005) in the preceding paragraph refers to the Hegelian understanding that, whilst language is a universalising agent, it also is a destroyer of the particular. In other words, Belsey argues that because all language comes to us from an external source<sup>6</sup> it is general or universal in nature, it does not and cannot, because of its externality, reflect the full spectrum of internality found within an individual subject. The Lacanian understanding of this process sees this as the supplanting of the real by the symbolic. Both of these terms will be further explored later in this chapter.

Lacanian Psychoanalysis is similar in some ways to a weak constructivist position because it still allows a relationship with physical reality, an emphasis on the production of understandings of reality through the senses, and on the understanding of these senses and the communication of this understanding. Whilst constructivism is particularly concerned with the role of society and/or culture in the formation of understandings of reality, psychoanalysis is most interested in the gap or lack that occurs between interiority and the formation of the self as a speaking subject (Kristeva 1984).

This theoretical loss or lack of the real is the subject of the following section of this chapter but it needs to be emphasized that this thesis takes a 'weak' constructivist point of view; one that sees perceptions of reality as being informed by the society that produced the subject but also acknowledges that some degree of external reality exists independent of the subject (and that within any culture or society there will be a range of different subject positions that are available to be chosen on any given issue). This positioning of this thesis within the weak constructivist viewpoint is important because of the ways of exploring human understandings of reality that are

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that Structuralist theorists such as Chomsky would disagree with Belsey's position here, arguing instead for the innateness of language (1984).

inherent to it and the central role played by communication in the propagation and perpetuation of particular cultural understandings.

As Belsey comments:

The abolished particularity returns as resistance, marking the speaking being's loss of the unnameable real, which is still there, but no longer there-for-a-subject. This resistance makes itself felt not only in individual experience, but also as incoherences in the apparent homogeneity of culture itself. A cultural criticism that takes this into account is able to acknowledge the silences that mark the inscriptions of culture, the complexity and the hesitations of the texts, as well as their noisier affirmations (2005: 37).

This is an important point to keep in mind because it these moments of silence that are of particular interest to this thesis in regards to the limits of discourse that are implied in the eruption of the real that are arguably the most significant part of the event of September 11 2001. Belsey's focus on dissent and 'silences' is well deserved to avoid an understanding of the formation of perceptions of reality that is too culturally deterministic in nature. Culture is never monolithic and this needs to be acknowledged in any type of analysis that comes from a constructivist viewpoint.

### **The Lacanian Real**

The word 'real' comes from the Latin 'realis' originally meaning 'of the thing itself'. In its original formation from the 13<sup>th</sup> century it meant "absoluteness of being" and further "the immediate object of that which is true" (Runes 1962:264). In addition the word "...'real' is often used with some opposite term in mind, such as 'ideal' or 'fake'" (Honderich 2005:787). More usefully for the purposes of this thesis, the concept of 'the real' was taken on by Lacanian psychoanalysis in the 1950's as "a limit concept in relation to the SYMBOLIC (sic). The real, in one sense, is simply what is excluded from the symbolic, excluded from the network of signifiers which build

up the reality of the world, and which is hence impossible to know” (Bullock & Trombley 1999:731).

As mentioned in the previous section, psychoanalysis can be seen as being formed around this preoccupation with the gap or lack that is brought about with the imposition of the ‘Other’ of language onto the real of the pre-linguistic subject. Lacan believes that this is the first lack that is experienced because it comes before the separation from the mother inherent to the mirror-phase (Miller 1988). Julia Kristeva in her book *Revolution in poetic language* (1984) refers to this state prior to separation from the mother as the chora where everything is undifferentiated and the subject lives in the real (1984) a point that will be returned to in Chapter Four.

In this way the real is what is jettisoned with the acquisition of the ‘Other’ of language. Language, or the symbolic, has no place for the particular of the real because it is a universalising force. Belsey comments on how “this particularity is cancelled by the other of language. But what is lost reappears as a residue, unconscious desire for something else” (2005:36). In the jettison of the real, the lack or gap that is left behind is attempted to be filled by desire and in many ways this desire could be for just about anything. The most significant characteristic of it is that no matter what is used in an attempt to fill this gap, it never satisfies. As Belsey puts it “The succession of objects of desire that present themselves as able to satisfy it are no more...than stand-ins, substitutes at the level of demand for an ‘object’ that is altogether less palpable” (2005:31). This less palpable object is of course the missing real. What has disappeared has been lost in the acquisition of language, in the rise of the symbolic.

“The unconscious represents the residue of the obliteration performed by language of the instinctual, organic self” (Belsey 2005: 35). This is, in many ways, what is at the basis of a Lacanian understanding of the unconscious. It is the leftover from language’s excision of the real. This is what makes it both so powerful and also an object of fear because it does not reside in the realm of language. It is not easy,

almost impossible, to communicate that which comes from the unconscious. Trying to recount a particularly vivid dream exemplifies this. Any attempt to translate that experience involves shaping and molding it to fit within the available words that can be used to express this experience and as this is done it changes the original as well as the representation that is being given. Arguably even just trying to remember it forces it into the language used for thought and something is inherently lost in this process.

Lacan's understanding of the relationship of language and the real can be exemplified by his statement within Seminar 54<sup>7</sup> that "One can only think of language as a network, a net over the entirety of things, over the totality of the real. It inscribes on the plane of the real this other plane, which we here call the plane of the symbolic" (Miller 1988: 262). In this way it can be seen that Lacan separated language and the real on to separate planes of existence and that the plane of language was overlaid onto the plane of the real making the real disappear for the subject.

One of the most interesting points that Lacan made about the real, in relation to this thesis, comes from Seminar 11 where he talked about the real in terms of being "the place of events so traumatic that it must never be confronted, even in dreams" (1978:53). It is posited by this thesis that the mediation of September 11 was such a traumatic event that it forced a confrontation, on some level, between the real and the symbolic. The following section will explore the particular reworking of the Lacanian real that is provided by Žižek. This thesis will use this particular conception of 'the real' as an heuristic concept to explain the workings of the media-real<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Lacan ran a series of Seminars from the 1950's through to the end of the 1970's. They were a popular fixture in Parisienne intellectual life at that time. In these Seminars Lacan presented case studies, concepts and theories, some of his most important concepts have come from the seminar series (Evans 1996).

<sup>8</sup> A Žižekian reworking of the concept is being used because of some of the inherent problems with the original formulation by Lacan. One of the key factors is that Lacan's use of the concept of the real changes considerably across his career and it can be exceedingly difficult to work out which one of his formulations that he is using at any one time. Žižek's work in this regard is far clearer and more categorical.

The media-real, in the sense proposed by this thesis, arises from the eruption of the Lacanian real through its representation and only comes into being with the conjunction of the triadic forces of the spectacle, the uncanny and the abject and the pathways or conduits of unpreparedness and technological hyperefficiency. It was this eruption of the Lacanian real that this research theorises was the reason for the mediation of this event being so significant. Indeed it was the faltering of the symbolic structure of mediation that is noticeable in the early coverage of September 11 that sets this event apart from those that had come before.

### **Žižek and the Lacanian Real**

Slavoj Žižek, in his book *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989) reworks Lacan's ideas on the real in three quite different ways. The first of these, is that the real is a traumatic encounter where the foundation erupts through the symbolic superstructure and that, while the trauma is happening, it cannot be expressed. The traumatic encounter can only be constructed after the event, even then however it still resists symbolization. In this case the real is seen as "...a hard kernel resisting symbolization, dialecticization..." (Žižek 1989:161). In addition to this "The Real is an entity which must be constructed afterwards so that we can account for the distortions of the symbolic structure." (Žižek 1989:162).

Following on from this is the notion that the 'real' is something which does not exist except in the fact that it is something which cannot be grasped. It is a void, it cannot be inscribed, yet it still produces effects that can be seen and grasped. The real in this instance is seen as "...an entity which, although it does not exist...has a series of properties – it exercises a certain structural causality, it can produce a series of effects in the symbolic reality of subjects." (Žižek 1989:163).

The third view of the real that is presented by Žižek is that the real is a leftover or remnant that cannot be further reduced, and also, paradoxically "...it functions as a

positive condition of the restoration of a symbolic structure...” (Žižek 1989:183). Here Žižek is referring to the idea that because the real cannot, in this third case, become any more particular, any more reducible, it opens the way for a return of the general, a return to the symbolisable. Anything added to this state of singularity will move it back towards multiplicity.

All of these interpretations are useful because of the clarity of the way in which Žižek encapsulates his understanding or reworking of Lacan’s ideas. This Žižekian reworking of the concept of the real is particularly useful because of the nature of the case being studied and the model of communication that is being proposed to deal with the issues that were raised by the mediation of the September 11 attacks.

### **Critiques of Žižek’s reworking of the real**

However Žižek’s interpretation is a contested one. Other theorists such as Laclau have taken a different understanding of the Lacanian real. The following quote from Cederström gives an indication of their differences:

The distinction between negativity and positivity, at least how it is articulated in Laclau’s and Žižek’s work, stems from two different interpretations of Lacan’s notion of the Real. In the first interpretation, the Real is conceived as something impossible, as something which “resists symbolisation absolutely”...This version of the Real highlights the negative by arguing that in the construction of meaning and use of language there will always be a remainder that cannot be articulated or captured (2007:610).

Here Cederström is highlighting a point made earlier in this section about the differences between Lacan’s earlier conceptions of the real and the ones made later in his career. Cederström goes on to say:

The second interpretation of the Real, which is more present in Lacan’s later teaching (from Seminar XI and onwards), concentrates more on the positive aspects

of the Real, and closely links this notion to *jouissance* (the term that Lacan uses to designate an intense and paradoxical form of enjoyment). Stavrakakis does excellent work teasing out these respective positions, clearly revealing how negativity has been a perpetual obsession for Laclau and how Žižek consistently romanticizes the positive dimension of the Real (Cederström 2007:610).

What the above shows is that Žižek takes a more positive approach to the concept of the real than some other theorists, such as Laclau<sup>9</sup> and that this approach is drawn from the later work of Lacan while some of the other interpretations rely more heavily on the earlier work. When referring to the positive understanding of the real taken on by Žižek what is being referenced is the way that the real is not seen as a completely negating figure, but one that also inspires a kind of painful longing, a reaction of *jouissance*.

Although this point will be argued at length later, it is worth mentioning here that in using this Žižekian conception of the real as a traumatic eruption, and building upon an understanding of the Lacanian real as being characterised by absence or the gap that is founded by the loss of the self in the formation of the speaking subject, the media-real can be seen as a traumatic eruption of the absence of the symbolic. This can be illustrated through noting that the media-real arises in those periods of time where the symbolisation processes falters and become detached from what the media is trying to represent. This is part of the reason why the media-real is often experienced as a feeling of unease, uncanniness or in Freud's terms *unheimliche*, because the subject becomes aware (on some level) that the event far surpasses its representation. This concept of the *unheimliche* is one that will be explored in far greater detail in Chapter Three where each of Freud's interpretations of this concept will be examined and applied to aspects of the coverage of the September 11 attacks.

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<sup>9</sup> An example of this 'negative' view of the real that comes from the work of theorists such as Laclau can be seen in the following: "why does this pure being or systemacy of the system, or – its reverse – the pure negativity of the excluded, require the production of empty signifiers in order to signify itself? The answer is that we are trying to signify the limits of signification – the real, if you want, in the Lacanian sense – and there is no direct way of doing so except through the subversion of the process of signification itself" (Laclau 1996:39). What this indicates is that Laclau's position is based around what is excluded from the symbolic, what is made absent for the differentiation of language to be able to occur.

September 11 can be seen as a traumatic eruption that defied initial attempts to place it within the symbolic structure of language – so much so that there is a definite feeling in the first two hours of the media coverage that the words don't fit the images, that somehow they are inappropriate, clichéd and don't come close to expressing the true magnitude and spectacle of the event itself. This also led to difficulties in terms of categorization and revealed itself in a kind of scrambling for genre in much of the early footage. These points will be further elucidated in later chapters, in particular the 'scrambling for genre' will be explored in Chapter Five.

In relation to the media-real more generally, the Lacanian concept of the real, and Žižek's reworking thereof, is useful and productive because it is at these kinds of points or junctures, such as the case described above, where the existence of the media-real becomes more easily discernable. At these points there is a break in our ability to symbolize the world around us and we are left with two different forms of reality, the outer empty shell of communication and symbolization that is the media coverage and the inner kernel that is resisting the symbolization, the event in the real itself. The media-real can be thought of as a model useful for exploring how representations of an event can be understood as fragments of the inner kernel that has escaped from the outer husk.

Whilst Žižek's reworking of Lacan is most useful from the point of view of this thesis because it provides an understanding of the real as a traumatic eruption, it is also more categorical in its approach to this the real. As was mentioned earlier in this section, Lacan's use of the real changed considerably across his career and it can be difficult at times to know which of the definitions he is using. Žižek's reworking of Lacan is clearer and more accessible, however it is important to note that there are some significant criticisms of it. Belsey cites the fact that Žižek appropriates Lacan for idealism as sufficient evidence of his significant changing of the Lacanian position on the real (Belsey 2005). However, in terms of this thesis, and the weak constructivist position that it ascribes to, this conflation of the real with the void is

not so problematic because there is already an underlying acknowledgement of the existence of a physical reality. Belsey's claim that Žižek divorces the Lacanian real from the organic has already been dealt with by this acknowledgement (Belsey 2005).

Žižek's book *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (2002) marks Žižek's own response to the event of September 11. He quotes Alain Badiou in defining the key feature of the twentieth century as a "passion for the real" (Žižek 2002:5) and that because of this

The ultimate and defining moment of the twentieth century was the direct experience of the real as opposed to everyday social reality – the real in its extreme violence as the price to be paid for peeling off the deceptive layers of reality. (Žižek 2002:5/6)

Here Žižek is proposing that, ironically, the 'Western' passion for the real led to an encounter with the real that was inherently painful and violent because the societal understanding of reality is not the same as a direct experience of the real. In other words, the understandings that were previously held of reality were deceptive in that they had no reference to the real.

Žižek cautions against reading the event of September 11 as the real shattering an imaginary vision of ourselves, but that rather:

We should...invert the standard reading according to which the WTC explosions were the intrusion of the Real which shattered our illusory sphere: quite the reverse – it was before the WTC collapse that we lived in our reality, perceiving Third World horrors as something which existed (for us) as a spectral apparition on the (TV) screen – and what happened on September 11 was that this fantasmic screen apparition entered our reality. It was not that reality entered our image: the image entered and shattered our reality (Žižek 2002:16).

This way of understanding the event of September 11, as something external that enters and ruptures the previously held understanding of reality matches closely

with the concept of the media-real because under a constructivist view of reality society has shaped the way that the subject understands the world around them. When this is challenged (and September 11 challenged this in a particularly brutal way) it is this societal construction of reality, the subject's perception of the world, that fragments and crashes down around them. As Žižek remarked:

...precisely because it is Real, that is on account of its traumatic/excessive character, we are unable to integrate it into (what we experience as) our reality, and are therefore compelled to experience it as a nightmarish apparition (Žižek 2002:19).

Despite some of the key similarities of this work to that of Žižek, there are also some significant differences, such as the use of the concepts of the spectacle, the *unheimliche* and the abject. While Žižek comments on the re-emergence of the real within the event of September 11 he does not broaden this analysis to look at the underlying factors that allow for this re-emergence and nor does he look at a number of the technical factors, examined in Chapter Five, that, it is argued, were essential in the escape of this event from its representation. Again, Žižek does not draw upon the following concepts of discourse and authenticity in his commentary on the event of September 11.

### ***Foucault, Discourse and Truth***

Discourse is a concept that has been taken up in a wide array of different disciplines. At its most basic level it can be defined in terms of a "...regulated practice(s) which accounts for a number of statements" (Mills 1997:7). In other words, it is the rules governing what is possible to communicate in a given situation. The use of discourse as a concept is fractured and fragmented with different disciplines having differing definitions of discourse and varied applications of Foucault's (and others) theories. An example of these differences can be found between the cultural studies and

critical theory disciplines where discourse is seen as “the general domain of the production and circulation of rule-governed statements” (Mills 1997:9) and mainstream linguistics where the term discourse can be used to describe a concern with language in use rather than language structured as a system (Mills 1997).

Different disciplines have modified Foucauldian ideas and other theoretical views on discourse to apply them to very different situations. For instance within feminist theory, discourse theory is “particularly productive because of its concern with theorizing power” (Mills 1997:78), whereas within critical linguistics it is often used to “refer to the different ways of structuring areas of knowledge and social practice...” (Mills 1997:149) and is additionally tied to a concern about power and the ways in which it is exercised. In this view discourses do not just reflect or represent social entities and relations, they construct and constitute them. In a similar vein post-colonial discourse theory “...refers to a set of practices and rules which produced those texts and the methodological organization of the thinking underlying those texts” (Mills 1997:107).

This thesis will be taking a very broad view of discourse where it is seen as what it is possible to say in a given situation, within the rules of the institution which provides the context for the statement. Having said this discourse is also a far more complex concept than this implies. The broad view of discourse allows for a complex understanding of the interrelationships of discourse and power and how discourse provides the limits to what can be ‘said’ in a given context. These limits to discourse are of particular importance to this research due to the focus on an event that has escaped from the symbolisable and, it is theorised, exists at the boundaries of the discursive.

## Discourse and Truth

Within this broad idea of discourse, Michel Foucault theorised the use of 'discourses of power' and, of particular relevance to this thesis, 'discourses of truth'. In *Power/Knowledge* (1980) Foucault outlines what he saw as an inherent link between the notion of truth and the notion of power, locating them within the broader framework of discourse and the institutions through which it is formulated.

In societies like ours, the 'political economy' of truth is characterized by five important traits. 'Truth' is centred on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it; it is subject to constant economic and political incitement... it is the object, under diverse forms, of immense diffusion and consumption... it is produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media); lastly it is the issue of a whole political debate and social confrontation ('ideological' struggles) (Foucault 1980:131).

Foucault formulates his understanding of the place of truth within a particular society and the kinds of institutions that, he suggests, control it. Central to this argument is the belief that truth is not a simple concept nor is its mobilisation ever straightforward, rather it is subject to an array of different powerful influences and tendencies.

For Foucault there is no absolute truth, and all truths are relative to, and influenced by the place, society, institution, and time that they spring from:

Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which it is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault 1980:131).

What Foucault is pointing to in this quote is the way in which the concept of truth is both utilised and constrained by the social context within which it is being utilised. Here he talks about the way in which a 'regime of truth' is an accepted discourse within a particular society at a given time that comes with a set of 'rules' or guidelines that define the ways in which it may be deployed.

This definition of truth is integral to the concept of the media-real. By refusing the idea of an absolute or overarching truth it is possible to regard the discourses provided by the media as partial, relative, and influenced. In terms of the event being studied in this research, this allows for an understanding that what is being presented is not necessarily (and never can be) the whole picture. This is because all truths are discursive, and there is no approach to the idea of 'truth' without a discursive framing of it. In the Lacanian real this discourse is meaningless and undifferentiated, in other words there are no binaries and therefore no distinctions between true and false.

Foucault's work is particularly concerned with the historical production of 'regimes of truth' and the ways in which historical discourses have framed the understanding of various aspects of society such as madness or sexuality. An awareness of this work is vital in regards to the core concerns of this thesis because visual representation is a form of language which comes with its own discourses, with its own 'regimes of truth', primarily based around those extant in the society of the day.

This awareness is informed by an understanding of Foucault's use of the episteme as a way of categorising history. As Claire O'Farrell points out an episteme can be seen as: "...a subset of the historical *a priori* and describes the underlying orders, or conditions of possibility' which regulate the emergence of various scientific or pre-scientific forms of knowledge during specific periods of history" (2005:63). Foucault discusses his purpose in constructing an archaeology in terms of "...attempting to bring to light...the epistemological field, the *episteme* in which knowledge, envisaged

apart from all criteria having reference to its rational value or to its objective forms, grounds its positivity and thereby manifests a history..." (1970:xxiii).

The archaeologies that Foucault produces via this method provide insights into the ways in which meaning is both constructed and maintained within specific societies at specific times and the ways in which this understanding can be applied to the case being studied here. In Chapter Five this theme will be taken up again when we look at the breaking of televisual codes and conventions and the blurring of genre boundaries that were inherent to the coverage of the September 11 attacks.

### **Critiques of Foucault**

It is important at this point to be aware that Foucault's ideas have not been accepted uncritically. Possibly one of the most well known critics is Jean Baudrillard (2007) who claims that Foucault's work is somewhat pointless because he can only theorise in historicity. In other words the key notions that he examines disappear or are in the process of disappearing by the time of examination. Baudrillard argues that:

It is useless therefore to run after power or to discourse about it ad infinitum since from now on it also partakes of the sacred horizon of appearances and is also there only to hide the fact that it no longer exists (2007:63).

This criticism is indicative of the position that Baudrillard formed in regards to Foucault's work on power, however it is interesting that Baudrillard himself saw his own theories as having come about because of Foucault's work. He later remarked: "To forget Foucault was to do him a service...to adulate him was to do him a disservice" (Baudrillard 1990:360). Here Baudrillard refers to why he needs to critique Foucault's work so severely; he feels that he was so heavily influenced by Foucault's work that he needed to move past this influence to be able to produce anything original. His way of moving past this influence is to critique it so that it loses its power over him (Baudrillard 1990).

Another of the key criticisms of Foucault comes from Jurgen Habermas who disagreed with the formulation of the relationship between power and truth used by Foucault<sup>10</sup>. In *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1987) he criticises Foucault because:

Foucault abruptly reverses power's truth-dependency into the power-dependency of truth. Then foundational power no longer need be bound to the competencies of acting and judging subjects — power becomes subjectless (1987:274).

The problem that Habermas sees with this position is that:

No one can escape the strategic conceptual constraints of the philosophy of the subject merely by performing operations of reversal upon its basic concepts. Foucault cannot do away with all the aporias he attributes to the philosophy of the subject by means of a concept of power borrowed from the philosophy of the subject itself (1987:274).

Underlying this argument is, however, a more serious criticism, and one that has been raised in regards to much postmodernist and post-structuralist thought: the charge of relativism. By making the claim that all truth is relative, the foundation of being able to make such a theoretical claim is taken away.

The basic assumption of the theory of power [that the meaning of validity claims consists in the power effects that they have] is self referential; if it is correct, it must destroy the foundations of the research inspired by it as well. But if the truth claims that Foucault himself raises for his genealogy of knowledge were in fact illusory and amounted to no more than the effects that this theory is capable of releasing within the circle of its adherents, then the entire undertaking of a critical unmasking of the human sciences would lose its point (Habermas 1987:279).

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<sup>10</sup> He also disagreed more generally about the usefulness of the archaeological methodology used by Foucault (Habermas 1987).

Stuart Dalton, in his article 'Beyond Intellectual Blackmail: Foucault and Habermas on Reason, Truth and Enlightenment' (2008) makes some interesting arguments against Habermas' position in defence of Foucault's work. He makes the claim that

Foucault's understanding of truth and reason is, in fact, far more intricate and nuanced than Habermas has allowed. Foucault does not propose a simple reversal of truth and power; rather, he calls into question the very possibility of all such "simple" realities, relationships, and reversals (2008:7).

What Dalton is arguing here is that Habermas has made the mistake of assuming that Foucault conceptualises truth and power in the same way that Habermas does and that this is not actually the case. Further to this Dalton makes the point that:

Foucault is asking us to be more reasonable in our assessment of rationality. He is not suggesting that we turn our backs on truth — that we judge it to be a fiction, nothing more than one of the manifold effects of power. Rather, he is calling for us to own up to the fact that truth is not so pure and simple as Habermas (and others) would make it out to be; but that it is (always and already) inhabited by — among other things — relations of power (2008:8).

This illustrates that, although Foucault did conceptualise truth as being inherently relative to a particular time, place or institution, there was also a nuanced understanding that truth is always inhabited by power. While this does not necessarily turn 'truth' into its reverse it does mean that the types of understanding of what is true will be determined by the power structure within which the understanding is being formed.

Foucault's conception of the relativity of truth and his way of understanding discourse are useful in regards to this thesis because of the ways in which discourses of truth were mobilised in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks and their representation. This mobilisation of claims to truth was one of the significant

factors in the use of language as a reconstruction tool, as will be explored in the following sections, to help stabilise and reshape the shared perception of reality that had been shattered by the eruption of the real.

### ***Derrida, Différance and Deconstruction***

The Foucauldian conception of truth can be argued to be closely related to Jacques Derrida's concern with destabilising the metaphysical foundation of Western philosophical thought. Derrida theorised that this metaphysical thought is based around a materialist view of reality as external to the human subject with an overarching central truth that comes, in part, from Christianity (1976). For Derrida, the Christian conception of an omnipotent supreme being means that there is an external truth or point from which everything can be categorised and measured and that the veracity of particular conceptions of the world increases the closer that the subject comes to understanding God's supreme plan.

One of Derrida's key contributions to philosophical thought is the concept of deconstruction. Deconstruction is a method of analysis that aims to illustrate that any text is not a discrete whole but must be seen as related to other texts and the broader society from which it comes. It is a process that shows the inherent contradictions that exist in all texts and how these meanings can be seen to be irreconcilable and contradictory meaning that there can never be a single interpretation of a text. As Miller elaborates in his article 'Stevens' Rock and Criticism as Cure' (1976): "Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text, but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself. Its apparently-solid ground is no rock, but thin air" (1976:34). Thus, deconstruction is a process that shows how a text is always providing its own dissolution because unearthing the inherent contradictions within a text effectively *deconstructs* it.

Derrida sees deconstruction as the end point of meaning when language is conceptualised in terms of writing. Deconstruction here becomes the point where meaning both exists and is also shown to be arbitrary and transitory. This is an important point because Derrida argued that there were significant differences in the way language as speech and language as writing are used and that there are significant differences in both structure and the process of making meaning between the two. Derrida remarked that:

I tried to work out...[in deconstruction] what was in no way meant to be a system but rather a sort of strategic device...an unclosed, unenclosable, not wholly formalizable ensemble of rules for reading, interpretation and writing. This type of device may have enabled me to detect...in these an evaluation of writing, or, to tell the truth, rather a devaluation of writing whose insistent, repetitive, even obscurely compulsive, character was the sign of a whole set of long-standing constraints. These constraints were practiced at the price of contradictions, of denials, of dogmatic decrees (Derrida 1982:40).

Derrida's concept of deconstruction works to undermine the central binary oppositions that underlie this metaphysical conception of reality by pointing to the fact that they are arbitrary classifications rather than natural (or God-given) distinctions. One of the binaries that is destabilised by his work is true/false, and in destabilising this binary it has been argued, by theorists such as Lye, Derrida is showing that difference is all that is important. As Lye states:

Any ultimate, transhistorical truth is only a truth by virtue of difference; so that no ultimate 'truth' can be, and be itself, nor can it be outside of time and space, and hence beyond contingency. Any 'truth' exists, then, only contingently, and relationally, through *différance* (Lye 2008)<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Difference needs to be distinguished from '*Différance*'. *Différance* is a term Derrida coined to indicate the endless deferral of meaning. It is primarily a linguistic term which is a pun on difference and deference. Any signifier must infinitely defer its meaning because of the nature of the sign.

This introduces us to another of Derrida's key concepts: that of *différance*. He articulated this concept, a word that when spoken sounds the same as difference, but with a meaning that draws from both 'differ' and 'defer', to show how writing differs from speech and how writing is not just a lesser or 'fallen' form of language. This concept refers to Saussure's original ideas on the process of signification<sup>12</sup> and Derrida posits this in terms of an endless deferral of meaning (Reynolds 2010) where every signifier points to another signifier (which points to another *et cetera*) in order to make meaning. So its meaning arises in relation to difference, that is, what it is not. Milner makes the point that:

...for Derrida, the meaning of meaning is an indefinite referral of signifier to signifier...Linguistic meaning thereby entails an 'infinite equivocality'. Derrida inherits also the Saussurean notion of language as founded on difference, but coins the neologism, *différance* to stress the double meaning of the French verb *différer*, as both to differ and to defer or delay...Thus difference is also deferral, for the moment at least, of other alternative meanings (Milner 1991:74).

This idea of the endless deferral of meaning and the notion that meaning is made in regards to difference, that is, in regards to what the signifier is not, leads us back to the process of deconstruction and the destabilisation of binary oppositions. Binary oppositions are one of the most obvious examples of this deferral of meaning because their meaning arises directly from what they are not. The example of good/evil is one of the most common examples. What is good (or evil) is that which is not evil (or good). By unearthing the inherent contradiction at the basis of binary oppositions Derrida shows how any text destabilises itself through the recognition of these irreconcilable contradictions.

This approach of destabilisation also leads us back to one of the other prevalent examples of a binary opposition, and one that is more central to the discussion in this section, that of true/false. If the meaning (or at least part thereof) of 'true' is

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<sup>12</sup> Saussure posited a completely arbitrary relationship of the signifier to the signified (Bally & Sechehaye 1983).

based around what it is not (false) then it is always contingent and relative to the inverse meaning. By pointing to the arbitrary (and contingent) nature of binary oppositions Derrida posits that the ways in which meaning has been structured in Western theoretical thought is arbitrary and needs to be challenged rather than accepted as a 'natural' or 'common sense' understanding of the world.

In terms of this thesis one of the important points made by Derrida is that this deferral of meaning is not just limited to the written word. In fact he included in this the ways in which the individual understands the world. In this way the relationship of Derrida's work to structuralism can be seen, in that he was examining the ways in which language structures understandings and perceptions of reality. "For Derrida 'what one calls...real life'...is itself a text, and it can, therefore, be deconstructed" (Milner 1991:74). Derrida's theories, and in particular the concept of deconstruction, are not limited to literary analysis but have a far broader application.

## **Critiques of Derrida**

Derrida's work has been subject to a number of criticisms from different theorists and some of his work has caused a great deal of controversy<sup>13</sup>. One of the key claims

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<sup>13</sup> An open letter to *The Times* newspaper upon the announcement that Derrida was to be granted an honorary doctorate from Cambridge University was published by a group of philosophers from a variety of universities on May 9 1992.

"Sir, The University of Cambridge is to ballot on May 16 on whether M. Jacques Derrida should be allowed to go forward to receive an honorary degree. As philosophers and others who have taken a scholarly and professional interest in M. Derrida's remarkable career over the years, we believe the following might throw some needed light on the public debate that has arisen over this issue.

M. Derrida describes himself as a philosopher, and his writings do indeed bear some of the marks of writings in that discipline. Their influence, however, has been to a striking degree almost entirely in fields outside philosophy -- in departments of film studies, for example, or of French and English literature.

In the eyes of philosophers, and certainly among those working in leading departments of philosophy throughout the world, M. Derrida's work does not meet accepted standards of clarity and rigor.

We submit that, if the works of a physicist (say) were similarly taken to be of merit primarily by those working in other disciplines, this would in itself be sufficient grounds for casting doubt upon the idea that the physicist in question was a suitable candidate for an honorary degree.

M. Derrida's career had its roots in the heady days of the 1960s and his writings continue to reveal their origins in that period. Many of them seem to consist in no small part of elaborate jokes and the puns "logical phallusies" and the like, and M. Derrida seems to us to have come close to making a career out of what we regard as

has been a deliberate form of obscurantism. John Searle has been particularly vigorous in his critique of Derrida's work:

...anyone who reads deconstructive texts with an open mind is likely to be struck by the same phenomena that initially surprised me: the low level of philosophical argumentation, the deliberate obscurantism of the prose, the wildly exaggerated claims, and the constant striving to give the appearance of profundity by making claims that seem paradoxical, but under analysis often turn out to be silly or trivial (Searle 1984:4).

Derrida's use of language can, for some people, seem impenetrable at some times and deliberately elusive at others. His insistence on defining things only in terms of what they are not can also be seen in the same vein. However when this is taken in conjunction with his work on binary oppositions it seems to make more sense because as he has pointed out all binary oppositions are defined, in part, by what they are not, by what they are opposed to. Foucault who reportedly (according to Searle) described Derrida's writing as 'terrorist obscurantism' also took up this critique of Derrida's written style. "He writes so obscurely you can't tell what he's

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translating into the academic sphere tricks and gimmicks similar to those of the Dadaists or of the concrete poets.

Certainly he has shown considerable originality in this respect. But again, we submit, such originality does not lend credence to the idea that he is a suitable candidate for an honorary degree.

Many French philosophers see in M. Derrida only cause for silent embarrassment, his antics having contributed significantly to the widespread impression that contemporary French philosophy is little more than an object of ridicule.

M. Derrida's voluminous writings in our view stretch the normal forms of academic scholarship beyond recognition. Above all -- as every reader can very easily establish for himself (and for this purpose any page will do) -- his works employ a written style that defies comprehension.

Many have been willing to give M. Derrida the benefit of the doubt, insisting that language of such depth and difficulty of interpretation must hide deep and subtle thoughts indeed.

When the effort is made to penetrate it, however, it becomes clear, to us at least, that, where coherent assertions are being made at all, these are either false or trivial.

Academic status based on what seems to us to be little more than semi-intelligible attacks upon the values of reason, truth, and scholarship is not, we submit, sufficient grounds for the awarding of an honorary degree in a distinguished university.

Yours sincerely,

Barry Smith (Editor, *The Monist*)

Hans Albert (University of Mannheim), David Armstrong (Sydney), Ruth Barcan Marcus (Yale), Keith Campbell (Sydney), Richard Glauser (Neuchâtel), Rudolf Haller (Graz), Massimo Mugnai (Florence), Kevin Mulligan (Geneva), Lorenzo Peña (Madrid), Willard van Orman Quine (Harvard), Wolfgang Röd (Innsbruck), Karl Schuhmann (Utrecht), Daniel Schulthess (Neuchâtel), Peter Simons (Salzburg), René Thom (Burs-sur-Yvette), Dallas Willard (Los Angeles), Jan Wolenski (Cracow) Internationale Akademie für Philosophie, Obergass 75, 9494S Schaan, Liechtenstein. (Smith et al. 1992, May 9).

saying, that's the obscurantism part, and then when you criticize him, he can always say, "You didn't understand me; you're an idiot." That's the terrorism part." (Cited in Searle 2008). Noam Chomsky has also critiqued Derrida for his 'difficult writing' style and 'pretentious rhetoric', though Chomsky's critique also draws on an understanding that this stylistic quality allows for the construction of an intellectual elite of French theorists whose power is, in part at least, drawn from the fact that they are so difficult to understand thus making them an exclusive 'club' (Chomsky 1995).

Other theorists, such as Richard Rorty have defended Derrida's use of obfuscation by making the case that it is a deliberate attempt to escape from positivist, metaphysical assumptions to be found in the works of philosophical predecessors (Rorty 1989). Derrida, in the last interview that he gave, described the work of those theorists who came out of the 1960's (himself, Foucault and Deleuze in particular) as:

...an intransigent, even incorruptible, *ethos* of writing and thinking...without concession even to philosophy, and not letting public opinion, the media, or the phantasm of an intimidating readership frighten or force us into simplifying or repressing. Hence the strict taste for refinement, paradox, and aporia (Derrida in Le Monde August 19 2004).

In this Derrida is making the claim that all of these theorists made very deliberate choices in both their subject and style because they saw it as necessary to the development of their thought.

Another of the key criticisms of Derrida's work is that it can be seen to be a form of nihilism whereby Derrida's work denies the possibility of knowledge and meaning (Ginzburg 1992). Richard Wolin has described Derrida's work in terms of 'corrosive nihilism' (1993a: 186) and he argues (in relation to Derrida's position on the work of Heidegger) that this "deconstructive gesture of overturning and reinscription

ends up by threatening to efface many of the essential differences between Nazism and non-Nazism” (Wolin 1993b:188). These criticisms are interesting in that they illustrate that Derrida’s theories, when taken to the extreme, tend to produce a situation where meaning ceases to be possible. However it is important to note that these are quite extreme readings of Derrida’s work.

In terms of this thesis, Derrida’s work is productive because he provides some key concepts that can be directly applied to the case being studied. The ideas of *différance* and deconstruction are useful because they provide a number of ‘tools’ and understandings that can be applied to the coverage. In particular the use of deconstructive techniques in analysing the binary oppositions and the process of re-binarisation that occurred in the aftermath of the attacks is most productive and will be examined again in the following section.

In a number of sections throughout this thesis the binary oppositions provided within the coverage of the September 11 attacks will be deconstructed and shown to involve a complex process of the deferral of meaning and, as time went on, the positioning of the audience in ways that made it very difficult (in some ways) to disagree with the preferred reading that was being provided. Importantly however, this process was one that was imposed gradually as meaning, form and frames were applied to the coverage. In this process of reclaiming the symbolic from the eruption of the real the use of binary oppositions was used as a rebinarising way of rebuilding the representations of societal perceptions of reality that had been ruptured. It is this process through language that will be examined in the following section.

### ***Language, Discourse and the mediation of September 11.***

This section of the thesis argues that the binary oppositions that underpin the representation of societal perceptions of reality were ruptured by both the event

itself and its representation, that because of this destabilisation the aftermath of September 11 can be characterised as a period of deliberate re-binarisation and polarisation in an attempt to reconstruct the reality that was lost. This shattering of the societal perception of reality shared by many 'Western' nations occurred as the event escaped from its representation because this event belonged to the real. The concept of the Lacanian real was explored in the previous section and what is important to reiterate at this time is that the real is itself diametrically opposed to the realm of the symbolic, the realm of language. As the real erupted through its representation, because the real cannot be represented, all of the underpinning structures of the societal understanding of reality created through shared language and culture were destabilised, shattered and called into question. Their arbitrary nature was thrown into sharp relief, as were the underlying 'truths' or 'common sense' understandings of the 'way things just are'. Jeff Lewis in his book *Language Wars: The Role of Media and Culture on Global Terrorism and Political Violence* (2005) described the way in which:

...the settling dust of Ground Zero revealed not only the massive fissure in the New York skyline, but a yawning gap in the semiotic system of 'America' itself. The US security structures had failed; thousands of Americans were dead, injured or bereaved. The seemingly unassailable American self-belief was ruptured and everyone was cast into a shadow of doubt. This was a precise moment of dissociation: the signifier 'America' had split from its signified, leaving a vacant and smouldering absence of meaning (2005:94).

It is this absence of language and the symbolic where the eruption of the real takes place that is the primary focus of this thesis.

In the aftermath of September 11 the US government moved quickly to re-establish the binary oppositions that had been destabilized by the terrorist attacks. Binaries such as safe/unsafe, powerful/weak, good/evil and true/false had all been destabilised by the representation of the attacks. Not only did this event destabilise societal norms, it also destabilized the 'West' economically and politically

(particularly in regards to foreign policy) and challenged the long held belief of the 'West' or 'America' as being unassailable, in short it shattered a sense of security and complacency. The reconstruction or resuscitation of the societal reality that had been shattered was done in three interrelated ways. The first was to unify the nation, the second to construct a definitive enemy as an abject other, the third to stabilise the societal understanding of reality that had been undermined by the attacks.

Before moving into a more detailed examination of these issues it is necessary to briefly outline the way in which the 'nation' is conceptualised and used within this section specifically and throughout the thesis more generally. It is necessary to do this so that the idea of the nation is clearly determined. Benedict Anderson's definition of the nation, from his book *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (2006), is the one viewed as most productive for the current argument because of the way in which it both defines but also situates the idea of the nation within an historical junction of a number of different events and ideas. Anderson defines the nation as:

...an imagined political community...It is *imagined*...because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members...yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion...The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them...has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations...It is imagined as *sovereign* because the concept...[came] to maturity at a stage of human history when...adherents of any...religion were inescapably confronted with the living *pluralism* of such religions...and each faith's ontological claims and territorial stretch, nations dream of being free, and, if under God, directly so. The gage and emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state. Finally it is imagined as a *community*, because...the nation is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship (Anderson 2006:6).

Anderson sees the rise of the nation to have come about through three intersecting processes during the eighteenth century in Europe. The processes were the

development of the printing press alongside the beginnings of protestant capitalism and the vernacularisation of language. It is important to note that these processes are not discrete entities but are rather interconnected and build upon each other. Anderson's argument is however that the outcome of these factors, in the historical context of the Reformation and the rise of the protestant threat to Catholicism, was the birth of the concept of the nation (2006). However the key point to note is that each individual 'buys in' to this imagined community by believing, or imagining themselves to be members of it. Without this acceptance or belief by the individuals that make up this imagined community, the nation cannot exist. On some levels it can be argued that Anderson is talking about the discursive construction of the nation state through the imagined community of its members and the sharing of societal values and perceptions.

The United States, like Australia, has experienced large scale migratory flows of people from a wide variety of places and this has led to a diverse range of ideologies and belief systems living side by side. This means that consensus and unity on any individual issue has been practically impossible to achieve. An example of this can be seen where the former President, George W. Bush, was elected by a minority of the eligible American voters and only ended up winning his position through a protracted legal process where the recounting of critical votes was disallowed. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, when many people were paralysed by grief and fear, the nation needed to be unified (or in Anderson's terms the nation needed to be re-imagined).

To begin with, the official language, the language used by those such as Bush and Giuliani officially representing the government, contained many references that were obviously an attempt to draw this diverse community together. Words such as 'we', 'us', 'our' abounded along with references to the community that all are a part of 'America', 'our nation' or more rhetorically 'one nation under God'. In these instances, the President, as the figurehead of this imagined community, was attempting to draw everyone together to counteract the terror that many citizens

felt during and after the attacks. Statements such as “The resolve of our great nation is being tested, but make no mistake. We will show the world that we will pass this test” (Bush CBS 11/9/2001) illustrate this point.

By suggesting to people that they ‘belong’ to something greater than themselves and their immediate families, the President was trying to stem panicked behaviour that in an area of mass population can lead to a disastrous breakdown of social order and control (such as what happened in areas of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina). This first layer of rhetoric constructed who ‘we’ are, in this case it constructed the audience as American.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is a difficult moment for America... Today, we've had a national tragedy. Two airplanes have crashed into the World Trade Center in an apparent terrorist attack on our country... Terrorism against our nation will not stand...May God bless the victims, their families, and America. (Bush CBS 11/9/2001)

As can be seen above there is a considerable effort (and this is taken from Bush's first speech after the attacks) to tie the individual to the idea of the nation. ‘We’ve had’, ‘our country’, ‘our nation’ all give evidence of this unifying trend. Additionally there is a level of personification of the nation which can be seen in phrases such as ‘difficult moment for America’ and in the final sentence which equates the nation with both the victims and their families. All of these statements are unificatory in that they draw the individual in to this shared understanding, this shared perception or imagining of nation.

The second layer of this unification of the nation constructs the enemy in terms of ‘not us’ or in this case UnAmerican. This happens to both strengthen the unity of the nation at the same time as providing a focus for the rejection of the ‘Other’<sup>14</sup>. It is much easier to show people what they have in common when it is contrasted with

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<sup>14</sup> The ‘Other’ is a concept often used as a binary opposite to the self. The self being in part defined by what it isn’t – the other.

someone else whose values are manifestly different and outside of the core unifying values that are being used. Again returning to Anderson's concepts, what is being done is to show that the imagined community of the nation holds these particular values at its core while those values held by the enemy are outside of what 'we' all accept and believe.

In the case of September 11 this process began very early on, in Bush's first address to the nation from the primary school (where he was when told of the incident). He began this construction of the enemy with the statement "...to hunt down and to find those folks who committed this act." (Bush cited in Silberstein 2002:18). A few hours later more emphasis was added in Bush's second address where he described the people responsible as 'cowardly'. By his night-time address Bush's characterization had become much more pejorative: he now described the perpetrators as 'terrorists', 'mass murderers' and 'evil'. In tandem with this his exhortations for unity became much stronger, with statements such as "...our country is strong" and "[a] great people has been moved to defend a great nation" (Bush in Silberstein 2002:19). Instead of the attacks being characterized as attacks on three buildings they now symbolised "...our way of life, our very freedom...[being]...under attack..." (Bush in Silberstein 2002:19).

In terms of the language used by those in authority in the immediate aftermath of September 11 there is a noticeable push to distance the perpetrators from the members of the imagined community. They are now firmly identified as the 'Other', as outside of what 'we' as members of this imagined nation understand. Their actions become revolting and impossible for 'us' to comprehend, to try to understand why they would want to do such a thing. This second layer constructs the enemy in terms of 'not us' or UnAmerican.

The third stage in this construction of the other was a broadening of the front to include the U.S.A's allies and friendly neutral countries. At this point the terrorists began to be described as attacking civilization itself and that civilization needed to

defend itself: “This is civilization’s fight” (Bush in Silberstein 2002:26). This construction makes evident what became blatant in further speeches, that only the nations that are supporting the USA’s actions can be considered to be civilized. The polarization of the world into for or against was explicitly stated numerous times:

We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbour them...They will hand over the terrorists, or they will share their fate...Every nation in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbour or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime (Bush in Silberstein 2002:25).

This black and white divide between those ‘for us or against us’ was a sharp return to the binary oppositions that this thesis argues were so severely shaken by the events of September 11. This third layer worked to unite what are loosely termed ‘Western’ nations, or at least, nations that are pro-Western. Western nations (and pro-Western allies) became synonymous with civilization, implying that anyone not supporting USA policy at that time was uncivilized, barbarian and was a target for USA retaliation.

The semiotic void that Lewis (2005) describes as the result of the September 11 attacks produced what this thesis argues is actually an eruption of the real that shatters the symbolic construction of reality through language and culture. In the immediate aftermath of the event various discourses within the West were mobilised to repair this rupture or to fill this void. Some of the methods used have been described above. The first was a reconceptualising of the nation, a suturing of the signifier of ‘America’ and its cut off signified. As Lewis argues:

...many commentators and public officials [entered] the fray...to fill the semiotic void created by the collapse of the twin towers. Most particularly, Americans rushed to fill the void with a form of zealot patriotism which would not, under any circumstances, tolerate criticism or vacuous nihilism (2005:96).

This 'zealot patriotism' is particularly unsurprising given the 'void' that it is argued had opened in the societal understanding of reality. The event had breached the covenant that kept the nation imagining itself as a community because the binary oppositions that informed such an understanding of the nation had been shattered in the demolition of the narrative of 'bastion America', a safe, secure and happy place of peace and prosperity. What had been destroyed was that understanding of the nation's identity as a place where this sort of attack did not happen. The coverage of the immediate aftermath shows the beginning of the process of reimagining, which includes the reconstruction of the ideals that underpin the nation. The following is the text of Bush's speech to the nation on the evening of September 11 2001.

Good evening. Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts. The victims were in airplanes, or in their offices: secretaries, businessmen and women, military and federal workers, moms and dads, friends and neighbours. Thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil, despicable acts of terror. The pictures of airplanes flying into buildings, fires burning, huge structures collapsing, have filled us with disbelief, terrible sadness and a quiet, unyielding anger. These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. But they have failed. A great people has been moved to defend a great nation. Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundations of America. These acts shattered steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve. America was targeted for attack because we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity. And no-one will keep that light from shining. Today our nation saw evil, the very worst of human nature, and we responded with the best of America...The functions of our government continue without interruption. Federal agencies in Washington which had to be evacuated today are reopening tomorrow for essential personnel tonight and will be open for business tomorrow... America and our friends and allies join with all those who want peace and security in the world and we stand together to win the war against terrorism...This is a day when all Americans from every walk of life unite in our resolve for justice and peace. America has stood down enemies before, and

we will do so this time. None of us will ever forget this day, yet we go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world (Bush, G.W. CNN 2001).

This illustrates many of the points that have been made throughout this section on language. The use of words to draw a closer tie with the nation are prominent, the use of words such as 'our', 'we' and 'us' are particularly prominent in this reimagining of the nation. It is also contrasted to the othering that occurs, the use of markers of difference such as; 'they', 'their', 'them' and the association of these others with evil, enemies and 'the very worst of human nature'. This speech illustrates the beginning of the process of 'suturing' the representation of a shared reality that was wounded in the attacks.

### **Visual Language**

So far this thesis has focussed on defining 'event' and postulating how this understanding impacts on the perception of an event such as September 11. This current chapter has investigated the concept of discourse and the use of language and how this presupposes the making of meaning generally and more specifically this event in particular. What has not been made clear as yet is the relationship of the spoken and written forms of language with visual language and representation. Representation itself can refer to any of the above forms of language because all language 're-presents' thought and visual representation is no different from this. However there are some differences in the ways in which meanings are made with visual language that need to be explored.

Visual language, the representation of the world through images occupies a somewhat privileged position in regards to 'truth claims'. In part this comes from the dominance of the sense of sight in our physiological make up. Tony Schirato and Jen Webb in their book *Reading the Visual* (2004) make the point that "modern neurophysiology has determined that something like half of the brain is dedicated to

visual recognition” (2004:35). However it is also a movement within Western society to a privileging of this sense over others. McLuhan’s claim that visual technologies are an extension of the eye and our reliance on these technologies is indicative to a move from an oral culture to a visual one (1967) is an example of this kind of viewpoint.

One of the reasons for the ‘truth claims’ of visual technologies is that they appear to provide an unmediated ‘snapshot’ of reality. In some ways there is some validity in this notion.

All the same, there is a truth to reality presented by photography, and it is the truth based on what Gombrich calls ‘the eye-witness principle’ (1982: 253). As Gombrich explains it, the eye-witness principle was developed by the ancient Greeks (to whom we owe so much of what we know about vision), and it means simply that everything in shot or frame is what a viewer would have seen if standing in the same place, and at the same time, as the camera recorded the image (Schirato & Webb 2004:47).

Yet there are also problems with this understanding. As Schirato and Webb explain, “It is a reality that is not a reality, because no one can stand perfectly still and gaze undistractedly at one spot. Our eyes don’t allow it because they are always in motion and because we are binocular” (2004:48). In other words while the visual image seems to provide us with an unmediated image of reality from a particular viewpoint at a particular time it is still a re-presentation, it is still a mediation of reality because of the number of decisions that have gone into what is being shown. The choice of angle, lighting, point of view, inclusion and exclusion, focus and any other technical decisions all impact on the range of meanings it is possible to make. Additionally there are the limitations of the technology itself. All cameras have a frame that does not function in the same manner as human eyes. The way in which framing occurs is different as well as the different processes that different technologies use in producing the image. All of these factors impact on what appears in the end product and hence what array of meanings can be made. It is a delimiting

effect. This also references in some ways to the point made earlier about the use of the footage of the September 11 attacks as already belonging to a delimited set.

The ability to interpret visual images possessed by any audience is also informed by what is known as visual literacy. Visual literacy can be seen as a subset of cultural literacy, which can be defined as: "...both a knowledge of meaning systems and an ability to negotiate those systems within different cultural contexts" (Schirato & Yell 2000:1)<sup>15</sup>. In this way visual literacy is a way of making meaning from the visual that is tied to an understanding of, and ability to negotiate, the systems of meaning making that apply within a given culture.

In relation to the event of September 11 and its representation this visual literacy was one of the factors that, it is argued, caused the audience so many problems because the usual, culturally grounded ways of making meaning from a visual text were disrupted. As will be explored in Chapter Five, conventions such as genre, technical conventions such as shot length and shot type, framing conventions of the news and journalistic fields were all thrown into disarray by these attacks and this meant that negotiating the meanings of this particular event were very difficult to do, at least at first. The expectations that come with visual literacy were not being met so therefore the rules normally followed in the process of making meaning became meaningless, became part of the semiotic void discussed previously.

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<sup>15</sup> Cultural literacy as a concept is built upon the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu's concepts of cultural field, cultural capital and habitus are the basis for this idea of cultural literacy. Cultural field can be defined as "a series of specific institutions, rules, categories, designations and titles which constitute an objective hierarchy, and produce and authorise certain discourses and activities, on the one hand and the conflict which is involved when groups or individuals attempt to determine what constitutes capital within that field and how that capital is to be distributed, on the other" (Schirato and Yell 2000:37). Cultural capital can be thought of in terms of the cultural habits, dispositions and discourses that comprise a resource capable of generating 'profit' within a cultural field (Laureau and Weininger 2003). Habitus is "a set of dispositions which incline agents to act and react in certain ways. The dispositions generate practices, perceptions and attitudes which are 'regular' without being consciously co-ordinated or governed by any 'rule'. The dispositions which constitute the habitus are inculcated, structured, durable, generative and transposable" (Thompson 1991 in the introduction to Bourdieu 1991:17).

## ***Authenticity***

The ideas looked at so far in terms of perceptions of reality and the idea of truth being a relative, rather than an absolute, category lead to a questioning of the idea of the original or authentic – a problem that Baudrillard (and Derrida in terms of the deferral of meaning) theorises as having ceased to exist in the endless referral of meaning implicit in both the concept of *différance* and in Baudrillard's *Precession of Simulacra* (1994). However, for the purposes of this thesis, it is proposed that it is no longer a matter of dealing with a final order of simulation or the 'hyper-real' as Baudrillard describes it, because, with the representation of the event of September 11, we have passed beyond this into the area where discourse fails, where symbolisation fails, into the Lacanian real. It is here in the eruption of the Lacanian real that we see a return to authenticity and a return to its aura.

Walter Benjamin in his paper, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1968) problematises the concept of the original and the authentic in the modern period of Western society. This is particularly relevant to the mediation of the event of September 11 as it proposes the concept of an originary point which, in terms of the media-real, is constituted in that process of becoming when the 'real' bursts through the symbolized in an eruption of what might be considered the original. Benjamin's key argument is that mechanical reproduction allows us to break free from the mesmerising authority of this original or unique object.

Benjamin relates the notion of originality to the location of an object in time, space and culture. "The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being embedded in the fabric of tradition" (Benjamin 1968:4). Authenticity itself is described as "...the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced." (Benjamin 1968:3). Further to this, as Long points out in his article 'Art's Fateful Hour: Benjamin, Heidegger, Art and Politics' (2001), this theory can

also be seen as relating authenticity to authority “...the authority of an original work of art is derived from its independent existence as a unique being. Such originals confront the viewer as something marvellous, beautiful, authoritative” (2001:90).

A key notion in Benjamin’s work is his idea of the ‘aura’ that surrounds a natural object or an original piece of art.

We define the aura...as the unique phenomenon of distance, however close it may be. If while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or a branch which casts its shadow over you, you experience the aura of those mountains, of that branch (Benjamin 1968:4).

It is important to remember that the aura is formed in the relationship between the subject and the object. As Long argues: “...although the aura at first seems to be a property of the object, it in fact only manifests itself in the relation between subject and object” (Long 2001:92). This leads on to the idea that “...the aura is a unique appearance, the aura is both subjective and objective, for the encounter between subject and object is the condition for the possibility of appearance. As unique, the aura is authoritative” (Long 2001:92). It is this aura that carries the authority of the object as original or authentic and therefore it is the aura which mesmerises us.

Benjamin then goes on to explain that with mechanical reproduction the ‘aura’ and therefore the authority of the object is decayed. “...that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art.” (Benjamin 1968:3). This means that the impact of the reproduced object on the subject is lessened and therefore the object no longer dominates the subject. This has a liberating influence on the subject:

Whereas auratic perception establishes an immediate hierarchy between subject and object by investing the object with a high level of independence and authority, the perception at work in technical reproduction undermines the authority of the

object thereby liberating the subject from the object's mesmerising power (Long 2001:93).

It is important to note that Benjamin does not posit the destruction of the aura entirely but rather that its influence has waned or decayed.

An aura of authenticity meant that the subject reacted to these authoritative objects in a ritualised, concentrated way. Mechanical reproduction, in Benjamin's view, introduces distance between the subject and the object and hence breaks the hold of the aura over the subject. Benjamin sees this as a very positive thing because of this move away from a ritualistic, concentrated mode of engagement with the object to a more self-reflexive, distracted mode. He posits that this is a difference between what he describes as 'cult value' and 'exhibition value' (Benjamin 1968).

There have been some serious critiques of Benjamin's work in general and his concept of the aura in particular. Susan Sontag, in her book *Under the Sign of Saturn* (1980) describes Benjamin's writing as unusual in the way that sentences do not lead or flow from one into the other and nor is there a clear line of reasoning presented instead it seems as if each individual sentence "had to say everything, before the inward gaze of total concentration dissolved the subject before his eyes," and that "his major essays seem to end just in time, before they self-destruct" (1980:129).

Davis' article *Questioning The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: A stroll around the Louvre after reading Benjamin* (2008) explicitly questions both Benjamin's writing style and also his historical accuracy. Davis make the point that the ability to make copies is not a new phenomenon and that sculptors and other artists have since ancient times either made copies themselves of their work or had apprentices produce copies.

Pausing in front of a glass cabinet filled with Greek terracotta figurines, we feel that we might have seen many of these before, the sensation being not the inexplicable thrill of *déjà vu*, but that of plain familiarity. In fact, we might well have done; in Greece, molds for terracotta's began to be used around the 15th century BCE; they became widespread in the 7th century BCE. [30] Mass reproduction certainly antedates the latter half of the nineteenth century (Davis 2008).

This criticism of Benjamin's work is well deserved in that there are problems in the Benjamin's enunciation of his concept of the aura, as well as problems in the whole notion of an original – even for ancient artworks. The problem with the description given by Benjamin is that it is very imprecise and prosaic. When he says “If while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or a branch which casts its shadow over you, you experience the aura of those mountains” (1968:3) it could mean many things and there is an assumption inherent in the statement that everybody will experience this aura in the same way. Again, in describing an ‘original’ artwork, there are problems as Davis points out in determining exactly what is ‘original’. However, having said this, Davis is overlooking a key point in making this criticism and that is in relation to the subject's exposure to such works of art before, either in real life or in images. The lack of excitement evinced by the author may actually be more a product of the over-production and overexposure of current society to images of many different sorts of art, so that standing in front of the original in the twenty-first century does not inspire this confrontation with the aura.

What this critique does do, however, is highlight some of the changes within society that have occurred since the time of Benjamin's writing. The level of current exposure to images of a multitude of different things has, it can be argued, led to a situation whereby the withering of the aura has not produced a subject free from the determining power of the object, but rather a distracted subject bombarded by so many partial views of partial objects that no more room exists for critical reflection than Benjamin espoused was the case with works of art preceding

mechanical reproduction. Instead of freeing the subject through a distracted gaze and a loss of the original, the subject is ensnared by the distraction of the multi-spectacle hyperreal.

It is at this point where Benjamin's idea becomes of interest to this thesis, because it is argued that the event of September 11 allowed for an eruption of the Lacanian real to escape from its representation. In so doing the real negated the symbolic in the instant of its escape and reinvigorated the auratic mode of interaction between subject and object. The mode of interaction could be felt as a mesmeric, almost hypnotic, relationship between the viewer and the representation of the event.

Some interesting conclusions can be drawn when Benjamin's conception of the aura is applied to the case study of September 11. Although the early coverage of September 11 was technologically reproduced (in that it was a representation made through the use of technology), two new factors came into play. These are immediacy (or 'liveness') and unpreparedness. The footage of the attacks on the WTC took place (to a large extent) 'live'. This meant that the attacks were not as easily mediated by the usual televisual processes of planning, scheduling, scripting, editing and selecting the images as well as the frames to be used to represent the event. While the news is used to covering things 'live' or giving the appearance of covering events live, this event was on a scale not previously represented. In this sense they retained a high degree of their authenticity and hence authority as being an original event. September 11 can be seen as an event where the object reasserted its dominance over the subject. The aura came to the fore again, exerting a mesmerising, ritualised mode of engagement from the audience. This effect was added to rather than lessened by the repetition of the moment of impact and the towers collapsing because it didn't change the original, it was held hostage by it.

Benjamin's work can in many senses be seen as very closely related to the work of Baudrillard on simulation. Benjamin's main point is that through mechanical reproduction the subject is distanced from the object of the image and thus interacts

with it in a more independent, active manner. Baudrillard's concept of simulation works with this idea of distance between subject and the object/image. If, in a final order simulacra, there is no longer any resemblance between image and object, this then changes the power relationship between the subject and the object allowing for a greater degree of distance between them, hence further 'withering' the aura and the authority of the object/image.

Furthermore, in relation to Baudrillard's concept of simulation, the relationship between the original and the reproduction is renewed. This does not mean that, in Baudrillard's view, the image becomes a true representation of reality but that rather:

...reality gives the image an element of terror, an extra thrill. Not only is it terrifying, it is also real. Or rather it is not the violence of reality that comes first, giving the image an extra frisson; the image comes first and adds a frisson to reality (Baudrillard 2003:18).

This thesis argues that September 11 renewed the relationship between the original and its simulation, between the 'artwork' (used in its loosest possible sense) and its aura of authenticity. As the real erupted through its representation and shattered the Western shared sense of security, the socially produced perception of reality, it reintroduced a mesmeric mode of interaction between the subject and the object. The subjects, the audience, were held in thrall to the object-images that burst into living rooms; they held an authority over the subject that was very difficult to break from – at least at first. It is this moment that witnessed the birth of the media-real, as will be argued in the following chapters. A live eruption of the Real rupturing its symbolisation in a burst of the uncanny, the spectacular and the abject. In this eruption, the relativity of preconceived 'truths' of comfort and security were to the institutions which had produced these discourses was made starkly clear.

## Conclusion

This chapter began with an exploration of the Deleuzian understanding of the event. This exploration looked at how an event can't be separated out from the 'stream' of temporality within which it exists. To do so, to treat an event as merely an instant or a moment in time is to make it become less than what it is and hence less than what it could or can be. Water flowing in a stream is more than the sum of its molecules and an event is more than merely the sum of a series of instants. It is intrinsically linked to what has come before and what will come after. It is a process rather than a product.

Viewing the event as a part of a process rather than as the end product of a causal chain foregrounds the idea that an event does not exist in isolation of the happenings that occur both before and after it. In this conceptualisation there is a flow of becoming rather than a series of instants, each sharply separate from every other instant. In the Deleuzian view all of these moments flow into each other, they both impact on and are in turn impacted upon by every other 'moment' that makes up this particular flow of events.

From this beginning it is shown that the study of an event such as September 11 is a more problematic task than it might at first seem. How is it possible to manage to delimit such an occurrence? By acknowledging this event as a process rather than merely the end product of a causal chain it becomes obvious how difficult it is to put limits on the scope of such a study. However, by understanding that, in examining the *mediation* of the event rather than the event itself, what is being dealt with is already a delimited set then it begins to be possible to draw the boundaries of the study, all the while acknowledging that it is a *process* that is being investigated rather than just a *product*.

The first section of this chapter also addressed the Virilian notion of the technologically predisposed accident and importantly the impact of speed in terms

of the technological reproduction and transmission of communication. The idea that the kind of terrorism witnessed on September 11 2001 could not have occurred without the current level of technology and the speed with which messages can be communicated around the globe is an important one for this thesis because it underlines one of the key issues, that will be discussed in Chapter Five.

The second key section of this chapter looked at the real and ways of understanding reality. It began with a description of some of the key differences between the materialist and immaterialist positions of reality and then outlined the key immaterialist positions and situated this thesis as belonging within the 'weak constructivist' position that is predicated on the major role of society in shaping understandings of reality, while at the same time acknowledging some degree of external reality. It is so important to situate this thesis itself within the schema provided because of the sheer number and variety of positions that it is possible to take alongside the fact that each of these positions inherently changes the angle and approach that the thesis will take. It also makes sure that it is clear what position the thesis is taking and why. In taking a social constructivist position, this thesis is placing central importance upon the influence of society and communication on the formation of understandings of the world, and on how this understanding is communicated.

From this discussion the thesis moves into a more specific examination of the Žižekian reworking of the Lacanian real and the ways in which the real will be understood throughout this research. The approach taken on the real, whereby it is seen as a traumatic eruption that cannot be expressed because it is inherent to the lost organic self obliterated in the rise of the speaking subject, is when the symbolic structure founders and the presence of the real becomes apparent.

This chapter has also looked at a number of key theoretical concepts that form part of the overall analysis of the case of September 11 2001. What is important about these concepts is that they provide the basis for an analysis of the language, visual

language and impact of the representation of the event. In so doing they form a part of the overarching argument of this thesis, that the representation of the event of September 11 can be seen as something significantly different to what has come before because of the eruption of the real. Thus the aftermath of this eruption of the real forced a situation where the representation of the aftermath was a part of the recovery from the attacks and their representation. In effect the understanding of reality that had been ruptured was now being sutured to staunch the flow of the symbolic into nothingness.

What this means in practical terms is that there was a concerted effort from soon after the attacks (within the first 6-8 hours) to reclaim control of the event and more importantly to reclaim control of its representation. The ways in which this occurred will be examined further in the following chapters. This was done through a number of strategies but what is particularly important to this thesis is the use of language and discourses to provide the framework for this revisualisation. Through a process of unification, demonization and re-binarisation, the rupture in the semiotic code was gradually brought back under control.

The third of the major conceptual areas examined in this chapter was the Foucauldian interpretation of discourse and how this relates to societal understandings of truth. This notion of discourse, of what it is possible to say within a specific context or within a specific institution or cultural field is important because of the ways in which the media operate in society and the privileging of certain discourses or others, what Foucault refers to as 'regimes of truth' (1980:131). Foucault's work leads to a conclusion that 'truths' must, at least to some degree, be relative rather than absolute. It is this relativistic understanding of truth that is of particular interest to this thesis because of the nature of the truth claims made by the media generally and more particularly in relation to September 11. In undertaking this examination of the concept of discourse and its interrelationship with power this thesis has been provided with a 'tool' for the analysis of the coverage of the September 11 attacks. This 'tool' allows for an understanding of the

representation as a form of discourse, or more accurately as an amalgam of different discourses and 'regimes of truth' and it is the eruption of the real, that which is outside of discourse, that causes the event to escape from its representation.

This argument led from discourse into a discussion of Derrida's concept of deconstruction and how exposing the binary oppositions that underpin natural, given or 'common-sense' understandings of reality serve to destabilise the entire semiotic system and hence the societal view of reality that this informs. The nature of the mediation of the September 11 attacks, and the eruption of the Lacanian real through this representation, meant that some of the dominant Western understandings of the 'way the world is' were severely challenged and ruptured by the attacks. In the aftermath of this loss of the symbolic there was a clearly identifiable process of re-binarisation undertaken by both officials and media representatives in an attempt to stop the haemorrhaging of reality, or at least the understandings thereof. Derrida's concept of deconstruction here becomes a tool that can be used to examine how this process was undertaken and the forms in which it was applied.

The next section of the chapter dealt with some of these ways in which language and discourses were deployed in the immediate aftermath of the attacks. This section looked at how the imagined community of the nation was undermined by the event and its mediation and how this led to a re-imaging of the nation and the discourses and language used to enact this reconstruction process. In addition this section looked at the relationship of oral/written language to visual language and how visual language was also deployed in the aftermath of the attacks in the reconstruction of the nation.

The final section of this chapter looked at Benjamin's concept of authenticity and its aura. In this exploration Benjamin's understanding of the impact of technical reproducibility on the relationship between the spectator and the object of their gaze is highlighted. Benjamin makes the claim that with mechanical reproduction

(or technical reproducibility) the mesmeric nature of the relationship between the subject and the object is broken and that this is positive because the subject is then free to engage in a critical understanding of the social conditions which produce both subject and object. It is the aura of authenticity, in Benjamin's view, which enraptures the subject and traps them into being subsumed by the object, closing off the space for a critical engagement with the world around them. What this thesis proposes is that the eruption of the Lacanian real carried with it this aura of authenticity and the more usually distracted gaze of the viewer was mesmerised by the author thus reawakening the situation, deplored by Benjamin, where the subject is subsumed into the world of the object.

Overall this chapter has examined the four key concepts of the event, the real, discourse and authenticity. These concepts provide the basis for the analysis of the mediation of this event and a foundation for the answering of the questions posed in the beginning of the chapter. To understand how this event shaped societal perceptions of reality and why it differs from those seen in the past there needs to be an examination of both the circumstances within which it arose, the ways in an event may be understood as well as the ways of understanding reality. This is because these factors are crucial in exploring the processes of representation and meaning making.

When relating this chapter to the overall argument of this thesis, that the mediation of the September 11 produced a rupture in the societal understandings of reality through an eruption of the Lacanian real, what can be seen is a foregrounding of some of the concepts that make this 'reading' possible. By treating the mediation of the September 11 attacks as a text for analysis, and through the application of concepts such as discourse and regimes of truth alongside the technique of deconstruction and the idea of *différance*, the outline of the tear left by the eruption of the real can be traced. To refer back to the third understanding of the real proposed by Žižek, the real in this formulation is the remainder, what is left that cannot be symbolised except in its lack, in its ability to have an effect, and it is

precisely this understanding of the real that has been traced in this chapter where all that remains of the traumatic eruption is the outline, the nothingness left where the symbolic was obliterated and the gap in the semiotic (as well as the physical) environs.

## Chapter Two – The Spectacle.

In the previous chapter the key operational terms were defined and the theoretical positions taken were made explicit. We now turn to an examination of the complex interplay of convergent factors or forces which account for the nature of the representation of this event of mediation of September 11. The media-real arises from the conjunction of a specific set of ‘forces’ that travel through a number of specific pathways or conduits to lead to a situation where the Lacanian real of the event escapes from or supersedes its own representation. This results in it becoming more than, or other than, the real – the media-real. None of the forces in isolation would cause or explain the impact that this event has had – indeed it is almost impossible to quantify the impact of September 11.<sup>16</sup> But how have these three forces – the spectacle, the *unheimliche* and the abject – functioned together to transform this particular media event? What is the nature of each of the forces? What are the conduits which must also be present for the media-real and what is their nature?

The next three chapters of the thesis will begin the process of analysing the specific forces. In particular this chapter explores the notion of the spectacle and the role that this plays in the formation of the media-real. It examines Debord’s concept of the society of the spectacle and then moves on to look at the concept of spectatorship and the relationship between the spectacle and the spectator.

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<sup>16</sup> It has arguably spawned two invasions, a radical shift in the arena of international politics, a significant shift in the role of the media and its relationship to government and a very different level of awareness amongst the general population of the Western nations of how fragile the decades of peace and security have actually been.

## ***The society of the spectacle***

The first of the forces that will be dealt with in this section of the thesis is spectacle. Without spectacle an event cannot reach 'escape velocity'<sup>17</sup> from its representation. Guy Debord, in his book *The Society of the Spectacle* (1983), conceived of the situation whereby the mediated nature of modern life would lead to a surfeit of representation, in turn leading to a situation where the spectacle would become paramount, especially the mesmerising effect that it exerts. The role of the spectacle is of key importance to the concept of the media-real because of the way that it draws and holds the attention of the spectator. In combination with the other two forces, this hypnotic effect becomes pronounced.

Debord, writing in 1967, suggested that Western culture had become a 'society of the spectacle'. By this he meant that because the lives of individual subjects are organised by the capitalist system - which, in his opinion, came to replace religion as the guiding principle of Western society - therefore the discourses of the subject reflect the dominant ideology and rationale of this system: "The spectacle's form and content are identically the total justification of the existing system's conditions and goals" (Debord 1983: Section 5). While on some levels this doesn't seem very surprising - that the way that an individual talks and even structures their thinking reflects the social system within which they live - Debord takes this much further in arguing that this becomes the *justification* of the spectacular system's conditions and goals. By using this focus on *justification*, Debord is making the point that the spectacular is not only a part of the way the subject thinks, talks and lives, but is also the justification of this choice-which-is-not-a-choice. Inherent in the idea of a *justification* for a particular system is the notion that other choices may be possible, however if the justification for that 'choice' of system forms part of the structure of the way that an individual thinks/talks/lives their lives then the 'choice' becomes an

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<sup>17</sup> The minimum speed an object must reach to escape a gravitational field (Vallado 2004:33).

unconscious affirmation of how things are already done, it falls below the level of conscious decision making and just is.

In addition to the justificatory nature of the spectacle, Debord asserts that the mode and relations of production have become the central tenet of the way that individuals live their lives and the spectacle has itself become its own reason for being. “In the spectacle, which is the image of the ruling economy, the goal is nothing, development everything. The spectacle aims at nothing other than itself.” (Debord 1983: Section14). In other words, it is the self-perpetuating spectacle, where there is no point to it other than to create the environment for further spectacle, which makes this media age<sup>18</sup> so interesting. In linking the pointlessness of the spectacle to the pointlessness of monopoly capitalism, where everything is about perpetual growth and consumption, Debord is pointing to what he sees as the destructive illogic that characterises late capitalism and is the inevitable outgrowth of the earlier versions of capitalism originally critiqued by Karl Marx.

Frederic Jameson is another Marxist theorist who discusses this conceptualisation of late capitalism. Whereas for Debord, capitalism leads inevitably to the age of the spectacle, in Jameson’s analysis, what is produced is the fractured multiplicity of postmodernism. Jameson, in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) argues that in postmodernism, events are decontextualised and without depth. He describes three different characteristics that he discerns in the postmodern condition, drawing upon a comparison of a Van Gogh painting with a Warhol painting:

The first and most evident is the emergence of a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense—perhaps the supreme formal feature of all the postmodern- isms to which we will have occasion to return in a number of other contexts...Then we must surely come to terms with the role of photography and the photographic/negative in

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<sup>18</sup> See Paul Saffo’s 2007 essay “Farewell Information; it’s a Media Age”.

contemporary art of this kind: and it is this indeed which confers its deathly quality...All of which brings me to the third feature I had in mind to develop here briefly, namely what I will call the waning of affect in postmodern culture (Jameson 1991:8).

Jameson's point here is to show a general comparison between modernity and postmodernity by using the examples of these two artists work. The depthlessness, deathly characteristic and waning of affect are all characteristic, Jameson believes, of the ways of understanding prevalent in the 'postmodern age'. In making this argument Jameson is pointing to the sterility of a system that is devoid of context, that is innately superficial – because to be able to say more there needs to be the depth of context to draw upon – and due to his three factors, there can only be produced an affect that is superficial and fleeting. The points that he is making here dovetail with Debord's description of what happens to the society of the spectacle when exposed to so many superficial, contextless spectacles. What makes this concept of particular value to the argument of this thesis is that the spectacle exists for spectacle's sake; there is no more reason than this.

Debord also believes that a culture of spectacular illusion, alienation, isolation and separation has developed as a means of maintaining the status quo and keeping the relations of production stable for the dominant class. The primary function of spectacle is the maintenance of *status quo*. As Debord points out: "The spectacle within society corresponds to a concrete manufacture of alienation" (1983: Section 32). So while the spectacle itself has no point other than the production of further spectacle, Debord ties the usage of spectacle to a justification for the entire system as well as being a factor that helps to reproduce the existing conditions of that system. By being such a key factor in the maintenance of the *status quo*, the spectacle serves a purpose as an agent of distraction and illusion by drawing the subject's attention away from the fact that they are atomised and isolated, segregated into nuclear families and alienated from the people around them. He is making the point that without the spectacle, perhaps the populace might notice that

they are lonely and disconnected from the people around them, whilst imagining a connection (as Benedict Anderson would put it ) to an impossibly broad community – the nation. This idea is useful in thinking about the event of September 11 because it is this isolation amidst billions of people, this atomisation and alienation, that allows for the fascination many viewers and commentators reported on to begin with. The alienation brought about by the spectacle of the mediation of the attack furthers the hallucinatory belief in an impossibly broad community; the nation. To escape from the loneliness and terror of such a spectacle in a culture of atomisation, the reaction is, potentially, to cling to this reimagining of community even if it is hallucinatory and transitory.

Debord makes the claim that even cities and the use of natural space are a product of the current system as well as a further means of ensuring the isolation and alienation of the workers from each other. He argues that:

Urbanism is the modern fulfilment of the uninterrupted task which safeguards class power: the preservation of the atomisation of workers who had been dangerously brought together by urban conditions of production (Debord 1983: Section 172).

Through the use of spectacle and its power to distract and entrance, the conditions which allow for the supreme agency of the people are subverted to become nuclear family sized cells.

The move to the idea of the nuclear family as the building block of the social system can be argued to have increased the isolation and atomisation of the workers. When everyone is encouraged to live exclusively in nuclear family blocs, within an urban jungle of competing blocs, people are stacked on top of each other with no sense of connection to the people around them. In this territorialisation<sup>19</sup> of the spectacle,

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<sup>19</sup> It is a process of territorialisation because of the breaking of the urban space into smaller territories for each nuclear family unit. Within each of these territories is the isolated reception of the spectacle. Instead of a notion of communal reception of a message what is found in this idea is an alienated reception due to the territorialisation of urban space.

what is lost is the sense of the local, of community and of place. This loss of community and place can be seen to leave an emptiness which consumption and the 'community of the nation' is supposed to fill.

According to Debord, consumption has become the key responsibility and right of every Western citizen. It is both the purpose for being as well as the overarching duty of its subjects. Commodity fetishism is the way that Karl Marx described this phenomenon, this replacement of desire for one thing with another. In *Das Kapital* he describes it in terms of:

...a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. This I call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities. This Fetishism of commodities has its origin, as the foregoing analysis has already shown, in the peculiar social character of the labour that produces them (Marx 1992:s4).

Due to commodity fetishism, such high importance is placed on the production and consumption of objects that they become the reason and justification for existence itself. The individual is led to believe that commodities will make them happy, that the next object will be the one that completes their lives, but each time the individual achieves the goal of the latest commodity the happiness of consumption does not last and is often followed by a feeling of depression that the individual is still not satisfied. Of course it is at this point that the next object of desire comes along and their faith is renewed that if they obtain this newest commodity they will feel fulfilled just like the advertising promises. This never-ending cycle becomes in and of itself the goal of the consumer life. As Debord elaborates:

The satisfaction which no longer comes from the use of abundant commodities is now sought in the recognition of their value as commodities: the use of commodities becomes sufficient unto itself; the consumer is filled with religious fervour for the sovereign liberty of the commodities (1983: Section 67).

In other words commodities, like spectacle itself, have become their own purpose for being. They no longer serve a broader purpose other than further consumption. This is particularly relevant in the current economic crisis where governments are desperate to keep the population consuming because if the consumption stops so will the entire financial system.

Debord sees commodity fetishism as being closely related to the role of the spectacle: in fact, he positions the spectacle as the ultimate form of this fetishism:

This is the principle of commodity fetishism, the dominance of society by “intangible as well as tangible things”, which reaches its absolute fulfilment in the spectacle, where the tangible world is replaced by a selection of images which exist above it, and which simultaneously impose themselves as the tangible par excellence (Debord 1983: Section 36).

When seen from this position, all of modern culture becomes a commodity as well as being yet another form of spectacle. In addition to this Debord adds that “[t]he spectacle is the moment when the commodity has attained the total occupation of social life” (1983: 42). So what is being enunciated here is the idea that the society of the spectacle has become completely dominated by this fetishisation of the spectacle.

In the immediate aftermath of September 11 companies rushed to provide products to help people feel safe. The sale of American flags increased exponentially, as did the sale of gas masks -though there were no signs, and no reports of a chemical

weapons attack at this time (Liberto 2002, September 10). People seemed to turn to the consumption of commodities to assuage their national grief (Murphy 2002, September 2).

This process of fetishisation becomes a part of the justificatory nature of the spectacle's role in the current social system and increases the level of identification with the distraction rather than the actuality of daily life under monopoly capitalism. The society of the spectacle is a society in love with the superficial and infatuated with the images provided by the refracting mirror of the mass media. It is this obsessive love of the image, possibly related to the privileging of the visual in Western culture, that makes the concept of the spectacle so important for this analysis. Although the society of the spectacle has been developing for a number of decades now, some may argue since the beginning of photography, it is in the opening months of the new millennium that we see its realisation. The mediation of September 11, in many ways, can be seen as the apex of this progressive 'love affair' between Western culture and the image. In the months after September 11, and particularly when there was mention of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, images of the wreckage of the WTC were replayed. The iconic image of the twisted steel girders looming out of the smoke and debris is one that is instantly recognisable as a symbol of the September 11 attacks because it was used so frequently in the aftermath of the event.

A particularly important idea in the context of this thesis is the Debord's posited relationship between the spectacle and the real:

The spectacle which inverts the real is in fact produced. Lived reality is materially invaded by the contemplation of the spectacle, while simultaneously absorbing the spectacular order, giving it a positive cohesiveness. Objective reality is present on both sides. Every notion fixed this way has no other basis than its passage into the opposite: reality rises up within the spectacle, and the spectacle is real (1983: Section 8).

This way of viewing the relationship between the spectacle and reality is particularly important because of the way that Debord sets up a binary opposition between the spectacle and the real. He begins with the idea that they are diametrically opposed positions, that the spectacle is produced as an 'inverted real', and then shows how they become inextricably linked in the society of the spectacle. The key notion revolves around the passage of the spectacle from an opposite to the real; through being consumed it becomes a part of reality itself. This is of central concern because of the way that Debord theorises the relative positions of the spectacle and the real and the fact that they only meet due to production and consumption. Again this comes back to the idea of the spectacle as a justificatory process of the system rather than as an external element of the current culture. In terms of the September 11 attacks a Debordian reading would see that the spectacle of the attacks only became 'real' through consumption of the images. For most people the only way that anything was 'real' for them about the attacks was the spectacular images of the event that they consumed.

The role of the image is very interesting in terms of the society of the spectacle. Debord claims that in the society of the spectacle the sense of sight is privileged above all of the other senses: "The spectacle has a tendency to make one see the world by means of various specialised mediations...[and] naturally finds vision to be the privileged human sense which the sense of touch was for other epochs..." (1983: Section 18). This importance placed on the image or the mediated sense of vision, leads to a near supplicatory positioning of the subject in regards to the image where "The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people mediated by images." (Debord 1983: Section 4). This idea was looked at in the preceding chapter in relation to the privileging of the visual in Western culture and the way that this in turn produces a visual language that is often read as 'true' because 'pictures don't lie' As Sontag points out in regards to photographic images: "Photographed images do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it, miniatures of reality that anyone can make or acquire" (1990:4). This

certainly can be connected to Benjamin's ideas about the power relationship between subject and object with the auratic presence of authenticity that was explored in chapter two. In this case the power of the image (the object) over the subject can be clearly seen in the way that the spectacle can enrapture an audience, and this is particularly pertinent to the case of the coverage of September 11. However it is important to note that Debord doesn't see any withering of the power of the aura with the mechanical reproduction of images. This conception of the power of the image also relates to medium theory notions of theorists such as Marshall McLuhan who place even more emphasis on the primacy of a particular sense on the systematic organisation of social life.

All media work us over completely. They are so pervasive in their personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered. The medium is the message. Any understanding of social and cultural change is impossible without a knowledge of the way media work as environments. All media are extensions of some human faculty – psychic or physical. The wheel is an extension of the foot; the book is an extension of the eye, clothing, an extension of the skin, electric circuitry, an extension of the central nervous system. Media, by altering the environment, evoke in us unique ratios of sense perceptions. The extension of any one sense alters the way we think and act – the way we perceive the world (McLuhan 1967:26-41).

This emphasis on the visual within Western society, whether it is seen as being created by technology or as being the reason for the creation of that technology, again lends to the overarching argument being made in regards to the media-real. It is yet another example of the power of the image, and of the spectacle itself, in the current media-saturated age – which was never more apparent than with the mediation of the attacks on the World Trade Center.

Debord also discusses the destruction or denigration of language and communication more generally through the rise of the spectacle. He claims that the

spectacle takes over the function of language in communicating an occurrence but that this communication is banal and meaningless. In this sense it can be seen as a form of phatic communication – communication whose sole purpose is to keep the channel of communication open. In this case the channel is kept open for the purpose of further spectacle. As Debord argues:

The flagrant destruction of language is flatly acknowledged as an officially positive value because the point is to advertise reconciliation with the dominant state of affairs – and here all communication is joyously proclaimed absent” (1983: Section 192).

This idea of the absence of communication in the spectacle can also be tied to the psychoanalytic idea of absence as the source of desire, because desire is the desire for a completeness that can never be actualised and so, therefore, becomes attached to objects, or others, as a temporary replacement for this lack. This can be seen as a form of fetishism, or the replacement of an object for the (in Freud’s case) missing maternal phallus (Freud 1927). However the usage here is more in line with Marx’s (1992) use of the term which was looked at earlier in this chapter.

This absence in communication, in the schema of thought, would therefore lead to a desire for this communication which would in turn become attached to other signifiers in an effort to achieve completeness. Lacan, when discussing schizophrenia, talks about a break in the signifying chain for the schizophrenic (1977). This break leads to what Jameson, refers to as “an experience of pure material Signifiers, or in other words of a series of pure and unrelated presents in time” (Jameson 1991:20). In his reference to the ‘break’ or ‘lack of connection’ with the schizophrenic, Jameson is drawing parallels with the postmodern society’s lack of context leading to a similar situation as that described by Marx above.

## Critiques of Debord

There have been a variety of criticisms of Debord over the years, though somewhat surprisingly his concept of the society of the spectacle has generally been well received. Indeed what has tended to be critiqued is more to do with his conceptualisation of capitalism rather than his conceptualisation of the role of the spectacle itself. One key general criticism of his work is that he poses no alternatives, no ways of overcoming the society of the spectacle, In fact his work has been described by some writers as unremittingly pessimistic (McDonagh 1997:5). Debord's *Commentaries on the Society of the Spectacle* (1987), released twenty years after the publication of the original book, was dismissed by most critics as a descent into paranoia. One critic went so far as to write "Situationism has fallen from megalomania to paranoia" (Jenny 1990:112) whilst another described his work as "Adorno gone mad in a situation in which there is no longer any access to concrete experience, capitalism reigns supreme, and only a few marginal intellectuals can figure out what is going on" (Piccone 1991:86).

Some of this criticism seems valid when considering the level of paranoia inherent in statements such as:

A person's past can be entirely rewritten, radically altered, recreated in the manner of the Moscow trials -- and without even having to bother with anything as clumsy as a trial. Killing comes cheaper these days. Those who run the spectacle, or their friends, surely have no lack of false witnesses, though they may be unskilled...Thus it is no longer possible to believe anything about anyone that you have not learned for yourself, directly (Debord 1987:sVII).

Here Debord is saying that there is no such thing as a fair trial in the society of the spectacle, that everything is manufactured and that nothing is what it seems. In another section he attacks the academy, whose members are supposed to be a bastion of impartial intellectual learning, arguing:

Nothing remains of the relatively independent judgment of those who once made up the world of learning; of those, for example, who used to base their self-respect on their ability to verify, to come close to an impartial history of facts, or at least to believe that such a history deserved to be known. There is no longer even any incontestable bibliographical truth, and the computerized catalogues of national libraries are well-equipped to remove any residual traces (Debord 1987:sVII).

Here Debord makes the claim that even libraries can no longer be trusted because of the ability of those in control of the society of the spectacle to change information at will. Despite the level of paranoia displayed in this book Debord makes some interesting statements about terrorism. He comments, for example, that:

Such a perfect democracy constructs its own inconceivable foe, terrorism. Its wish is to be judged by its enemies rather than by its results. The story of terrorism is written by the state and it is therefore highly instructive. The spectators must certainly never know everything about terrorism, but they must always know enough to convince them that, compared with terrorism, everything else must be acceptable, or in any case more rational and democratic (Debord 1987:sIX).

The point raised above is strikingly similar to the comments made by Baudrillard after the September 11 attacks. In his article *The Spirit of Terrorism* (2003), Baudrillard comments:

For it is that superpower which, by its unbearable power, has fomented all this violence which is endemic throughout the world...no one can avoid dreaming of the destruction of any power that has become hegemonic to this degree". (2003:5).

Where these Baudrillard and Debord differ, in terms of their understanding of terrorism, is in the way that they see the audience. While Debord's audience is passive and unable to make any other conclusion than what is provided to them,

Baudrillard's audience are complicit in the attacks themselves: in some senses they have 'dreamed' the attacks into existence. As he states, "...we have dreamt this event, that everyone without exception has dreamt it" (Baudrillard 2003:5).

A further criticism of Debord's work comes from Douglas Kellner. In his book *Media Spectacle* (1990), Kellner uses many of Debord's ideas on spectacle, however he qualifies his use of these concepts by stating:

...although Debord's concepts of the "society of the spectacle" and of "the integrated spectacle" (1990) tended to present a picture of a quasi-totalitarian nexus of domination, it is preferable to perceive a plurality and heterogeneity of contending spectacles in the contemporary moment and to see spectacle itself as a contested terrain (Kellner 2003: 11).

This critique is well justified as reading Debord literally would lead to a belief that deliberate choices were being made by some singular entity in charge of the whole capitalist system. Taking this into account, there are still many useful ideas that come out of Debord's work, such as the relationship between the spectacle and the real, the relationship between technology and the spectacle, commodity fetishism and the spectacle, as well as the way that the system reorganises its citizens social lives in its image.

Technology plays an important role in the rise of the spectacular society. All spectacle has some reliance on technology for its production and/or transmission, but new technology has become the driving force of Western economies and is at the top of the food chain of desire for the latest object in terms of commodities. Kellner terms this reliance on and idolisation of technology as 'technocapitalism', which he sees as the synthesis of capital and technology. This leads into the formation of the "infotainment society" and the marriage of technology and spectacle into the 'technospectacle' (Kellner 2003: 11). The new technologies, such

as the Internet and mobile phones, are playing an ever more central role in the life of citizens in the Western world. Kellner claims:

Arguably we are now at a stage of the spectacle at which it dominates the mediascape, politics and more and more domains of everyday life. In a culture of the technospectacle, computers bring escalating information and multimedia extravaganzas into the home and workplace through the Internet, competing with television as the dominant medium of our time. The result is a spectacularization of politics, of culture, and of consciousness, as media multiply and new forms of culture colonize consciousness and everyday life... (Kellner 2003: 14).

Media spectacle, or the mediated representation and/or creation of spectacular events, is particularly driven by new technology with the miniaturisation and production of the latest gadgets or additions to slightly older technologies. This allows for more participation by consumers in the production of media. The eyewitness story is now frequently supplemented or supplanted by the eyewitness' mobile phone video footage. This is the rise of a new kind of consumer, one that Alvin Toffler and afterwards Terry Flew refer to as 'the pro-sumer' (Toffler 1980; Flew 2005).

The concepts of the technospectacle and technocapitalism are important because they show the interweaving of the spectacle, the technology and the technological society which produced it. This enmeshment of technology and spectacle will also be further explored in Chapter Five when the role of technology, and in particular communications technology will be examined as one of the conduits that allow for the creation of the media-real.

Kellner's use of Debordian concepts provide for an interesting examination of many different cultural areas of contemporary American life in terms of the spectacle and the role that the mass media play in its construction. Kellner explores different kinds of spectacles such as the commodity spectacle of McDonald's and the sports

spectacle of Michael Jordan and Nike. He also applies the concept of the spectacle to fictional television shows such as *The X-Files*. He relates the idea of the spectacle to news, both in the O.J Simpson Trial<sup>20</sup> and in the political arena<sup>21</sup>.

Kellner's use of these concepts is of interest to this research, however it should be noted that there are some significant differences in the kinds of events that Kellner examines and in the scale of these events to those used here. Kellner's case studies, although an interesting application of Debord's work, tend to use a decentred approach to the idea of spectacle – as is emphasized in his critique of Debord's work. They are domestic spectacles, everyday spectacles, spectacles that fade from the conscious mind in just the way that Debord theorises. They affirm the system through distraction and deflection: the individual doesn't think about anything deeper because the latest 'shiny object' distracts them before they can focus on anything more significant.

The kind of spectacle being dealt with in this thesis can be argued to be a more apt exemplification of what Kellner refers to as the 'megaspectacle', "...whereby certain spectacles become the defining events of their era" (2005:26). In his article 'Media Culture and the Triumph of the Spectacle' (2005), Kellner does differentiate between some of these differing levels of spectacle, however he still sees the commodity spectacle of McDonalds as being a 'megaspectacle'. This is where significant differences begin to occur between his adaptation of Debordian theory and the ways in which it is used in this thesis. This thesis argues that there is an enormous difference in the type, scale and reception of the spectacle when we are talking about the mediation of the terrorist attacks of September 11 and that the mediation of this event is a megaspectacle in the most appropriate use of that term.

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<sup>20</sup> The O.J Simpson trial occurred in 1995 where football star and media personality Orenthal James Simpson was charged with the murder of his wife Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman. The trial, in part due to the televised car chase to apprehend Simpson, was one of the most sensational in United States of America law history. Simpson was acquitted on all counts on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October 1995. It was a controversial finding and a later civil case for damages from Nicole Brown Simpson's family found him guilty (Linder 2000).

<sup>21</sup> Kellner makes the point with both of these issues that the spectacle of the election or the spectacle of a high profile trial both distract from any in depth understanding of the issues involved (2005).

The nature of the megaspectacle of September 11 can be seen in a number of ways. First and foremost it has been the defining event of the first decade of the new millennium. It has shaped the foreign policy of many countries throughout this decade, wars have been fought and some are still ongoing due to the influence of this event. It is also exceedingly spectacular in and of itself. Figures 1 and 2 below show two of the most spectacular still frame images of the event and illustrate the nature of the spectacle being discussed. Darley describes a spectacle as “Designed to stimulate and capture the eye and, often the gut (viscera) as well, rather than the head or intellect” (2000:40). This is certainly what is prompted by the kinds of images seen in Figures 1 and 2. There is a visceral reaction to the images of towers bleeding smoke and debris, of planes exploding through buildings. The head or intellect can be argued to be spellbound by the power of the spectacular image. The level of spectacle, or megaspectacle as shown in the figures below, is something rarely witnessed outside of the realm of the big budget action or disaster film.

Figure 1 (WNBC 11/9/2001)



Figure 2 (Associated Press 11/9/2001)



In his article '9/11, spectacles of terror and media manipulation: A critique of Jihadist and Bush media politics' (2004), Kellner argues, similarly to Baudrillard, that the mediation of war is now starting to reside in the realm of the hyperreal. He comments in regards to the rescue of Private Jessica Lynch<sup>22</sup> in the more recent Iraq conflict<sup>23</sup>, "Eight days after her capture, the US media broadcast footage of her dramatic rescue, obviously staged like a reality TV spectacle" (Kellner 2004:56). Tellingly, he also comments that: "The September 11 terror spectacle looked like a disaster film..." (Kellner 2004:43). Representation of 'reality' is here aligned with, and indeed dependent upon, representations of the fictional. In this way of thinking 'reality' is made more 'real', rather than less, when it invokes the conventions of fictional depiction. This is likely related to the sheer number of fictional representations that the Western audience is exposed to in any given year. So when there is an unprecedented event, in searching for sense-making interpretive schema, fictional comparisons spring readily to mind. Kellner does not pursue this connection in any detail, yet this linking of fact and fiction is particularly relevant to one of the key aspects of Freud's notion of the uncanny, which will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Three – the reality confusion induced by the uncanny and furthered by the blurring of boundaries between the imaginary and the actual.

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<sup>22</sup> "Private Lynch, a 19-year-old clerk from Palestine, West Virginia, was a member of the US Army's 507th Ordnance Maintenance Company that took a wrong turning near Nassiriya and was ambushed. Nine of her US comrades were killed. Iraqi soldiers took Lynch to the local hospital, which was swarming with fedayeen" (Kampfner 2003, May 15). From this point there is much disagreement about the rest of this story. The official U.S.A media story was that she was heroically rescued by American soldiers 8 days later after having suffered a bullet wound, a stabbing and being repeatedly slapped during interrogation in her hospital bed. However subsequent media coverage claimed that the 5 minute television clip released by the Pentagon did not show the full picture, in fact doctors from the hospital, interviewed by the British media, told them that "she had a broken arm, a broken thigh and a dislocated ankle....There was no [sign of] shooting, no bullet inside her body, no stab wound - only RTA, road traffic accident" (Kampfner 2003 May 15). The article in The Guardian went on to say "The doctors told us that the day before the special forces swooped on the hospital the Iraqi military had fled. Hassam Hamoud, a waiter at a local restaurant, said he saw the American advance party land in the town. He said the team's Arabic interpreter asked him where the hospital was. "He asked: 'Are there any Fedayeen over there?' and I said, 'No'." All the same, the next day "America's finest warriors" descended on the building. "We heard the noise of helicopters," says Dr Anmar Uday. He says that they must have known there would be no resistance. "We were surprised. Why do this? There was no military, there were no soldiers in the hospital. It was like a Hollywood film. They cried, 'Go, go, go', with guns and blanks and the sound of explosions. They made a show - an action movie like Sylvester Stallone or Jackie Chan, with jumping and shouting, breaking down doors." All the time with the camera rolling. The Americans took no chances, restraining doctors and a patient who was handcuffed to a bed frame" (Kampfner 2003 May 15).

<sup>23</sup> The 'Coalition of the Willing' invasion of Iraq began in March 2003. U.S.A forces are still currently stationed in Iraq.

Much spectacular media can be described as hyperreal<sup>24</sup>. Indeed, this is what Kellner is pointing to when he uses the comparison of the rescue of Private Lynch to the staging of a reality TV spectacle. The spectacle of the action or disaster film often has no original to refer to; they are impossible scenes that, as Baudrillard observes, have no relationship with a 'real' occurrence – or in many cases with the possibility of really occurring.

Reality itself founders in hyperrealism, the meticulous reduplication of the real, preferably through another reproductive medium...It becomes reality for its own sake, the fetishism of the lost object: no longer the object of representation, but the ecstasy of denial and of its own ritual extermination: the hyperreal (Baudrillard 1976:144).

One of Baudrillard's most famous examples of the way hyperreality operates is in his assertion that 'the Gulf War did not take place'. Of course, Baudrillard was not referring to the mechanics of the actual war (troop movements, bombings, civilian casualties) when he said this. Rather, he meant that the war was not 'real' in that much of it was 'staged' or 'recreated' and framed in certain ways to be consumed by the mass media audience. The Gulf War, then, was "...a non-event, an event that does not truly take place" (Baudrillard 2003:18). Instead, it became pure simulacra, 'reality' divorced from its referent as far as it is possible to be.

The concept of the media-real developed in this thesis does not imply this total divorce of the copy from the original. This notion of the possibility of a total divorce between copy and original is problematic to begin with. Rather, the media-real implies that the original still exists, that the new structure has been hastily flung around this event that shatters the subjects pre-programmed viewing. In this

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<sup>24</sup> *Hyperreality* is theorised by Jean Baudrillard as being the product of final order simulation where the relationship between the original and the copy is irretrievably lost, where the signifier becomes totally divorced from the signified. It is the restructuring of the sign system and the process of signification. Baudrillard sees the precession of simulation of the image as:

"...the reflection of a profound reality;  
it masks and denatures a profound reality;  
it masks the absence of a profound reality;  
it has no relation to any reality whatsoever, it is its own pure simulacrum" (1994:6).

situation, which refers only to the first moments of representation, there is no time for the transference of the original to a copy; this occurs as the hours pass, and as form and meaning are reintroduced, as the original is repackaged into the more usual representational conventions. In the case of the Gulf War, then, in Baudrillard's depiction, the media-real would be found in the moments when the real could no longer be contained within the initial structure or frame given to the war. Events that contradicted the official version such as the bombing of a civilian bomb shelter<sup>25</sup> by a so-called smart bomb are examples of this<sup>26</sup>. The media-real is a technologically cumulative concept. In its most powerful form, seen in the immediate footage from the September 11 attacks, it needs to hit a critical mass in terms of global reach, instantaneous transmission, convergent media and (like advertising) repetition, in order to explode the strictures of hyperreal mediation and rupture the comforting illusion of a distant and controllable reality.

In his article 'L'Esprit Du Terrorisme' (2002), Jean Baudrillard makes some interesting points about September 11 and the media representation of the event. He calls the attack the "...ultimate event, the mother of all events..."(2002:13). Baudrillard sees this almost in terms of the schoolyard bully receiving their 'comeuppance'. What he is saying is that the world wouldn't have had the reaction it had unless everyone, in some way, enjoyed seeing the lone world superpower brought down. "Without our profound complicity the event would not have reverberated so forcefully, and in their strategic symbolism the terrorists knew they could count on this unconfessable complicity" (Baudrillard 2002:13). One of the most interesting concepts discussed by Baudrillard in this article is the role of the image in relation to the event.

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<sup>25</sup> This bombing of the Amiriyah civilian bomb shelter on February 13, 1991 caused a great deal of controversy. Human Rights Watch make the claim that the US did not follow appropriate protocol in their targeting of the shelter even though the US military claimed it was being used by the Iraqi military (HRW [online] 1991) while some Muslim academics, such as Jeenah Na'eem has made the claim that the US forces were trialling a new kind of 'bunker buster' and cared nothing for the civilians trapped inside the shelter (Jeenah [online] July 2001). Casualty figures vary from 200 to 408. The wreck of the shelter was, at least until the current invasion, a shrine to the victims.

<sup>26</sup> However, in this case the incident was not released 'live' so the elements of unpreparedness and technological hyperefficiency were not apparent thereby reducing the level of unheimlichkeit and also the referent to the real.

...the terrorists exploited the realtime of images, their instantaneous worldwide distribution. The role of the image is highly ambiguous. Even as the image exalts the event, it takes it hostage. It multiplies the event into infinity, and at the same time it diverts our attention from the event and neutralizes it (Baudrillard 2002:17).

In many ways what Baudrillard is pointing to here is exactly the point that Debord makes in his theories on spectacle: that the image (or spectacle) distracts the subject from the deeper implications of what is occurring. Though, again, the concept of the media-real diverges from Baudrillard's thinking. This is because the media-real is about the *resurrection* of the 'real'. The mediation of the attacks did not have the disconnect Baudrillard speaks of in the relationship between the hyperreal and the real. If anything, there was a surfeit of the 'real', experienced as a powerful fascination with the representation of the event. It exploded the boundaries of the hyperreal and escaped from the precession of simulacra back into the realm of the unspeakable, uncopyable, mesmerising real.

## **Relationship to other attacks**

The relationship of the spectacle to the coverage of September 11, and the media-real, is of key significance to this thesis because it is the spectacle that initially draws the attention of the spectator. The coverage of September 11 was profoundly spectacular in nature. The event would not have reverberated so powerfully with the audience without the presence of spectacle, or in this case the megaspectacle, and this is borne out by the London bombing of 7/7/2005<sup>27</sup>, which, although it was a catastrophic occurrence, did not escape from its representation because the impetus of all of the convergent factors looked at in this thesis did not come

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<sup>27</sup> On July 7 2005, four suicide bombers attacked targets on London's public transportation system. "Three bombs went off at or around 0850 BST on underground trains just outside Liverpool Street and Edgware Road stations, and on another travelling between King's Cross and Russell Square. The final explosion was around an hour later on a double-decker bus in Tavistock Square, not far from King's Cross" (BBC News 2005, July 7).

together in the same way. The level of breathtaking spectacle was missing and in particular the spectacle did not appear live like the images of the second plane crashing into the WTC with the September 11 attacks. In relation to the media-real more generally the spectacle is one of the most important elements, and is particularly crucial in terms of the renewal of auratic presence inherent within a media-real event. However it is important to reiterate that there was a level of spectacle apparent in the London attacks but that it was a lack of the cumulative factors that differentiated it.

To highlight these differences the three key forces that come together to form the media-real are the spectacle, the *unheimliche* and the abject. These convergent forces are then transmitted through the conduits of unpreparedness and technological hyperefficiency and the cumulative effect of this entire process is the escape of the event from its representation through a re-emergence of the Lacanian Real. None of the bombings that have occurred since September 11, including either of the Bali bombings<sup>28</sup>, or the Madrid<sup>29</sup> and London bombings have had the same combination of factors. The level of spectacle in all three of the cited examples was quite different to that of the September 11 attacks. Nowhere did footage go to air 'live' that showed the attacks as they happened. Nor did the aftermath of any of the other attacks contain the level of spectacle and uncanniness of the subsequent collapse of the twin towers.

In terms of the *unheimliche*, which is the subject of the following chapter, they did not emulate the September 11 attacks to the same extent. Whilst a level of *unheimliche* may be ascribed in each case, in none of these cases does it reach the same level as the attacks on the WTC. In terms of the London bombings there was a level of uncanniness in the pillars of smoke emerging from the underground railway

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<sup>28</sup> There have been two separate terrorist attacks on the Indonesian island of Bali. The first occurred on October 12 2002 when a suicide bomber targeted Paddy's night club in Kuta. 202 people died, 88 of them Australians (Gurtner 2004). The second attacks occurred on October 1 2005 and were a series of three suicide bomber attacks. 25 people were killed and 102 injured (ABC News Online 2005, October 2).

<sup>29</sup> The Madrid terrorist attacks occurred on March 11 2004, killing 191 people and injuring 1,800. Ten explosions occurred on four separate commuter trains within the space of five minutes (Reinares 2010).

stations, however this did not approach the uncanniness of watching the second plane deliberately bank into the WTC. The abject, being the subject of the fourth chapter, is present in all three of the cited cases and no real difference is posited between the event of September 11 and the other events mentioned. However due to the lesser degree of convergence overall there was no breaking of the boundaries of discourse. These events, from the first, were discursively situated and did not escape from their representation.

In terms of the pathways or conduits there were differences as well. There was a lack of the 'live' and raw in the coverage of these events. As mentioned previously the attacks were not captured live in the same spectacular manner as the September 11 attacks. Although original footage taken during the attacks did surface this tended to appear much later than in the September 11 attacks. There was also a rise in 'citizen journalism' by this time, which led to a more fractured accounting of the attack<sup>30</sup>. There was none of the panicked tone of the media in the reporting of the other three cases<sup>31</sup>. The London bombings are particularly noteworthy here, with the BBC reporters remaining calm and impassive throughout their broadcast<sup>32</sup>. It should be noted here that the British and Spanish media have a long history of reporting on terrorists acts within their countries and this means a more codified and cogent response might be expected, as was borne out in their coverage of the attacks on their countries<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> This argument, put forward by Wallace (2005) sees a significant difference between the 911 attacks and the London bombings because of the way in which the audience received their news. He makes the claim that by 2005 many people within the audience were being kept up to date by blogs and social networking sites and that this represented a fundamental change to the centrally controlled media model operating during September 11.

<sup>31</sup> A conclusion based on the notes taken by the author during the coverage of the London bombing.

<sup>32</sup> BBC editorial guidelines state: "We must report acts of terror quickly, accurately, fully and responsibly. Our credibility is undermined by the careless use of words which carry emotional or value judgements. The word "terrorist" itself can be a barrier rather than an aid to understanding. We should try to avoid the term without attribution. We should let other people characterise while we report the facts as we know them. We should not adopt other people's language as our own. It is also usually inappropriate to use words like "liberate", "court martial" or "execute" in the absence of a clear judicial process. We should convey to our audience the full consequences of the act by describing what happened. We should use words which specifically describe the perpetrator such as "bomber", "attacker", "gunman", "kidnapper", "insurgent, and "militant". Our responsibility is to remain objective and report in ways that enable our audiences to make their own assessments about who is doing what to whom" (BBC 2010).

<sup>33</sup> The article *Mediated Terrorism in Comparative Perspective: Spanish Press Coverage of 9/11 vs. Coverage of Basque Terrorism* (2006) by Sádaba and La Porte makes the point that the Spanish Coverage of September 11 was coloured by the reporting on terrorism committed by the Basque separatists within Spain (2006). The BBC

This first section of Chapter Two has looked at Debord's notion of the spectacle has been examined as has the way in which this concept relates to the coverage of the September 11 attacks. Kellner's critique of Debord's work and Kellner's own concept of the 'megaspectacle' have also been examined. Finally Baudrillard's concept of simulation and the hyperreal were explored. Whilst the central concept of this thesis – the media-real – is informed by all of these concepts it is also something that exceeds them. Spectacle is one of the foundational components of the media-real but at the same time it is only one part of a larger construct. While drawing upon Debord's ideas of the society of the spectacle, the media-real also acknowledges the weaknesses of parts of this initial theory and is cognizant of the point that Kellner makes in regards to the totalising tendencies of Debord's original concept<sup>34</sup>.

Similarly the idea of the 'megaspectacle' has been drawn upon and also critiqued. In the same way Baudrillard's ideas on simulation and the hyperreal also form part of the theoretical foundation of the media-real. These concepts are important because they form a significant part of the theoretical background for the emergence of the media-real.

### ***Spectatorship***

A focus limited to the role of the spectacle only tells one side of the story, particularly when analysing why the representation of this event may have been so influential in shaping what possible societal perceptions of reality were available. Of equal importance in the equation is the role of the spectator. Indeed to theorise only from the 'extreme longshot' leads to one of the chief criticisms that Kellner makes of

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also has extensive experience in covering IRA terrorist attacks within the UK since the secession of the Irish Republic in 1922.

<sup>34</sup> Kellner's key criticism, as cited earlier in this chapter, is that Debord sees the society of the spectacle in terms of a monolithic control of society by an unnamed group/class through the use of the spectacle (Kellner 2005).

Debord's work – that is, where is the audience in all of this? Where is their agency? This thesis does not subscribe to the idea of an overarching manipulative entity controlling and propagating the rule of the spectacle. Due to this divergence from Debord's concept wherein the audience is seen in particularly passive way, a significant level of importance must be attached to the role of the spectators themselves.

One of the central questions that this thesis deals with is the extent to which the mediation of the attacks on the WTC was different? Which in turn raises the question of how did the spectatorship of this mediated event differ from that of past events? The explanations for this mesmerising effect begin with the presence of the real, whereby this eruption of a symbolic real belongs to a different order of reality. In many theoretical constructions, Lacan's, for instance, the pre-symbolic real is the remainder of the reality instinctively understood before the imposition of language moves the subject from the individual and undifferentiated world of the chora<sup>35</sup>. (The chora is a concept developed by Kristeva to describe the perceptual world of the infant prior to the mirror-phase, to the universalising world of language (1977).) This concept, and the concept of the mirror-phase, will be examined in more detail in Chapter Four.

The mesmeric nature of the footage is something noted by a number of commentators. As Lewis remarked: "Those who viewed the destruction of the towers, in most cases through televisual replay, were confronted by a mesmeric, terrible and strangely beautiful event" (2005:112). Again in Baudrillard's response to the attacks he describes the 'mass fascination' of the audience witnessing representations of the attacks (2002). This mesmeric viewing of the attacks, which involved a negation of the world outside the screen, at least for a period of time, is of

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<sup>35</sup> The original concept of the chora comes from Plato where it meant "a mobile receptacle of mixing, of contradiction and movement, vital to nature's functioning before the teleological intervention of God, and corresponding to the mother" (Cited in Kristeva 1977:57).

interest to this thesis because it is this enraptured viewing that is one of the things that marks this event out as something quite different to prior events.

Television, a primary medium in the communication of the representation of the September 11 attacks, tends to be a medium that distances the spectator from the world: the individual watches lazily and everything is always a long way off and mediated through many different eyes. As Ellis posits in his book *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video* (1992):

TV's regime of vision is less intense than cinema's: it is a regime of the glance rather than the gaze. The gaze implies a concentration of the spectator's activity into that of looking, the glance implies that no extraordinary effort is being invested in the activity of looking...The TV-looker is a viewer, casting a lazy eye over proceedings (1992:137).

In the representation of September 11 this wasn't the case. It felt immediate and more real than many in the audience were prepared to deal with. It felt so immediate because of many of the technological factors, such as the proliferation of communicative media, that will be explored in more detail in Chapter Five. It was also immediate because there were 'real' people to identify with. Instead of the somewhat distanced and impassive model that news reporters often seem to adhere to, the live images frequently came from 'normal' people, and the images that did feature news reporters themselves showed them as 'real people', where they were scared, they bled, they ran or they helped people, but they reacted as everyday humans rather than as passive, supposedly objective, observers. A particular example of this can be seen in some of the shots taken as the towers collapsed. A number of camera operators were running for their lives but had left the cameras rolling. In the pitching and vertiginous images that were produced other members of the news crews could be seen running with them and appearing to search for cover (CNN 11/9/2001). This involvement of crews as actors rather than just

observers allowed for the possibility of greater identification between the spectator and the people that this event was happening to.

Another factor was the level of repetition. The repeated screening of the moment of impact had an almost hypnotic effect. However it can be argued that it was a key factor in the fascination that the representation of this event held for many spectators. In a culture of violent spectacle, only violent spectacle satisfies anymore. It isn't particularly exciting to see the next news anchor talking to some security specialist. However, seeing the explosion as the plane hits the building for the twentieth time that hour is.

The production process's constant innovations are not echoed in consumption, which presents nothing but an expanded repetition of the past. Because dead labor continues to dominate living labor, in spectacular time the past continues to dominate the present (Debord 1967:s156).

What Debord demonstrates here is that within a spectacular society there is a compulsion to repeat the spectacle because the spectacle has become a justification for the system itself. In this way there is a dominance of the past over the present because the past is controllable and this can be seen when the event is controlled through repetition.

Feeding in to this repetition was an unusual lack of advertising which also contributes to the level of mesmerism. Television is all about distraction. Television structure breaks shows every 18-20 minutes or so<sup>36</sup> and it is during the advertising breaks that, it has been argued by theorists such as Vangelisti (2004), much of Western family interaction occurs. There is also a tendency to do the things that the body wants done, to get a drink, go to the toilet, get food etc. There were none of these distractions with Sept 11. It was possible, in the US, Australia and many other

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<sup>36</sup> Some US channels apparently run on an 23 minutes of programme to 7 minutes of advertising ratio though this can go as high as a 18:12 minute ratio depending on the time of day and the type of programme being screened (Robinson & Martin 2009).

Western nations, to go to every single station in turn and the same story was playing with many of the same images, same sounds and very similar people. More importantly there were no advertisements to be seen. And while many individuals might see this as too good to be true, in this situation, coupled with the level of repetition, it meant that it was exceedingly difficult to look away. In a culture where distraction is piled on distraction, where the audience can even distract itself from the distraction of the spectacle, it was most unusual for the level of concentration that this particular spectacle produced.

When examining the role of the spectator in relation to the spectacle of September 11 there are two essential concepts that need to be explored. The awesome presence of the 'real' is directly related to the concept of auratic presence which is drawn from the work of Walter Benjamin, and this idea of auratic presence will be one of the foci of this section on spectatorship. The other focus of this section will be on the Freudian concept of scopophilia and Laura Mulvey's use of it in 'Visual Pleasures' and what this might mean for the consumption of the representation of an event such as this.

### **Auratic Presence**

The auratic presence that the mediated event of Sept 11 had was of an order very rarely witnessed before. Even though it was being mechanically reproduced and re-presented somehow this event retained a link with its 'aura of authenticity', its origin. It did not seem to become a simulacrum of itself, even through its own reproduction it maintained its presence as a symbolic 'real' occurrence. How did it do this? By belonging to the Lacanian real in the first place, it was not reducible to its component parts but rather became more than just the sum of its parts. Instead of the repetition reducing its impact, as happens to most other events in the media, in this case the repetition made it even larger than it already was. Instead of distancing the spectator from the tragedy the audience were brought closer to it.

Walter Benjamin's essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' can be seen as one of the foundational pieces for any analysis of the 'presence' of a particular form of mediation. This article sets out how Benjamin sees the difference between an original work and its reproduction as well as the differences in the responses of the audience to physically present 'stand alone' art and art which is produced through mechanical media. The primary argument being made in this section, with reference to Benjamin's work, is that the excess of the Lacanian symbolic real that was captured on the electronic/mechanical reproduction media retained its aura, its authenticity and that this was one of the key factors in how this mediated event differed from other mediated events.

Elsewhere in this thesis Benjamin's arguments in regards to authenticity have been laid out but a key point that was not looked at in any great detail is the relationship between an original work of art, a mechanical representation (the examples used by Benjamin are a photograph or a film) and the way that a spectator interacts or relates to each one. Benjamin begins with two different kinds of values that are imbued in the relationship between the subject (the spectator) and the object (the work of art/mechanical representation). With an original work of art, Benjamin claims that it contains 'cult value', that is, that the work of art "begins with ceremonial objects destined to serve in a cult" (Benjamin 1968:V224) and that this kind of cult value is what is witnessed in cave paintings and most kinds of early art. Their existence is far more important to the originating artist than to anyone actually witnessing them. There is then a gradual movement away from this idea where the 'exhibition value' of different pieces of art starts to become far more important than their 'cult value'. In other words, it is not the 'magical' nature of their existence which is of key value but their exhibition, their being witnessed by others, that takes precedence. He sees this as reaching a whole new plane with the invention of photography where the exhibition value becomes everything, that is, that to have value the photographic representation needs an audience.

Benjamin goes on to argue that the 'cult value' of a work of art does not give way without resistance and that this is the reason for the fascination with the human face and photographic portraiture. He points to the fact that most of the earliest photography was focussed around the taking of 'likenesses' and that the family portrait was one of the earliest popular forms of photography. Benjamin sees this as stemming from a 'cult of remembrance', whereby the photograph is used to remind the individual of a loved one's presence when they are either absent or dead. This 'cult of remembrance' is successful because the aura has not become completely severed from the image because of the subject's connection to the fleeting mortality of the human likeness. As there is a move into the photography of places without actors, without a human presence, there is a subsequent move from the ritual to the exhibition in regards to the positioning of the audience. Benjamin then comments that with the film, although there is frequently a human presence, the spectator's understanding and interpretation of a particular scene within the film is contingent on their understanding of every other scene that has come before it and this particular scene's place within the overall flow of scenes. This contingency changes the relationship between the subject and the object of their gaze.

The change in the nature of the relationship between the audience and the work of art (or between the subject and object) is theorised by Benjamin as producing a qualitatively different form of relationship. He sees the relationship between the work of art and the spectator as absorbing the spectator, that is, that with the contemplation of an original work of art, the audience (the subject) is absorbed into the world of the work of art (the object) thus producing a situation where the object subsumes the subject. Benjamin sees the relationship between the audience and the mechanical representation as the reverse of this. He believes that in this situation the spectator absorbs the representation, the representation becomes a part of the audience's world, hence the subject subsumes the object.

It is argued that the representation of the September 11 attacks reintroduced the 'cult value' relationship between the audience and the representation. In other

words, instead of the spectator absorbing the object of their gaze (the work of art or in this case, the representation) and bringing it into their world, in this case the object (the representation of the September 11 attacks) drew the subject (the audience) into its world and the perception of reality existent in that world. It is argued that this occurs because of the reinvigoration of the aura caused by the eruption of the real through its representation. It is in this way that the audience's perceptions of reality were shattered. By replacing the broad societal perception of reality, even momentarily, with a totally different perception of reality, that which belongs to the event itself, the spectators become aware that their perception of reality is not the only one; it becomes uncoupled from its 'naturalisation'. That what has been understood as merely a 'given' or a 'constant' is not that at all, it is, as implied by the name, merely 'a', rather than 'the' perception. More will be said about how this transformation took place throughout the rest of this thesis.

For now it is important to note that although the coverage of September 11 fits within the category of Benjamin termed technical or mechanical reproduction, and therefore should lack anything other than a vestigial sense of the aura, the coverage is so unusual because, it is argued, there is such a strong auratic presence to it. This thesis argues that this resurgent aura comes from the presence of the Lacanian real as it erupts through the representation of the event. Due to the presence of the aura the 'cult value' relationship between subject and object is reinvigorated leading to a shattering of possible societally shared perceptions of reality, through an acknowledgment of the arbitrariness of the commonly held perceptions as opposed to its acceptance as 'natural'.

Benjamin also talks directly about the distracted nature of the audience of the mechanically or technically produced object. He seems to posit at least two differing opinions as to whether this distracted gaze is positive or negative. On the one hand he believes that freeing the audience from the aura of the traditional work of art liberates them, allows them distance from such works of art, but on the other hand, somewhat akin to Debord, the distracted gaze can also be a bad thing because it

implies disconnection from the world around as well as a lack of time for contemplative reflection.

Benjamin is in many ways picking up on a theme from the work of many Communists/Socialist theorists/artists from that time – the idea of interruption as a way of shocking, of emphasising certain themes or elements central to a Marxist challenge to bourgeois hegemony. Brecht was famous for using such methods throughout his plays. As Bentley describes:

It is a system of interruptions that break up the play into the atomic elements of which it consists. Interruption is for Brecht a dramatic device of the first importance (2008:32).

Eisenstein is equally famous for his development of the idea of montage, used for similar purposes within his films<sup>37</sup>. So Benjamin's point here is that distraction, or an interrupted gaze, allows for new ideas to come to the surface, because the rhythm of contemplation has been broken, and the hold that the 'author' of a traditional art work has, has also been broken. Thus there is more chance for the subject to be free from the 'false consciousness' imposed by the bourgeois means of production.

However Benjamin also realised that there was a problem inherent in the notion of the distracted audience, one which some of the earliest of film critics commented on. Benjamin quotes Georges Duhamel's complaint that "I can no longer think what I want to think. My thoughts have been replaced by moving images" (Cited in Benjamin 1968:XV238). So while Benjamin refers to concentration and distraction as polar opposites (1968:XV239), as Howard Eiland points out in his article 'Reception in Distraction',

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<sup>37</sup> One of the most famous examples of this is Eisenstein's film *Battleship Potemkin* and in particular the Odessa stairway scene (Eisenstein 1925).

The essay on technical reproducibility makes it evident that distraction, in a properly modern context, must itself be understood dialectically, that is to say, beyond the simple opposition of distraction and concentration” (Eiland 2005:7).

So Eiland argues that what is implied by Benjamin in the later part of the essay on technical reproducibility is that there is more than one type of distraction – there is a distraction that allows for the importation and examination of new ideas, but there is also the distraction of diversion: “The opposition now would seem to be between mere distraction and, shall we say, productive distraction – between distraction as a skewing of attention, or as abandonment to diversion, and distraction as a spur to new ways of perceiving” (Eiland 2005:9).

This idea of the two types of distraction, and in particular the idea of the type of distraction as diversion dovetails with the later work of Debord on spectacle. Benjamin, writing decades earlier than Debord, did not witness the use of this kind of distraction whereas Debord had seen the uses made of the spectacle for the purposes of diversion rather than bringing about new thought. Debord’s assessment is very negative in comparison to Benjamin’s, who saw much hope in the potential of the new technologies to bring about an ‘awakening’ of the perceptions of the masses, whereas Debord had witnessed the uses made of the new technologies in carrying this notion of distraction as diversion to a far greater degree.

The importance of this conception of distraction for this thesis lies in a number of the peculiarities of the mediation of the September 11 attacks. Firstly, in Debordian terms, it can be argued that the audience was mesmerised by the spectacle itself, it distracted people completely from the world around, there was no real concentration, instead there was only reception. Secondly, the nature of the coverage meant that the lack of advertising, a medium built upon distraction and interruption as diversion, pulled the spectator ever deeper into the representation. Thirdly, the nature of the event itself, the ‘return of the real’ as Baudrillard put it,

meant that the societal perception of reality, and in many ways it was a perception formed through distraction, was shattered by the reappearance of the real. This eruption through its representation of the unsymbolisable, the 'hard kernel' that resists dialecticisation, is what brought about the rise of the media-real.

In terms of the mediation of September 11, the argument of this section is that because of the eruption of the symbolic 'real' the barrier that Benjamin describes as existing between a representation and its audience, or a work of art and its audience, vanishes and once again a situation arises where the object of contemplation subsumes the subject with the audience is drawn into the world of the image. While existing in this world of the image, the subject is distracted and distanced from their physical selves, and in many ways so mesmerised by the encapsulation of the image, that the concentration necessary for analysing what exactly it is that is being witnessed is almost impossible. At the same time the audience is being exposed to the realisation that there is more than one perception of reality and for many members of the audience this denaturalisation calls into question the basis for this older complacent perception of reality.

## **Scopophilia**

The second of the major concepts that is examined in this section on spectatorship is the Freudian concept of scopophilia. Scopophilia is an important concept for examination in the context of this thesis because it allows for a closer theorisation of the relationship between the audience and what they are watching, and particularly focuses on the relationship between the individual audience member and the character/actor/person who appears on the screen.

The term scopophilia was coined by Sigmund Freud to mean 'love of looking' (Freud 2000). This love of looking did not originally have a direct relationship with any of the erotogenic areas but was more to do with seeing people as objects. This

objectification involved the gaze as a mechanism of control and of curiosity. Scopophilia in this formulation is essentially an active occurrence. Later Freud tied scopophilia to the pre-genital autoerotic period and saw it on an active instinctual level from which it can be interrelated to narcissism. Obviously scopophilia can be seen as a concept intertwined with both the spectacle and with the spectator. The love of looking inscribed in the term scopophilia requires both subject and object before it can come into being, and is in some ways the logical outgrowth of a society of the spectacle, a society of spectators.

Laura Mulvey, in her essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1989) uses the Freudian conception of scopophilia alongside the Lacanian concept of the formation of the ego through the mirror phase. She argues that they are actually complementary processes when applied to the audience's relationship with cinema. While scopophilia is seen essentially as an instinctual action it is controlled and reigned in by the ego. Under the Lacanian view of the formation of the ego through the mirror phase, the subject recognises at the instant of selfhood, the incompleteness of the self and this realisation of lack becomes one of the driving forces of the ego, the completion of this fractured incomplete self. This search for completeness leads to the 'trying on' of other personae and personalities, which is where, it is theorised, the human ability to identify with others comes from.

Mulvey sees a dual process occurring within the audience. On one level there is the pleasure in subjecting the world on the screen to the controlling and curious gaze of the scopophilic while on the other, the incompleteness of the ego and the search for a cure to this feeling of 'lack' leads the individual to 'try out' the subject positions of others. The perfect 'others' are those that are already under the subject's controlling gaze, the ones already contained within the screen. In Mulvey's words: "The scopophilic instinct (pleasure in looking at another person as an erotic object) and, in contradistinction, ego libido (forming identification processes) act as formations, mechanisms which mold this cinema's formal attributes" (1989:25). Hence Mulvey's

argument that the audience's relationship to narrative cinema is one of both pleasure and lack, control and incompleteness, identification and objectification.

Part of Mulvey's argument involves the physical space of the spectator in the cinema, "...the extreme contrast between the darkness in the auditorium (which isolates the viewers from one another)" (Mulvey 1989:17). The cinematic gaze is a different gaze to that of the televisual. In the cinema the space is both public and private at the same time. The audience members are situated in a public space outside of the home, while at the same time the darkened room with the social conventions of no talking isolates the audience from the other people inhabiting this curiously dual world. This atmosphere enhances the feelings of scopophilia: the spectator is there, in that place, at that time, to watch and only to watch. The visual senses have been given primacy, as long as they are focussed in the right direction, hence the projection of light onto a screen in a darkened room. In China the earliest films were described as 'Western shadow plays' emphasizing from the beginning the role of lighting and shadows. At the same time the environment and the artificial isolation of the audience from each other provides the perfect combination of factors for the feelings of identification with the 'screen-people' that are already subject to the individual's gaze.

Psychoanalytic film theory places the environment of the spectator in a central role in the formation of meaning and our relationship to the world of the screen. Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, in her article 'Psychoanalysis, Film and Television' (1987), argues that psychoanalytic film theory is focussed around looking at "...film spectatorship in terms of the circulation of desire" (1987:180). Psychoanalysis sees the spectator as a central part of the 'cinema machine' or 'cinematic apparatus' and that watching a film is somewhat akin to dreaming. Flitterman-Lewis outlines continues:

The cinematic apparatus is thus a complex, interlocking structure involving:  
1) the technical base (specific effects produced by the various components of the film equipment, including camera, lights, film, and projector); 2) the

conditions of film projection (the darkened theatre, the immobility implied by the seating, the illuminated screen in front, and the light beam projected from behind the spectator's head); 3) the film itself, as a 'text' (involving various devices to represent visual continuity, the illusion of real space, and the creation of a believable impression of reality); and 4) that 'mental machinery' of the spectator (including conscious perceptual as well as unconscious and preconscious processes) (1987:181).

One of the most important differences between psychoanalytic film theory and its application to television theory is the theorizing of the spectator. Flitterman-Lewis comments that: "...what the psychoanalytic approach might provide in its application to television studies, is the definition of an entirely new type of social subject, part viewer, part consumer – the 'tele-spectator'" (1987:172). Television encourages a different style of watching, partially because it is predicated on interruption: "Instead of demanding the sustained *gaze* of the cinema, TV merely requires that its viewer glance in its direction" (Flitterman-Lewis 1987:187).

The Television is close, present, 'part of the furniture', informal. It is deliberately interrupted (advertising), and is mostly viewed with family (or people known to the individual), generally the lights are on, people can talk and move about freely, there are active choices in what to watch at what point, and frequently what the television portrays is happening now. As Flitterman-Lewis observes: "It is television's peculiar form of presentness – its implicit claim to be live – that founds the impression of immediacy..."(1987:189). She adds "...television's 'immediate presence' invokes the illusion of a reality presented directly and expressly for the viewer" (Flitterman-Lewis 1987:189). This emphasis on the immediacy of the televisual image is a point that will be further explored in the Chapter Five.

In terms of the subject's relationship to television as opposed to their relationship to the cinema, television is a far more informal and direct form of electronic communication. Television does not come with the strict social etiquette associated with the cinema. It is domestic, in some ways friendly, and therefore invites a far

more relaxed and diluted form of attention. Distraction as opposed to concentration is the key to televisual viewing as television in many ways is even more akin to Benjamin's 'exhibition value' than film is. Television is totally about the audience. Without that audience there is no call to some level of artistic originality, without the audience television doesn't exist because there is no one to advertise to.

Another of the important differences between the cinema and television is the actual technology involved. As Flitterman-Lewis explains it: "A film is a strip of autonomous still images that appear to move when projected one after the other on the screen...The moving television image...is generated by the continuous scanning of whatever is in front of the camera by an electronic beam" (1987:188). Although this difference is now changing with televisual capturing techniques and film technology becoming less differentiated through the use of digital technologies, there still remain some significant differences in the production values of the two. Television is immediate and is also a conduit for advertising, it doesn't tend to rely on high production values or amazing special effects. Most shows are predicated on the domestic, on the familiar. However, increasingly, there are more and more instances of where the world of film is merging into the world of television. Films are routinely screened on television and most Western consumers own DVD players so that they can watch films at their leisure. There has been a surge in the level of big budget television programming with many spinoffs from films being launched. Conversely there are many instances of television shows spawning films based on their 'worlds'. What all of this indicates is that although there are still a number of key technological differences between television and film many of these differences have been, and continue to be eroded.

Television may occur in a completely different environment but has some of the same dual impacts as cinema. The figures before the spectator are again contained within a screen, forever outside of the subject's actual reach, but there is an understanding that whereas a large percentage of filmic characters never did exist, many of the characters on the small screen do exist outside of television. Television

occurs in the private sphere of the home changing the almost voyeuristic nature of the darkened, isolated public space. It is frequently well lit with few of the same social codes and conventions of behaviour. It is acceptable to talk and interact with others while the television is on – although during particularly intense dramatic serials we might see the enforcement of some of the same cinematic viewing rules.

Having said this there are still similarities given the right circumstances. Although the television is within the private sphere this does not mean that there is no interpenetration. The News is the most cogent example. The vast majority of the news stories that appear within a television news bulletin are to do with public sphere matters such as world affairs, politics, disasters, finance etc. In addition to this, in most families the main television viewing space is in the most public area of the house, the lounge room/living room. These two factors provide some of the curiously dual crossovers between the public and private spheres that are seen within cinema. Added to this is the extra degree of identification that is possible (though does not always occur) with the more 'life-like' people found within news and current affairs type shows. There is also a need to remember that films are now watched even more frequently on the small screen than on the large. This has led to a blurring of the boundaries between the two types of screens, though there is a tendency to treat television with less of a focussed gaze in most day-to-day viewing.

In certain circumstances there may also be the enforcement of a similar type of gaze. If a story of particular interest comes on the family may be 'shushed' so that the person with the authority to do the silencing can apply a more focussed gaze to what has caught their attention. In some cases what is playing on the screen has enough spectacular force to capture the attention of everyone without the intermediary 'shush'.

Some Theorists, such as Hockley in *Frames of Mind: A Post-Jungian Look at Cinema, Television and Technology* (2007), have made the point that television viewing is not

monolithic in that there are different modes of engagement for different types of viewing. Hockley elaborates:

...different types of psychological engagement occur in the act of watching television and in the activity of watching television programmes. Watching a television programme suggests a relationship more akin that of the cinemagoer watching a film. The screen is the immediate and dominant object of interest, the relationship is participatory and relatively unconscious...In contrast the watcher of television is bathed in the invocatory flow of images and sounds (2007:69).

What Hockley is pointing to here is a difference between the watcher of television generally and the watcher of a specific television programme. As signalled in the above quote Hockley sees the engagement of the audience in these two practices as quite distinct. He does not deny that much television viewing is decentered and distracted but what he does provide is a division between different types of television engagement.

Caldwell is another theorist who challenges what he terms 'glance theory'. In his book *Televisuality: Style Crisis and Authority in American Television* (1995) he argues that:

Contrary to glance theory, the committed TV viewer is overtly addressed and "asked to start watching" important televised events. The morasslike flow of television may be more difficult for the TV view to wade through than film, but television rewards discrimination, style consciousness, and viewer loyalty in ways that counteract the clutter. Whereas viewership for film is a one-shot experience that comes and goes, spectatorship in television can be quite intense and ingrained over time (Caldwell 1995:26).

Here Caldwell points to something which has not been taken into account in much psychoanalytic accounting for the differences in viewing between the cinematic spectator and the televisual one. This is the long-term engagement that many

viewers have with particular programmes and the gratifications that they get from this engagement. Although as Hockley pointed out there are different ways of viewing television, some involving more distraction than others, Caldwell is pointing to a very interesting point in terms of the build up of identification and enjoyment that serious followers of particular shows can become immersed in. In this situation it is impossible to see them as being less engaged than a cinema spectator, in many cases this long term relationship with the programme is likely to make them a more engaged viewer.

Voyeurism is a near sexual excitement caused by the witnessing of some occurrence, often, though not always of a sexual nature. Some theorists, such as Jameson have claimed that the image itself is intrinsically sexual in nature and that it therefore inspires a voyeuristic mode of engagement:

“The visual is *essentially* pornographic, which is to say that it has its end in rapt, mindless fascination...while the most austere films necessarily draw their energy from the attempt to repress their own excess...Pornographic films are thus only the potentiation of films in general, which ask us to stare at the world as though it were a naked body. On the other hand, we know this today more clearly because our society has begun to offer us the world - now mostly a collection of products of our own making - as just such a body, that you can possess visually, and collect the images of” (Jameson 1992:1).

The mindless fascination described by Jameson is the same spectacular separation described by Debord. Both are implying a level of both distance and longing that is engendered by the transmitted spectacle, a spatial distance that the audience, it can be argued, tries to fill through a temporal relationship.

The mediation of September 11 was one of the cases where an argument can be put forward for the extreme engagement of the audience with the material on the screen. Despite its initial resemblance to a scene from a Hollywood blockbuster, people reasonably quickly came to understand that it was occurring in the here and

now. From a psychoanalytic point of view what occurred was the perfect marriage of the scopophilia and identificatory processes. These processes, which have always sat rather incongruously, came together seamlessly. The love of looking was captured and bound by the spectacular nature of what was being represented. It was almost impossible to look away. At the same time the level of identification that occurred was extraordinary for many in the Western audiences. It did not feel like it was happening on the other side of the world, it was visceral, it was now and it was 'us'. These people caught up in the unfolding tragedy could have been in any of the major modern cities in the Western world. As such, they became the perfect, almost blank models for the identificatory processes performed by the ego in its quest for fulfilment. The perfect twinning of the scopophilic and identificatory processes led to a mesmerisation of many people in the audience.

There was a sense of forbiddenness to the almost involuntary consumption of the images, a sense that there should not be a feeling of pleasure from witnessing so much death and destruction. But still the spectator couldn't look away. The fascination with the spectacle in broader society led to the situation where, when the spectacle was real, all the audience could do was watch.

## **Conclusion**

The mediation of September 11 was of particular note on both sides of the spectacle – in both its projection and reception. It was a spectacle, a 'megaspectacle' to use Kellner's terms, but it also produced something unusual on the spectator's side as well. On the side of spectacle much of its impact comes from the spectator's somewhat belated identification of this event as 'real' but at the same time as something that had been seen before, albeit in a fictional form. This reality confusion over whether the spectacle was deliberately performed by the media or whether it was happening outside of the world of fiction, added to the confusion (and hence mesmerism) of the representation of the event. As spectators it was

possible to see that there were a number of processes involved whereby this event became something unusual. There was a further blurring of the line between the cult and exhibition values of the representation of this event which further confused the lines between voyeurism and identification.

This chapter has looked at the entwined issues of the spectacle and the spectator. They are entwined because they are reliant upon the other for their meaning. While the primary interest of this chapter has revolved around the spectacle and the role of the image in the formation of visual spectacle, it has also been important to emphasize the active role of the audience, and as a consumer of the spectacle, the spectator.

The event of September 11 had such a huge impact in part due to its spectacular nature. Without the spectacle of the planes exploding into the buildings, and to a somewhat lesser extent the buildings collapsing, the event would not have escaped from its representation. Having said this, there were other factors of equal importance when talking about the impact of the mediation of this event, namely, the *'unheimliche'* and the abject, and these form the basis of Chapters Three and Four respectively.

By examining Debord's theories on the society of spectacle this chapter has examined the ways in which the spectacle has become one of the defining characteristics of modern Western society. In accepting this fact there is an emphasis placed on the importance of the role of the spectacle in understanding events such as September 11. This kind of event relies upon the spectacle to have the kind of impact that it does. In part this is because of the value that the media place on the spectacular nature of something but it is also to do with the value that much of Western society places on being 'awed' by the spectacle.

When combining Debord's theories, and acknowledging their weaknesses offered in critiques such as Kellner's, and with an understanding of Baudrillard's theories on

simulation, there begins to emerge a picture of the power of the spectacle. In particular, if the importance that McLuhan placed on the way in which a medium can affect the society within which it exists is taken into consideration, then it becomes possible to speak about the ways that spectacle shapes societal understandings of reality. This demonstrates that one of the factors in how the representation of this event shaped what possible societal perceptions of reality were available, is the presence of such a high level of spectacle.



## Chapter Three - The '*Unheimliche*'.

The second of the three forces that come together to form the media-real is Freud's concept of the '*unheimliche*' or the uncanny. The '*unheimliche*' is vital to understanding how the media-real works. It in fact performs a dual function in its propagation. In the first instance, without the '*unheimliche*', as with all of the forces, the coverage of an event cannot escape from its representation. This is because the transgression of boundaries and destabilisation of binaries inherent within the '*unheimliche*', along with the reality confusion that this causes, are partially responsible for the event's escape from the symbolisable. In the second instance the '*unheimliche*' allows for a situation where the destabilisation of the binaries that has allowed the escape of the Event from the symbolisable, now 'feeds back' into the symbolic system causing a multiplication of the sensation of the uncanny. The key themes of the uncanny that will be dealt with in this chapter are; the convergence of the familiar and the strange, the loss of distinction between imagination and reality, the fear of the double, the omnipotence of thought and the blurring of the boundaries between the animate and inanimate.

While the preceding chapter dealt with the idea of spectacle and how this added to the overall effect of the coverage of September 11, this chapter on the uncanny deals with the way in which the event of September 11 inspired in many people a sensation of 'wrongness' and dislocation in addition to the fear and mesmerism commonly discussed. Evidence of this can be found in the eyewitness statements in the early coverage, some of which will be looked at in greater detail later in this chapter.

## *Definitions*

Freud uses the word “*unheimliche*” in his writings on this concept. The Germanic base of this word is “Heimlich”, which means homely or pertaining to the home and is closely related to the word for native. Therefore the literal translation of *unheimliche* is “unhomely” (Freud 1975:220), however its connotative meanings are closer to the English ‘uncanny’ hence the use of this term. *Unheimliche* also has an additional meaning of something hidden that is abruptly brought to light (Freud 1975:220). As a number of theorists, such as Tatar have noted that ‘heimlich’ is a very interesting word and “is so charged with ambiguity that, in one of its shades of meaning, it coincides with its antonym *unheimliche*” (Tatar 1981:169). Although, as stated, the most direct translation of ‘*unheimliche*’ from the German is ‘unhomely’ the English ‘uncanny’ has a similar meaning with many of these similarities only coming to light in the connotations attached to the word. Additionally ‘canny’, to know or to have knowledge or skill, the root word from which ‘uncanny’ is drawn, also has a situation where one of its meanings is close to one of the meanings of its antonym. The word ‘canny’

...was once associated with occult or magical power and in this sense the word coincides perfectly with the primary dictionary definition of ‘uncanny’: ‘partaking of a supernatural character; mysterious, weird, uncomfortably strange or unfamiliar.’ What is canny can thus easily become uncanny. The uncanny, like *das Unheimliche* does not necessarily represent something entirely strange or unfamiliar – *pace* the compilers of the OED – but also something strangely familiar (Tatar 1981:171).

In an interesting twist it is somewhat uncanny or *unheimliche* that the meanings of the two words are actually as close as they are – even though the roots of the words are very different. This sliding and blurring of meaning between the terms themselves is interesting to this thesis because one of the primary characterizations that can be made of the concept of the *unheimliche* is that it is particularly prevalent at the blurring of boundaries and at the destabilisation of binaries.

It is very important at this point to differentiate between Freud's concept of the *unheimliche* and Kristeva's concept of the abject, which will be the focus of Chapter Four. There are similarities between the two concepts. However while Freud's concept can induce fear and uncomfortableness it does not imply the outright rejection, revulsion and repulsion connoted by Kristeva's conception of the abject. The abject is a rejection of something inherent to the subject, or coming from within the individual. However repulsive it might feel part of the reaction to it comes about through the recognition that it is (or has been) a part of the subject (Kristeva 1982). The *unheimliche* or uncanny does not have this prerequisite and although something coming from within an individual can induce an uncanny feeling, the *unheimliche* is not predicated upon this. In many cases that which produces the feeling of uncanniness is something external and sometimes very alien (yet strangely familiar).

*Das Unheimliche* is an important concept because it represents the convergence of a number of psychoanalytic understandings. It ties in to the Lacanian reworking of Freud's theories and relies upon a number of the fundamental elements of Freud's theorisation of the human unconscious. As Mladen Dolar comments in his article "'I Shall be with You on Your Wedding-Night": Lacan and the Uncanny' (1991):

The dimension of the uncanny...is located at the very core of psychoanalysis. It is the dimension where all the concepts of psychoanalysis come together, where its diverse lines of argument form a knot. The uncanny provides a clue to the basic project of psychoanalysis (1991:5).

The uncanny relies upon the anxiety produced by something being 'not quite right' or strange and familiar at the same time. Freud relates it to a number of his key ideas such as the notion of repression, his explanation of the stages of development and his general idea, possibly his most useful contribution to our understanding of

human interiority, that humans are not entirely rational, conscious beings<sup>38</sup>. In some ways his ideas on the unconscious may be summed up by the idea that the individual is not entirely under their own control, however much they might like to pretend that they are and that through the study of the behaviour that occurs in spite of consciousness it may be possible to ameliorate conditions that are caused by the unconscious. As Freud argues:

...our assumption of the existence of the unconscious is *necessary* and *legitimate*, and that we possess manifold *proofs* of the existence of the unconscious. It is necessary because the data of consciousness are exceedingly defective; both in healthy and sick persons mental acts are often in process which can be explained only by presupposing other act, of which consciousness yields no evidence...All these conscious acts remain disconnected and unintelligible if we are determined to hold fast to the claim that every single mental act performed within us must be consciously experienced (1975:99).

In other words Freud is saying that the unconscious must exist because there are so many things that cannot be explained within consciousness. He continues:

...on the other hand, they fall into a demonstrable connection if we interpolate the unconscious acts that we infer...We can go further and in support of an unconscious mental state allege that only a small content is embraced by the consciousness at any given moment, so that the greater part of what we call conscious knowledge must in any case exist for very considerable periods of time in a condition of latency, that is to say unconsciousness, of not being apprehended by the mind (Freud 1975:99).

It is in this place that this exploration of the uncanny begins, from the idea that the individual does not always understand or even control the ways in which they react to certain situations. The uncanny is important here because it frequently occurs in times and places where there may be no apparent reason for it, particularly in terms of the doppelganger, or fear of the double, the individual may be able to convince

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<sup>38</sup> Freud was not actually the first to propose the existence of the unconscious, it was talked about by a number of psychologists and neurologists, such as Boris Sidis and William James during the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. What Freud actually contributed was a systematic way of studying the unconscious and a popularisation of the term.

themselves that there is no reason for them to have that feeling of uncanniness but that doesn't necessarily make the feeling go away.

One of the earliest criticisms of Freud came from within his own circle of followers. Karen Horney eventually broke with Freud after critiquing his concept of 'penis envy' which he responded to by refusing to enter into any dialogue with her on the subject (Boeree 2006). She had broken one of the cardinal rules of the inner circle, she had questioned one of Freud's key assertions. As Boeree explains: "First she criticised Freud's idea of penis envy...She suggested that what may appear to be signs of penis envy is really a justified envy of men's power in the world" (Boeree 2006:7). In fact she went further than this and proposed the concept of 'womb envy' where, as Boeree describes:

...some men... [may] feel envious of a woman's ability to bear children. Perhaps the degree to which men are driven to succeed, and to have their names live on after them, is in compensation for their ability to more directly extend themselves into the future by means of carrying, bearing and nurturing their children! (Boeree 2006:7).

It is impossible to deny that there are many problems with psychoanalysis and in particular with Freud's work itself. Freud has been castigated by many theorists over the last century and particularly by feminist theorists, whose key criticism is the phallogentrism of his theories, sometimes to the exclusion of any other justification for a particular behavioural trait. Further criticism has been made of his sexist and misogynist treatment of the female gender in general and for possible breaches of both clinical and academic practices in the ways in which he chose the evidence to fit his theories. Both Betty Friedan (1963) and Kate Millet (1970), some of the early second wave feminist writers, dismissed Freud for the way that he theorised women and in particular for his concept of 'penis envy'.

Much of what Freud believed to be biological, instinctual, and changeless has been shown by modern research to be a result of specific cultural causes. Much of what Freud described as characteristic of universal human nature was merely

characteristic of certain middle-class European men and women at the end of the nineteenth century...His attempt to translate all psychological phenomena into sexual terms, and to see all problems of adult personality as the effect of childhood sexual fixations also stemmed, in part, from his own background in medicine, and from the approach to causation implicit in the scientific thought of his time (Friedan 1963).

Friedan's criticism was a reasonably bold assertion at a time where Freud's theories were being treated with a great deal of literal acceptance.

Other psychological theorists, such as Eyesenck (2004), point to the irregularities in Freud's scientific methods and view all of his work with a great deal of scepticism. Eyesenck argues: "Nevertheless, over eighty years after the original publication of Freudian theories, there is still no sign that they can be supported by adequate experimental evidence, or by clinical studies, statistical investigations or observational methods" (2004:170).

While many of the above criticisms are valid to some degree they disregard the usefulness of many of the contributions of psychoanalysis. As a critical tool used within cultural theory for the analysis of sociological and psychological phenomena psychoanalytic concepts can provide illumination and depth. It is important to reiterate at this juncture that the methodology being used within this thesis is a 'fractured lens' model (also known as 'Foucault's toolbox) where it is not seen as necessary to take on board the entirety of any theory or avenue of investigation. Instead what has been used within this thesis are a number of concepts taken from very different theorists and belonging to a number of different schools of thought. In so doing this thesis takes the position that in the examination of complex social occurrences, more than a single 'lens' or way of thinking can provide the most thorough analysis.

So, while a number of key concepts have been appropriated from within the 'field' of psychoanalysis, this is not intended, nor should it be read as, an endorsement of the

whole of that field or school of thought. In general terms the idea of the unconscious is being used as is the idea of the uncanny. In addition there are a number of psychoanalytic concepts taken from Lacan, and discussed elsewhere in this thesis, that are being used. The concepts, in particular, of the Oedipal complex and the general Freudian attempt to tie every psychological occurrence to some sexual root cause, and are problematic and have been deliberately excluded from the scope of this thesis.

The Lacanian reworking of psychoanalysis included the concept of the *unheimliche*, though unlike English there was no French term that encapsulated its meaning. Instead, as Dolar explains, Lacan invented his own term *extimite*, a concept formed from the prefix 'ex' from the French for exterior with the root *intimité* from the French for intimacy (Dolar 1991). This neologism deliberately blurs the lines between the classic binaries, such as essence/appearance, interior/exterior, mind/body and subject/object. By doing so it points to their artificiality and arbitrary nature and how problematic this can be in terms of psychoanalytic analysis. What is of particular interest to this thesis about this concept is that the *extimite* can also be described as being "simultaneously the intimate kernel and the foreign body" (Dolar 1991:6). By residing in this paradoxical realm of belonging to both the interior and the exterior, to both the familiar and the strange, the *extimite* and hence both the *unheimliche* and the uncanny, become:

...a simple Lacanian common denominator which is the irruption of the real into "homely", commonly accepted reality. We can speak of something that shatters well-known divisions and which cannot be situated within them (Dolar 1991:6).

This irruption of the real, and the subsequent shattering of the 'homely' reality is a part of the situation being explored in this thesis in relation to the mediation of the September 11 attacks. The media-real arises at this juncture as the real erupts spectacularly through a socially constructed reality that is both familiar and strange, it comes from both the exterior and interior and it provokes a reaction that is

equally blurred between fear, revulsion and mesmerism. This final blurring will be dealt with in the following chapter – the abject.

Many of the elements that make up this notion of the uncanny are present in the media coverage of September 11. The most useful constituent parts of the uncanny, in terms of this research, are: the idea of something being both familiar and strange at the same time, the *unheimlichkeit* that can be brought about through repetition, the coincidence of wish and fulfilment, the confusion of judgement between reality and the imaginary, the compulsion to repeat overriding the pleasure principle as well as the uncanniness of the double and the uncanniness of the inanimate becoming animate.

### ***Freud's two types of the uncanny***

Freud describes two different bases for the formation of uncanniness. The first he sees as occurring in actual existence where more primitive beliefs that have been surmounted come back to haunt the individual because an event makes the individual call into doubt whether the older belief was actually true “...but we do not feel quite sure of our new beliefs, and the old ones still exist within us ready to seize upon any confirmation” (Freud 1975:247). Belief in vampires and werewolves has been supplanted by a belief in the rational explainable, the folklore replaced by scientific objectivity and impassivity. However when walking along a dark country road late at night and something moves in the bushes nearby, although the individual may tell themselves that it is just a wallaby or a bush turkey, that that shadow moving was a kangaroo, but a part of their brain might still whisper ‘but what if...’.

There is a problem here with Freud’s use of the descriptor ‘primitive’ when he is talking about older beliefs that have been supplanted by newer ones. Thurschwell comments that; “Freud’s ideas about anthropology are now viewed as based on

mistaken assumptions about 'primitive' peoples and human prehistory" (2000:110). However Thurschwell goes on to make the point that:

...psychoanalysis works primarily to dispute the idea that there are 'naturally' degenerate people, races or classes; it breaks down the idea that the pathological is immoral, seeing the pathological as in continuum with the complex, passionate but unquestionable normal, state of human emotional life (2000:9).

What needs to be kept in mind when dealing with Freud's use of the term primitive is that for the time in which he was writing his usage was hardly pejorative, though by the standards of today it certainly seems that way.

The second form of uncanny comes about when; "...an uncanny experience occurs...[where] infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression..." (Freud 1975:249). This aspect of the uncanny is obviously closely related to many of Freud's theories on repression and how repression tends to re-emerge in later life (1975). This kind of uncanniness is where, rather than imagination taking over, feelings do. The individual might react to a stimuli in an inappropriate way or show a more intense fear reaction to something than what they normally might because it is related to something buried in their unconscious. These different bases for the formation of the *unheimliche* can either occur individually or in some cases together.

Freud also draws a distinction between the uncanny that occurs in actual existence and the uncanny that is represented in fictional writing and stories.

We have noticed one point which may help us to resolve these uncertainties: nearly all of the instances that contradict our hypothesis are taken from the realm of fiction, of imaginative writing. This suggests that we should differentiate between the uncanny that we actually experience and the uncanny that we merely picture or read about (Freud 1975:247).

Freud claims that in the latter case there is an element of premeditation whereas the uncanny in the real world is unanticipated. For the most part, he claims that fairy tales and biblical stories are not uncanny, even though they might contain themes that may be uncanny in another setting. Freud believes that this is because the audience are accustomed to reading these tales as just that, *tales* or make believe. However when the writer is drawing the audience into a world, which could be considered to be real, or is close to the real, the uncanny stands out. In many ways the closer to the 'real world' that the depiction is, without being entirely factual, the greater the sense of the *unheimliche*. Freud discusses the way in which:

The imaginative writer has the licence among many others, that he can select his world of representation so that it either coincides with the realities we are familiar with or departs from them in what particulars he pleases...In fairy tales, for instance, the world of reality is left behind from the very start, and the animistic system of beliefs frankly adopted. Wish fulfilments, secret powers, omnipotence of thoughts, animation of inanimate objects...can exert no uncanny influence here...that feeling cannot arise unless there is a conflict of judgement as to whether things which have been 'surmounted' and are regarded as incredible may not, after all be possible...(1975:250).

He contrasts this with the choice of a setting;

...less imaginary than the world of fairy tales...The situation is altered as soon as the writer pretends to move into the world of common reality. In this case he accepts as well all the conditions operating to produce uncanny feelings in real life; and everything that would have an uncanny effect in reality has it in his story (Freud 1975:250).

It should be noted however that there are some significant problems with this division in the way that Freud originally formulates it. Later in the same essay he moderates his views on this issue, and this will be returned to later in the chapter. Many fictional tales, even those of a fantastical nature, can be considered to fit within the mould of the uncanny, some of the most famous films, particularly of the

horror/thriller genre, are so scary precisely because they fit within the parameters of the *unheimliche*. They are familiar yet strange, they deal with issues that make the spectator feel a little uneasy, a little unsettled. Much that appears within the horror genre, particularly the area of the genre that is not recognised as 'being close to real life' can be considered to be uncanny. In particular the idea of the double or the 'doppelganger' is a theme returned to again and again in horror films. As Schneider outlines in his article 'Psychoanalysis in/and/of the Horror Film' there are many instances of the use of the uncanny 'double':

One filmmaker fond of exploiting the uncanny potential of twins or, more precisely, of blurring the lines between twins and schizophrenics is Brian De Palma {Sisters [1973], Raising Cain [1992]}. In David Cronenberg's *Dead Ringers* (1998), Jeremy Irons plays identical twin gynecologists whose sanity collapses as their identities merge. And who can forget the 1971 Hammer horror film *Twins of Evil*, featuring Playboy magazine's first identical twin centrefolds, Mary and Madeleine Collinson (2004:109).

On some levels it is debateable as to how much 'reality' fairy tales actually leave behind. If they bore no resemblance to the world of perceptions how could they be used to impart morals and messages that are relate-able to everyday lives? If there were no echoes of the 'real world' to be found in these folk tales, if the characters were not so very life like in many ways, then it seems unlikely that the audience could draw any kind of identification with such characters making it impossible for the tales themselves to be useful for teaching anything about the world, the individual's place in it, or ways of behaving towards others.

One of the most uncanny stories that this author has ever read, a short story by Stephen King about zombies<sup>39</sup>, was uncanny and fear provoking despite the fact that the plot and story held little resemblance to real life. The setting of the tale, a small fishing village on Gennesault island off the coast of Maine (USA), bore little

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<sup>39</sup> The story was called 'Home Delivery' and it appears in *Nightmares and Dreamscapes* (1993) a collection of short stories by horror author Stephen King.

resemblance to the city life being led at that time, the protagonist, a fisherman's wife with no outside occupation, again bore no relationship to a busy city work life. Yet the story produced an intense fear response, and the memory endured across the years as something not quite right, a 'what if?' tale that despite all of the differences, and the scientific improbability that a meteorite contaminated rain could cause all of the corpses in the village to rise up to terrorise the living. It fits with the uncanny though because it was familiar and strange at the same time. Although the setting and the characters were completely outside the lived experience of this audience member the way their feelings were described was not. A simple exercise of putting yourself in their shoes allowed that identification to become stronger. It also fits with the idea of old beliefs, in some ways childish beliefs that have been supplanted with rational and scientific explanation returning and forcing a re-examination of whether it is possible after all. This can also be seen as being related to conceptions of what is true and/or real. One of the ways in which the familiar can be judged is in how closely it aligns with the individual's perception of what is true or what is real, in many ways this provides the limits to what the individual is prepared to believe is possible to occur in a given situation.

Additionally stories that can be found in the genres that are farthest away from day to day realities can also be considered to be uncanny. Examples abound within both the fantasy and sci-fi genres. The *Alien* series can be seen as an example of this. Geiger's *Alien* is uncanny precisely because of the degree of alien-ness, there is a darkness, and an uncomfortableness, a feeling of wrongness that is provoked by many scenes within the series and none of these scenes bear a significant resemblance to ordinary reality. What they do manage to do however is to use scenes such as the one where the crew all sit down to dinner together with the supposed recovery of their crewmate (a familiar scene even if somewhat dislocated by being on board a spaceship) what happens next as the alien erupts from the chest of the recently ill crewmate completely dislodges the 'homeliness' of the scene. It is this wrenching of the scene from the 'homely' to the 'unhomely' that provides for the uncanniness of the scene and the film more generally.

Žižek's analysis of the *Alien* film is particularly noteworthy. He uses Lacan's idea of the lamella<sup>40</sup> to analyse the film, beginning with the fact that the lamella is very similar in some ways to the 'facehugger' phase of the Alien lifecycle.

Lacan's description [of the lamella] not only reminds one of the nightmare creatures in horror movies; more specifically, it can be read...as describing a movie shot more than a decade after he wrote those words, Ridley Scott's *Alien*. The monstrous "alien" in the film so closely resembles Lacan's lamella that it cannot but evoke the impression that Lacan somehow saw the film before it was even made. Everything Lacan talks about is there: the monster appears indestructible; if one cuts it into pieces, it merely multiplies; it is something extra-flat that all of a sudden flies off and envelops your face; with infinite plasticity, it can morph itself into a multitude of shapes...(Žižek 2007).

Here, even in the initial reading there is something familiar, something known but not known in terms of the resemblance of the Alien to the lamella. In this article Žižek argues that one of the most uncanny aspects of the Alien film is actually the uncanny excess of life in the Alien, it just won't die. This death drive, as coined by Freud in his essay 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' was first discussed as an: "opposition between the ego or death instincts and the sexual or life instincts" (1987: 316). As Žižek comments, the death drive can be understood as:

...an "undead" urge which persist beyond the (biological) cycle of life and death, of generation and corruption. This is why Freud equates death drive with the so-called "compulsion-to-repeat," an uncanny urge to repeat painful past experiences which seems to outgrow the natural limitations of the organism affected by it and to insist

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<sup>40</sup> "The lamella is something extra-flat, which moves like the amoeba...And as it is something...that is related to what the sexed being loses in sexuality, it is, like the amoeba in relation to sexed beings, immortal - because it survives any division, and scissiparous intervention. And it can turn around...But suppose it comes and envelopes your face while you are quietly asleep... I can't see how we would not join battle with a being capable of these properties. But it would not be a very convenient battle. This lamella, this organ, whose characteristic is not to exist, but which is nevertheless an organ...is the libido. It is the libido, qua pure life instinct, that is to say, immortal life, irrepressible life, life that has need of no organ, simplified, indestructible life. It is precisely what is subtracted from the living being by virtue of the fact that it is subject to the cycle of sexed reproduction" (Lacan, 1978: 196-197).

even beyond the organism's death - again, like the living dead in a horror film who just go on (Žižek 2007).

One of the obvious implications for the analysis of the September 11 coverage is the application of this uncanny urge to repeat the repetition of the moment of impact. This is a point that will be returned to later in this chapter but it is important to note here Žižek's use of the death drive in relation to horror film and in the urge to repeat a painful experience even past the limitations of the organism. This repetition past the point of pleasure, past even the limits of the organism is the level of repetition referenced by the coverage of the September 11 attacks in a painful, though still desiring way.

Despite this fact many films and other cultural products that are drawing parallels with real life can be very uncanny and provoke significant levels of fear. Examples of films in particular are easy to find, *The Blair Witch Project* was a film that provoked a great deal of uncomfortableness and unheimlichkeit for its audience and part of this was prompted by its reliance on blurring the boundaries between what was 'real' and what was staged. By creating a marketing campaign around whether the film itself had been 'discovered' in a backpack belonging to missing students or whether it was just another horror film, what was exterior to the film itself became a part of the film, hence destabilising the boundaries of interior/exterior. Rickels comments on this process:

Both films [*The Sixth Sense* and *Blair Witch Project*], though certainly in different ways, also exceeded the frame of the single screening (as contained in, as containing, a body of work) by networking with outer-corpus experiences of media manipulation and the two-timing of surprise. This vaster frame—which embraces the meantime—comes out of the new interactive media, and contains in advance side effects or symptoms that once developed all down the receiving line of films like *Psycho*, *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), and *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), which were precisely in themselves, left to themselves, uncontainable (2002).

Its visual style played into this as did every part of the film's production. The use of the handheld camera, the grainy disjointed nature of the cinematography, the use of semi-professional actors who were themselves manipulated through the use of direction techniques aimed at destabilising them (and creating more empathy for the roles they were playing by taking them out into the woods camping and then scaring them and depriving them of sleep), led to a very edgy, uncanny piece of cinema. In this case its *unheimliche* qualities were entirely reliant on the blurring of the boundaries between the real and the fictional. Wells notes that:

...this film is basically a return to a method approach to acting and film-making, where there is a commitment to as realistic portrayal of emotions and events as possible. The heightened naturalism of The Blair Witch Project coherently underpins the 'instability' of the supernatural environment. Those who start out in control soon become victims of events which cannot be circumscribed back within the safe parameters of known facts. The fundamental and primal fear experienced by the actors/characters is then re-inscribed as the way in which the film-makers can also prevent the audience from returning to the safe parameters of generic expectation. Again, the web site, with its moving palette of additional footage, interviews and documents reinforces this, and draws upon the known 'possessiveness' of the net-freaks and genre fans who serve to believe in, perpetuate and extend the mythology (2000:110).

This quote illustrates some of the key qualities about this film that make it so uncanny. The most major element is this idea of being familiar and strange at the same time as well as the blurring of reality and fiction. A further point, one that will be pursued in Chapter Five, is the idea of meeting or not meeting generic expectations.

What is common to both of the 'types' of the uncanny that have been discussed is that uncanniness particularly arises when the boundaries between categories are blurred or become nonexistent. This is the key to the concept of the *unheimliche* more generally; it always arises at the juncture where the classification of things is threatened or challenged or becomes more or less than what it was. This blurring of

the boundaries, particularly of binary oppositions, can be seen to be more fluid in the current era than what it has been before. The postmodern era can be categorised as a period of pastiche and bricolage and these categorisations draw attention to the hybridisation and shifting of boundaries common within Western culture of this time. It is also in this area that the uncanny is at its most similar to the abject, which is the subject of the following chapter. This idea of the blurring of boundaries is also an idea that will be further pursued in the following chapter.

### ***The Uncanny Valley***

In relation to the uncanniness of the blurring of boundaries a concept proposed by Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori is relevant here. 'Bukimi no Tani Genshó' or the 'uncanny valley of eeriness' is a term applied to the 'valley' in a graph of the way that people react to lifelike robots and robotic implements. As Chaminade et al. explain:

When Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori investigated robots' social competence (Mori, 1970), he proposed that as a robot is made more humanlike in its appearance and motion, an observer's emotional response would not linearly increase but would fall into a local minimum when the robot closely but imperfectly reproduces a human being, hence the name 'uncanny valley of eeriness' (2007:206).

At first the more human a machine looks the more empathy a person will have for it up until a certain point. Then there is a steep valley in the graph where the 'robot' has become too lifelike yet not lifelike enough and this inspires the feeling of uncanniness. After this as a robot continues to become more lifelike it is proposed that the feelings of uncanniness recede (Mori 1970). This concept is useful because it shows, albeit in a 'pseudo-scientific' manner, how familiarity yet strangeness bring about an innate fear reaction. (See Figure 3)

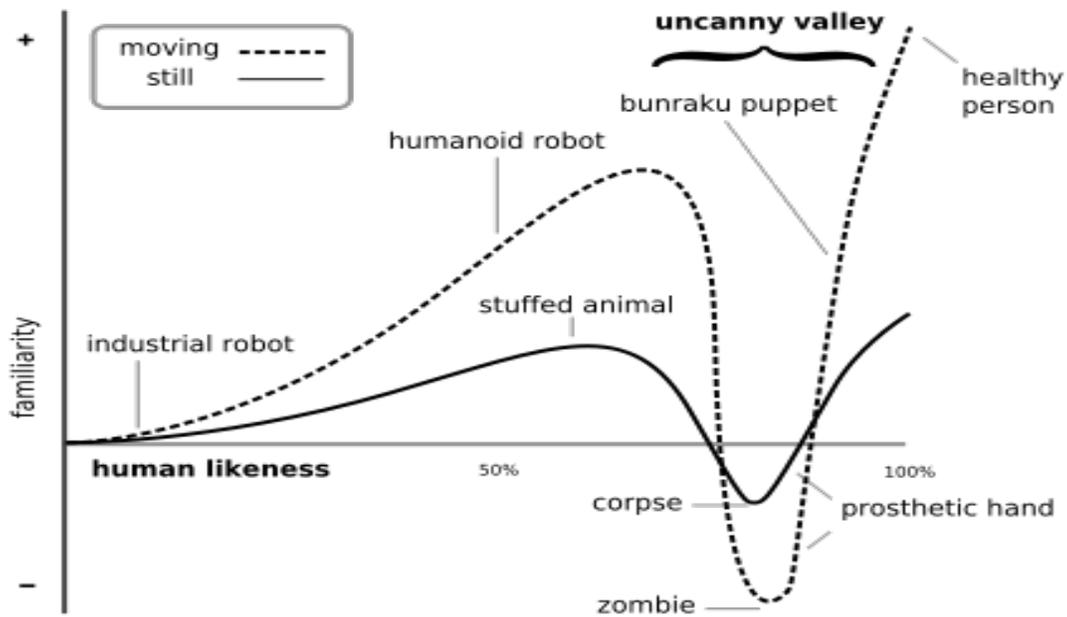


Figure 3.

Since the original conceptualisation of this idea in the 1970's there has been considerable interest within the robotics world on this theory. A number of research projects have been done into finding whether the correlation is provable, most of these experiments have been inconclusive. Part of the problem is that it is not a straight forward process whereby when x sees y the resultant feeling is z. Each human subject reacts at the least slightly differently to the same stimuli and a similar situation occurs with the uncanny valley. What might produce extreme uncanniness in one person does nothing to another. However some recent experiments have suggested that there is some correlation between anthropomorphism (or the closer to human an image looks while not being human) and negative thoughts/feelings towards the image. Chaminade et al elaborate:

Using a biological motion classification task, we found that the tendency to perceive a simple running motion as natural is modulated by the appearance of the character used to render the motion. Anthropomorphism of artificial agents decreases the tendency to report their motion as biological, and an MRI investigation found that the response bias towards 'biological' is correlated with an increase of activity in

regions involved in mentalizing and a decrease of activity in regions belonging to the mirror system (2007:215).

In other research into the same phenomenon Chaminade & Saygin further refined their experimentation. As Giles describes it:

To investigate how the effect works, Thierry Chaminade and Ayse Saygin of University College London scanned the brains of subjects being shown videos of a lifelike robot picking up a cup, as well as the same movement performed by a less realistic robot and a person. The results reveal there is a network of neurons in the parietal cortex that was especially active in the case of the lifelike robot, Chaminade says. This area of the brain is known to contain "mirror neurons", which are active when someone imagines performing an action they are observing. While watching all three videos, people imagine picking up the cup themselves.

In other words the experiment revealed that specific parts of the brain were particularly active with an increase in 'lifelike-ness' of the robot. Giles go on to explain that:

...the extra mirror neuron activity when viewing the lifelike robot might be due to the way it moves, which jars with its appearance. This "breach of expectation" could trigger extra brain activity and produce the uncanny feelings. The response may stem from an ability to identify - and avoid - people suffering from an infectious disease. Very lifelike robots seem almost human but, like people with a visible disease, aspects of their appearance jar (Giles 2007).

What this research shows is that there is some level of correlation of the uncanny valley in terms of human reactions to anthropomorphism where machines (in this case) blur the lines between what is and is not human.

Not all research has shown this correlation. Ishiguro and Bartneck, also researchers in the robotics field, came to the conclusion that the 'uncanny valley' was too simplistic a model of human reactions to anthropomorphism:

The results of this study cannot confirm Mori's hypothesis of the Uncanny Valley. The robots' movements and their level of anthropomorphism may be complex phenomena that cannot be reduced to two factors. Movement contains social meanings that may have direct influence on the likeability of a robot. The robot's level of anthropomorphism does not only depend on its appearance but also on its behavior...Again, Mori's hypothesis appears to be too simplistic...Instead, its popularity may be based on the explanatory escape route it offers (Bartneck et al 2009).

What is noteworthy about this research is that it approached the theory with a view to problematising the ways that humans react with lifelike robots. It did not look at just one kind of action but looked at a range of different interactions. They measured likability on a scale and asked participants to comment on the likability of humans or robots in various situations. One factor noted by the researchers was that the participants may well have been using different scales for the subjects that they believed to be robots (Bartneck et al 2009). The conclusion to their research, that Mori's hypothesis was too simplistic, did not however deny the fact that there were some correlations with different parts of the idea and that at base there were differences in the ways human interacted with robots as they became anthropomorphic.

The advent of new mediums of communication has led to the blurring of many categories and what occurred with the mediation of the September 11 attacks gives evidence to this. The factual nature of the news genre and the conventions that go with it are one of the areas being increasingly challenged in recent times. Deuze in his book *Mediawork* (2007) makes the claim that: "Journalism as it is, is coming to an end...commercialisation and cross-media mergers have gradually eroded the distinct professional identities of newsrooms and their publications" (2007:141). People are also more aware of the degree of construction that goes into the production of the 'news' and the portrayal of public events. Spigel, in her article 'Entertainment Wars: Television Culture after 9/11' argues that:

Given the political divisions that have resurfaced since 2001, it seems likely that the grand narratives of national unity that sprang up after 9/11 were for many people more performative than sincere. In other words many viewers really did know that all the newfound patriotism was really just a public performance staged for the cameras (2007:640).

In the immediate aftermath of the coverage of September 11 there was a curious mixing of facts and fictions as the US tried to exhort its population to return to normalcy. As Spigel elaborates:

In the week following 9/11, television's transition back to normal consumer entertainment was enacted mainly through recourse to historical pedagogy that ran through a number of television genres, from news to documentaries to day time talk shows to prime-time drama...They mixed...analogies to historical events with allusions to the history of popular culture, recalling scenes from disaster film blockbusters, science fiction movies, and war films and even referencing previous media events (2007:628).

This mixing of genres and referencing of the real with the imaginary was a way of drawing the population back to the familiar paths of popular culture prior to the event occurring. They were a way of showing that things that were outside of the ordinary had happened before, they have been talked about, they have been imagined and they have been witnessed before. In essence 'reality still exists'. In many ways what is being described here, besides being a form of mass comforting, was the beginning of the process of repairing the perception of reality that had been fragmented by the attack. This is a theme that will be returned to in Chapter Five.

In his writing on this issue of the uncanny, or the differences between the experienced *unheimliche* and the *unheimliche* of fiction Freud tends to, somewhat tentatively, tie the fictional form of the uncanny to the form of the uncanny he terms as the one where primitive beliefs have been supplanted by a more rational 'world-view' while he ties the 'real-life' form to repression of infantile feelings. However the most important part of this argument is that he believes that the uncanny can occur

within literature of a fictional nature but that it is at its most uncanny when that literature depicts a reality close to the audiences perceptions of their own. He further differentiates these points by bringing into the account the notion of 'reality-testing' and that this is where the difference truly lies.

The uncanny as it is depicted in fiction...is a more fertile province than the uncanny in real life...the realm of phantasy depends for its effect on the fact that its content is not submitted to reality-testing. The somewhat paradoxical result is that *in the first place a great deal that is not uncanny in fiction would be so if it happened in real life; and in the second place there are many more means of creating uncanny effects in fiction than there are in real life* (Freud: 1975:249).

What Freud is talking about here is the idea that fictional representations of the uncanny do not feel as 'uncanny' simply because they are not 'reality-tested', in other words that they are accepted to be fictional so therefore little attempt is made to see how realistic they are therefore leaving them in the realm of 'phantasy' where they only retain mild uncanny effects.

In relation to September 11 many people, at first, had serious difficulty in deciphering whether or not the events being depicted on their television screens belonged to a fictional world or not. In part this is due to the fact that:

The boundaries between journalism and other forms of public communication...are vanishing, the internet makes all other types of newsmedia rather obsolete...commercialisation and cross-media mergers have gradually eroded the distinct professional identities of newsrooms and their publications (Deuze 2007:141).

The generic conventions of the news, alongside the lack of advertising and other more usual interruptions to the televisual flow, eventually allowed people to grasp the fact that what they were witnessing was not fictional. It was a case of 'reality confusion, an issue that will be looked at more closely later in this chapter.

As is argued in the section on the spectator in the previous chapter, there was a level of identification with the people caught up in this eruption of the real. There was an understanding that there was no significant gap in circumstance, they were modern 'Western' professional people caught up in an horrific spectacular event. The audience had witnessed its unfolding too, live on screen, the spectator also had been mesmerised by the event but even more so the spectator had been mesmerised by the technological capture of the event, its reproduction and that *this* event had somehow escaped its representation. As Baudrillard sums up: "The speeches and commentaries made since September 11 betray a gigantic post-traumatic abreaction both to the event itself and to the fascination that it exerts" (2002a:2). While in reasonably close alignment with Baudrillard's position on the event of September 11, there are also some significant differences. While Baudrillard makes a number of useful points in regards to this event his work does not investigate the impact that the representation of this event had on the availability of potential meanings and the way that this intersected with the possible societally shared perceptions of reality.

### ***Key Themes of the Uncanny***

#### **Convergence of the familiar and the strange**

One of Freud's key themes in terms of the uncanny is the idea of something being both familiar and strange at the same time. This often provokes a fear response in people because of the confusion and convergence of that which is known and unknown. It also links in with the idea of the uncanny occurring with a kind of reality confusion. A familiar object in an unfamiliar setting can provoke this kind of response because it is something that was once predictable but in this new environment has become unpredictable and hence it creates confusion about the reality to which it belongs because in its predictable state it belonged to the reality that was known and familiar but now it has taken on characteristics that divorce it

from that ordinary reality and place it into the category of the unknown. Freud comments on this:

So, for instance, when, caught in a mist perhaps, one has lost one's way in a mountain forest, every attempt to find the marked or familiar path may bring one back again and again to one and the same spot, which one can identify by some particular landmark. Or one may wander about in a dark, strange room, looking for the door or the electric switch, and collide time after time with the same piece of furniture (1975:237).

This is directly relevant to the media coverage of September 11 because of the familiarity of planes and the unfamiliarity of them being used as weapons of mass destruction. Although, as stated previously, there are numerous films where planes explode or fly into buildings or crash into the ground, this was the first time that most of the audience had witnessed 'live' their use as both a weapon and as a tool of propaganda.. One of the conceptualisations was of Terrorism as a form of communication and the attacks of September 11 are certainly a form of communication. The timing of the planes and their explosions with the scheduling and production of news combined with the location of the attacks and with the spectacular nature of the attacks themselves appears to leave little doubt that it was intended by the perpetrators to harness maximum publicity and media coverage<sup>41</sup> – alongside the terror simply caused by the preparedness to use the lives of almost 3000 people, and the lives of the direct perpetrators themselves, to garner support for their cause. As Baudrillard commented, "The media are a part of the event, they are a part of the terror; in one way or another they play along" (2002b:5).

Repetition can play an important role in this convergence of the strange and familiar. Repetition was an important issue in terms of the media coverage of

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<sup>41</sup> "Citing 9/11 as the most dramatic and sophisticated example of this strategy, Nacos argues that "al-Qa'ida timed the attacks in order to achieve maximum television coverage, most particularly through presentations on the evening news bulletins" (Cited in Lewis 2005:25).

September 11. What makes repetition important, in terms of the concept of the uncanny, is described by Freud in the following passage:

As I was walking...through the deserted streets of a provincial town in Italy which was unknown to me, I found myself in a quarter of whose character I could not long remain in doubt. Nothing but painted women were to be seen at the windows of the small houses, and I hastened to leave the narrow street at the next turning. But after having wandered about for a time without enquiring my way, I suddenly found myself back in the same street, where my presence was now beginning to excite attention. I hurried away once more, only to arrive by another *detour* at the same place yet a third time. Now, however, a feeling overcame me which I can only describe as uncanny (1975:237).

This quote illustrates the point that the familiar itself can become frightening and also that repetition in and of itself can also produce the feeling of uncanniness. Additionally Freud makes the point that there is often an involuntary compulsion to repeat that can override the pleasure principle<sup>42</sup>. He particularly relates this to his work with neurotic patients but also sees this tendency in 'normal' society. It is important to note that this last point is a problematic one. Freud has been critiqued by some theorists such as Wallace for extrapolating to the whole of society circumstances and conditions witnessed in his patients (and himself): "In generalizing from data uncovered in himself and a few patients to the entire human race..." (Wallace 2008:25). Despite this problem the concept is still useful because of its utility to theorising how repetition can also increase the sensation of uncanniness.

This repetition is particularly obvious in the footage from the WTC where the planes were shown flying into the buildings on a high rotation of repetitions per hour. As

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<sup>42</sup> "The sovereign tendency obeyed by these primary processes is easy of recognition; it is called the pleasure-pain...principle, or more shortly the pleasure-principle. These processes strive towards gaining pleasure; from any operation which might arouse unpleasantness ('pain') mental activity draws back (repression). Our nocturnal dream, our waking tendency to shut out painful impressions, are remnants of the supremacy of this principle and proofs of its power" (Freud 1971:15).

Smith, in his article 'Reframing Fantasy: September 11 and the Global Audience' (2005) describes:

In terms of repetition compulsion the connection between Freud's theory and the media representation of September 11 is clear. One of the lasting images of the events of September 11 is the image of the second plane impacting on the second tower, replayed again and again through out the day and over the days which followed, in a global attempt to admit its possibility and to come to terms with the act (2005:67).

The repetition of the moment of impact kept many in the audience spellbound, it was the part of the coverage that felt the most disconnected from reality, the most dreamlike in many ways as the slow motion replay of the instant of impact was repeated *ad nauseum*. This captured moment is instantly recognisable for many billions of people around the world because of this fascination with repeating the event. The mesmerisation of the footage was such that eventually a high level committee of television station heads and government figures decided to reduce the level of the airing of the moment of impact for a number of days as adults became concerned for the wellbeing of children<sup>43</sup>. Children being considered to be the most susceptible to some kind of media effect when exposed to hundreds of repetitions of the moment of impact.

The entire event felt so overwhelming to many people that this repetition became one of the ways of affirming that the event had actually taken place, that it wasn't just some form of mass hallucination. At the same time this constant repetition also diluted the spectacle, it became familiar, it had been seen before. This dilution of the event through repetition is a point that will be returned to in Chapter Five when discussing the technical characteristics of the coverage.

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<sup>43</sup> "After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, complaints about replaying graphic images of the planes striking the World Trade Center and the towers collapsing led the networks to reconsider their coverage. ABC imposed a ban on replaying the images and instead used still photos, and other networks limited the use of the video footage" (Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) (2003)).

## **Loss of distinction between imagination and reality**

An integral part of Freud's conception of the uncanny is what he sees as the confusion or conflict of judgement about reality: "...an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes." (1975:244). He particularly relates this to his second form of the uncanny where infantile feelings are repressed only to return at a later stage of life. This blurring of the boundaries between the real and the imaginary causes a fear reaction because the socially constructed perception of reality itself is thrown into question and with it the entire belief system that it encapsulates. Freud also relates this to the distinction, mentioned previously, that he draws between the uncanny in actual experience and the uncanny in fiction. This is because the uncanny is most likely to occur in fiction where the writer is drawing their audience into a world that is deliberately close to reality, in effect asking the reader to suspend their disbelief. At these times a blurring of the boundaries between fact and fiction occurs and can result in reality confusion, which heightens the sense of the uncanny.

People frequently talked about this reality confusion in the days following the events of September 11. Many spectators were at first 'reality challenged' by the coverage and some even read the footage as being part of a Hollywood disaster film. As King explains:

The main points that led to the evocation of movie images in relation to the attacks on the World Trade Center are quite straight forward...The fireball that erupted when the second tower was hit was reminiscent of the ubiquitous fireball-explosion images of recent and contemporary Hollywood action-disaster movies...The explosive collapse or severe damage of skyscrapers has featured in numerous Hollywood extravaganzas...Images of the huge dust cloud that followed the collapse

of the World Trade Center towers had also been foreshadowed in varying ways...Some of those who told their stories afterwards likened the experience of trying to escape the dust and debris specifically to being inside a movie scenario (King 2005:48).

Bill Schaffer, in his article 'Just Like a Movie: September 11 And The Terror Of Moving Images' (2001) makes the point that:

At 'ground zero', amongst the smoke and ruins, this intimate connection between the moving image and contemporary forms of terror would be felt as an effect of uncanny resemblance. Survivors and witnesses repeatedly declared that 'it was like being in a movie'. The question of the moving image's fidelity to the real did not arise. To the contrary, images now provided the only standard against which to gauge the unbelievable reality of lived experience (2001).

What Schaffer is commenting on here is the way in which the people automatically compared the event to what they had seen in movies, for many people it was the only comparison available. Reactions of shock and disbelief were commonly expressed with the unreality of the Hollywood film eventually becoming something of an anchor.

The mediation of the September 11 attacks was intensely uncanny because what we were looking at here was the mediation of something that was 'real' that was so spectacular, the violence was so enormous that it broached the generic boundary between the fictional and the factual. As novelist Norman Mailer commented in the aftermath of September 11:

...as if part of the Devil's acumen was to bring it off, exactly as if we were watching the same action movie we had been looking at for years. That may be the core of the immense impact 9/11 had on America. Our movies came off the screen and chased us down the canyons of the city (Mailer 2003:111).

Many people within Western culture are used to seeing explosions, there are many films that show aircraft crashing into buildings or fields with spectacular special effects and explosions but this was an event that wasn't scripted in the same way. In many ways there are a number of similarities between the mediation of September 11 and a blockbuster disaster or action film. One of the key differences is the loss of life and the unpredictable nature of the 'real' version. However they were similar enough that in many instances people did not recognise the difference between the mediation of the attacks and a fictional representation. As King put it:

Even while it was still unfolding, the attack on the World Trade Center of 11 September 2001 was described on numerous occasions as like something 'from a movie'. The tone used by commentators at the time and later in the day was usually one that sought to capture the extraordinary and 'unbelievable' nature of the scenes they were witnessing...The images were, in some respects, uncannily similar to those offered by a number of Hollywood blockbusters produced in the previous decade (2005:47).

It wasn't just people after the event who were comparing it to a movie. Some of the eyewitnesses caught up in the attacks described it in those terms as well. Lewis reported that: "Innumerable witnesses reported...that watching the collapse of the towers was like watching a movie..."(2005:112). During the coverage one of the BBC anchors who was interviewing a counterterrorism expert (Mike Blustone) commented: "As you sit here Mike, watching a scene like that, which we thought only Hollywood special effects people could dream up..." (BBC 11/09/2001). What all of these comments point to is the fact that for many people September 11 represented a blurring of the lines of fact and fiction and this produced, in varying degrees, a kind of reality confusion.

This is one of the areas where it is possible to see the convergence of the spectacle and the *unheimliche*. In the case of September 11, what produced this convergence was the *unheimlichkeit* of the intra and extra textual knowledge available to the audience when combined with what was seen on the screen. The most similar

scenes that had been witnessed to what was unfolding in front of the television audience belonged to a different genre all together, that of the action/disaster film. Interestingly, one of the key ways that allowed for the understanding that this wasn't a film was again through extratextual knowledge. As King argues:

Any viewer unsure of the status of the coverage of 9/11 could have any doubts dispelled...by changing channels: the fact that the same material was being presented on all networks at the same time underlined its status not just as 'reality', but as reality considered to be of a high order of impact and importance (2005:49).

This reality confusion may, at least partially, have been to do with what Baudrillard, quoting Fernandez, called 'events being on strike' (Baudrillard 2002:1). By this he meant that 'Western' news had become little more than a steady and somewhat predictable diet of 'bad things' happening to other people. September 11 changed that. In Baudrillard's words: "Well the strike is over. Events are now back at work" (2002:1). This event challenged the social perception of the reality that all of Western society had helped to form because it challenged the semiotic code of the security and 'safeness' of Western life.

It is important to remember that there were also significant differences between the footage and a disaster film. Earlier, the extratextual marker of different television channels showing the same coverage was mentioned, but there were also a number of additional markers, one of which was absence. The things that were absent from the real representation were things that would almost always be present in the fictional. King cites the lack of a 'plenitude of images', amateur footage (shaky camera work, halting zooms, lack of focus), an absence of close ups, or cutaways to the interior of the tower, confused reporting from the journalists and anchor people, and possibly most tellingly of all a lack of a shot of the first plane hitting the tower, as evidence of significant differences between the representation of the event and a disaster film (2005). King goes on to describe why he believed that in the days after

the attacks the representation actually shifted to become more film like and less 'true to life':

Some of these absences were gradually removed as coverage developed, and the gap between reality and movie images was reduced in some aspects. Footage from ground level, at the time of the impacts and of the collapse of the towers, was supplied quite soon, providing a more up-close-and-personal impression of the events, including eyewitness testimonials on September 11 and images of people running for and taking cover...As more time passed, missing parts of the picture were supplied, and, significantly, something closer to a cinematic assemblage of images was offered... (2005:50).

Perhaps this process was trying to make the strange back into the familiar, to reassert control over events by making them into a perception of how these things should be. It also reduces their uncanniness because they are steered away from the dangerous arena of the strangely familiar and unpredictable into a familiar mould, which is well known, and unthreatening. This also relates to the process of re-binarisation that was discussed in Chapter One. This process of reasserting control over the image is a part of the reconstruction process where the shared perception of reality that was broken by the representation of the attacks is being rebuilt.

As an aside it is very interesting to note that a number of films made post September 11, such as *Cloverfield* have deliberately used the filmic style of the coverage of September 11 to add more of a 'real' feel to their film. Instead of focussing on the individual brave heroic protagonist they have instead focussed on the ordinary everyday person caught up in the drama of a spectacular occurrence. The film *Cloverfield* was attacked before it was even released by the Fox channel for being 'insensitive' and exploitative about September 11 in its portrayal of New York being attacked by a monstrous alien ('Melanie' Newshounds website 2008). *Cloverfield* used a great deal of handheld imagery alongside images of downtown Manhattan cloaked in dust and people running panic stricken through the streets. What drew Fox's particular ire was the image of the Statue of Liberty decapitated and

abandoned in the ruins of New York. The film does make use of some of the characteristics of the coverage of September 11 outlined in this thesis such as the use of handheld imagery, the use of non-professional actors, the blurring of some genre conventions, however it still firmly fits within horror/monster/disaster film genre that has a pedigree going back to the original *Godzilla* and *King Kong* epics.

## **Fear of the double**

Another important notion in the exploration of the uncanny is the fear of the double or doppelganger. Part of the uncanniness of the double comes from the idea that the double brings with it a feeling that “...we have characters who are considered to be identical because they look alike...so that the one possesses knowledge, feelings and experience in common with the other.” (Freud 1975:234). Freud relates this notion of the double to the first form of the uncanny he talks about, that which arises when primitive beliefs have been supplanted by newer beliefs but vestiges of the older ones still remain with the individual:

...the quality of the uncanniness can only come from the fact of the double being a creation dating back to a very early mental stage, long since surmounted - a stage incidentally, at which it wore a more friendly aspect. The ‘double’ has become a thing of terror, just as after the collapse of their religion, the gods turned into demons (1975:236).

This idea is relevant to September 11 because of the identical nature of the twin towers of the WTC, the fact that two seemingly identical planes hit them and that they both collapsed within half an hour of each other. The fact that they were double and that a double attack hit them makes the event all the more uncanny. This is further expanded by Baudrillard to symbolise the monopolistic system itself:

The fact that there were two of them signifies the end of any original reference. If there had been only one, monopoly would not have been perfectly embodied. Only the doubling of the sign truly puts an end to what it designates...They culminated in

the exact reflection of each other...the twin towers no longer had any facades, any faces. With the rhetoric of verticality disappears also the rhetoric of the mirror. There remains only a kind of black box, a series closed on the figure two, as though architecture, like the system was now merely a product of cloning, and of a changeless genetic code (2002b:45).

Baudrillard is here making the point that the doubled nature of the towers illustrates his concept of the hyperreal because by having this doubling effect there is no original to begin with. The doubled destruction by very similar planes and the twinned collapses all indicate an excess, of being no longer able to find an original. In terms of this thesis this doubling effect is interesting in that it amplifies the uncanniness of the event, it is another of the key themes of the uncanny that is present in the representation of the event.

### **Omnipotence of thought**

A further part of Freud's notion of the uncanny is what he terms the "omnipotence of thoughts" (Freud 1975:240) or the coincidence of wish and fulfilment. Again Freud particularly relates this to his work with neurotic patients but sees vestigial traces of it in the wider community. This concept is related to both the confusion of reality between the real and the imaginary as well as to the first conception of the uncanny as coming from primitive beliefs that have been surmounted. Freud uses the example of one of his patients who wished for someone's death and then believed that when that person had a stroke two weeks later and died that he had caused the death through wishing it. As he elaborates:

I have adopted the term 'Omnipotence of Thought' from...a former sufferer from compulsion neurosis, who...coined this phrase to designate all those peculiar and uncanny occurrences which seemed to pursue him just as they pursue others afflicted with his malady. Thus if he happened to think of a person, he was actually confronted with this person as if he had conjured him up; if he inquired suddenly about the state of health of an acquaintance whom he had long missed he was sure

to hear that this acquaintance had just died...if he uttered a half meant imprecation against a stranger, he could expect to have him die soon thereafter...(Freud 1989:142).

This form of the uncanny is strongly related to what Freud referred to as 'primitive beliefs' such as the 'evil eye' or 'pointing the bone' where the power to wish someone ill is seen as a magical tool for subduing opponents.

Our analysis of the uncanny has led us back to the old, animistic conception of the universe. This was characterized by the idea that the world was peopled with the spirits of human beings; by the subject's narcissistic overvaluation of his own mental processes; by the belief in the omnipotence of thoughts and the technique of magic based on that belief (Freud 1975:240).

This concept still occurs today in many native cultures and vestiges of it are still seen in many of the Eastern European countries. As well as this it is a common theme in many horror, fantasy and science fiction films, indicating that it is still very much alive in Western cultures as well<sup>44</sup>.

The characteristic of 'the omnipotence of thought' is particularly relevant to September 11 and also to its representation because of the nature of the geopolitical pre-eminence of the USA in the world today. Or as Baudrillard wrote in regards to this wish fulfilment by the terrorists: "In the end it was they who did it but we who wished it...Without our profound complicity the event would not have reverberated so forcefully, and in their strategic symbolism the terrorists knew that they could count on this unconfessable complicity" (2002a:13). He further adds that:

...the closer the system gets to perfection or to omnipotence, the stronger the urge to destroy it grows...what means of turning the tables remains besides terrorism? In dealing all the cards to itself, the system forced the Other to change the rules of the game. And the new rules are ferocious, because the game is ferocious. Terrorism is

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<sup>44</sup> The Harry Potter series can in some ways be seen as an example of this kind of thinking. The ability to cast magic spells and curses is clearly related to this idea of the omnipotence of thought.

the act that restores an irreducible singularity to the heart of a generalized system of exchange. (2002a:14).

In terms of the representation this complicity played out as an inability to disengage from the coverage because what was being witnessed was an ‘unconfessable’ desire on the part of the spectator. This is not to say that every member of the audience was desiring the death and destruction that the event brought with it but that it was a desire for *something to happen*, for something to change, for a *real event* to occur.

### **Blurring the boundaries between the inanimate and animate**

The final conception of the uncanny which is of use to this work, is the uncanny fear provoked by the idea of the inanimate becoming animate. This is closely related to the conception of the uncanny as occurring when there is a convergence and confusion of the boundary between the real and the imaginary. Freud states that: “...a particularly favourable condition for the awakening of uncanny feelings is created when there is intellectual uncertainty whether an object is alive or not, and when an inanimate object becomes too much like an animate one” (1975:233). Freud particularly relates this fear of the inanimate becoming animate to our fear of death because we have not surmounted the older beliefs and superstitions about death: “Since almost all of us still think as savages do on this topic, it is no matter for surprise that the primitive fear of the dead is still so strong within us and always ready to come to the surface on any provocation” (1975:242)<sup>45</sup>.

There is an obvious correlation to September 11 in this notion. Planes, familiar, inanimate pieces of machinery, were personified and demonified into flying suicide bombers that brought death and destruction on an awesome scale. It is very interesting to note that many of the concepts dealt with in this section regularly occur in current popular culture. In particular, horror films frequently rely on many

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<sup>45</sup> Here Freud’s work can be seen to be quite kin to the Kristevan concept of the abject which will be further explored in the following chapter.

of these themes to create an air of suspense, fear and the uncanny in their audiences. As has been seen throughout this chapter, the representation of the September 11 attacks can most certainly be described as uncanny. It made many in the audience feel uncomfortable, it filled many with fear and it helped to keep large numbers of the audience mesmerised by the images that were being transmitted.

Freud's concept of the *unheimliche* is the second of three convergent forces that come together to propel the event of September 11 through the conduits of Unpreparedness and Technological hyperefficiency allowing the event to escape its representation. The *unheimliche* is particularly important to the concept of the media-real. It is this sense of 'wrongness' and fear or uneasiness that combines with the fascination of the spectacle – the subject of the previous chapter - and which flows into the revulsion inherent to the abject - the subject of the following chapter - that is integral to how the event escapes from its representation. It escapes because it breaks the boundaries of what is symbolisable, this particular convergence of forces drives us to the place beyond discourse. Taking the individual back to the pre linguistic 'real'. To the undifferentiable, the chaotic, the realm of the Lacanian real, that 'hard kernel' resisting all symbolisation.

## **Conclusion**

Each one of Freud's major variations of the *unheimliche* has been examined in this chapter. This examination began with a definitional study of the term '*unheimliche*' and its relationship to the English work 'uncanny' and the French '*extimité*' demonstrating how even the words themselves show the slippage between the possible meanings of the terms and the ways that they begin by blurring a number of key binary oppositions. This blurring of boundaries will be picked up again in Chapter Five but it is important here because of the way that binary oppositions are used in the construction of social realities.

Binary oppositions are discursive, they function as 'societal signposts' in that they mark the correct, socially sanctioned behaviour or attitude for many instances. They give an idea of the relative social worth of different ideals and they are defined in terms of the other, in other words they are defined in terms of what they are not. When these binaries blur, when a significant slippage of meaning begins to occur the signposts lose coherence and the societal value becomes more difficult to judge. The discursive framework is threatened. These 'signposts' underlie many of the ways in which the societal perception of reality is formed and when they blur so too does the 'shared reality'. To be shared they must be communicated and as the slippage starts to blur the binary system of difference, the whole discursively shared perception of reality, is threatened. This shows how the concept of the uncanny, even by itself puts pressure on socially constructed perceptions of reality. When it combines with the Spectacle and the abject, flowing through the conduits outlined above, then a situation arises where the real escapes from how it is represented.

Freud also talks about the difference between the uncanny in fiction and the uncanny in the 'real-life' experience of it. More problematically he discusses the difference between the uncanny in fiction that is not trying to emulate reality (though whether or not this is actually possible is a matter of some debate) and the uncanny that comes from fiction drawn closely from a perception of reality. Included in this initial setting out of the terms in which Freud sees the uncanny is his distinction between the uncanny that is drawn from older beliefs that have since been supplanted but are now causing the individual to doubt the change and the uncanny that springs from the repression of infantile thoughts and fantasies. The importance of this section in the chapter is that it sets out a number of the ways in which Freud categorised the uncanny.

Of particular importance to this thesis is the idea of the differences between the uncanny in fiction and the uncanny that occurs in everyday experience because it is one of the areas of boundary slippage that the event of September 11 is indicative of. The vast majority of viewers did not experience the event personally, in that they

were not physically present in New York when the event occurred. However they did experience the mediation of the event in their 'real-lives' and it did have an impact on that 'real-life'. The feeling of wrongness and unease that the mediated event inspired cannot be dismissed as not belonging to the uncanny or of being a lesser form of the uncanny and it is here that there are some problems and contradictions in the way that Freud theorises this concept. By trying to separate the uncanny of 'real-life' from the uncanny of fiction and further between different forms of uncanny fiction, Freud seems to overlook what is fundamental to the concept of the *unheimliche* in the first place – the blurring of boundaries. The uncanny blurs the boundaries between the factual and the fictional, the uncanny exists in many forms of fiction and popular culture and because it is in some regards a subjective reaction to stimuli it is impossible to delineate a greater or lesser order of uncanny effect.

The first categorisation of the uncanny that is dealt with in this chapter is that the uncanny occurs when the boundary between the familiar and the strange is blurred. Recalling the concept of the 'uncanny valley' used earlier in the chapter there is an exponential link between how familiar something is, while remaining not quite right, with how much uncanniness is produced. In other words we may become more comfortable with something the more familiar it becomes, however the more familiar it becomes while still retaining an essential strangeness produces increasing levels of unease and fear. In relation to the September 11 attacks this familiar yet strange quality of the uncanny can be related to the resemblance of the footage to a big budget disaster film as well as to the use of the familiar 'everyday' airplanes as weapons of mass destruction. This is important to the concept of the media-real because it is one of the bases where we can see the uncanny at work within the event of September 11 and it provides one of the reasons for the feelings of 'wrongness' that the coverage provoked in some people.

Repetition plays into this concept as well. Repetition can eventually make the strange into the familiar and on some levels it was the repetition of the disaster film

that allowed for this event to produce such levels of uncanniness in the audience precisely because the mediation of the event was familiar yet at the same time so strange. The repetition also did its part in terms of the mesmerisation exerted by the footage. The cliché statement of 'watching a train wreck in slow motion' was fully borne out in the coverage of September 11. It was fascinating to watch that moment of impact over and over again, occasionally in slow motion itself, and part of the reason for this repetition, it is argued, was to try and convince the audience that the event had really occurred.

One of the most important points that Freud makes in categorisation of the uncanny is the reality confusion aspect of it. When the boundary between the imagination and the external reality is breached or blurred then a sensation of uncanniness ensues (Freud 1975). In many ways this form of the uncanny is one of the most obvious in terms of the coverage of September 11. Tales proliferate of people not understanding at first that what they were watching was 'real', that it wasn't a disaster film or a TV drama. It was this initial point that began this entire thesis project. Again the impact of the blurring of the boundaries in a socially sanctioned binary opposite can be seen. 'Western' culture for many centuries believed in the primacy of the rational thinking human being. It is in Freud's work (though based on the earlier work of other theorists) that one of the most significant challenges to this enlightenment ideal of the 'rational man' was made. This aspect of the uncanny directly challenges the idea that it is possible to objectively 'know' reality and that there is a strong demarcation between reality and the imaginary. Instead there is a slippage between these two binary opposites and a blurring of the boundaries which produces a great deal of anxiety and fear.

The fear of the doppelganger is the next articulation of the uncanny dealt with in this chapter. This particular characterisation is interesting because it is yet another case where slippage between binary opposites can be discerned, in this case between the notion of the individual and the other. Even individual identity is not necessarily as unique as the subject might like to believe. In terms of September 11

there were a number of twinned symbols that became emblematic of the anxiety and fear that the event and its coverage caused. The twin towers of the WTC being hit by twin planes and following twinned paths of collapse within an hour of each other are fertile grounds for superstition, the first of Freud's forms of the uncanny in terms of the return of older beliefs.

The fourth category of the uncanny that was explored in this chapter was that of the 'omnipotence of thoughts' again drawing on the idea of older beliefs or superstitions returning even though logically there is an objective explanation for the phenomena. It is related to the reality confusion category discussed above but is also more than this. It is the feeling that by wishing for something to happen and then it occurs and the anxiety, and fear that this can produce even if the individual is 'sure' that it is a coincidence. Again, as with all of the categories of the uncanny, there is a blurring of the boundaries between binary oppositions, in this case between wish/fulfilment, reality/imaginary, natural/supernatural. When related to the September 11 attacks this point can be seen in Baudrillard's claim that because of the nature of US hegemony many people around the world wanted to see the US brought low and when it was many people did experience a sense of the uncanny at having their wish fulfilled in such a manner.

The final characteristic of the uncanny examined in this chapter was the uncanny produced when the inanimate becomes animate. Again the immediate blurring of the boundaries that incurs the fear and anxiety reaction can be seen. In relation to the September 11 attacks this concept can be particularly applied to the use of planes, passive, everyday facts of life being demonified into terror inspiring weapons that can be aimed and fired against unsuspecting innocents. This particular point relates very strongly, and is much of the basis for Mori's concept of the 'uncanny valley'.

The overall concept of the uncanny is so important to the idea of the media-real that is proposed throughout this thesis because of the way that the destabilisation of

binaries works. A loss of one of these binary 'signposts' questions the validity of the other binary oppositions that are socially sanctioned and as these are questioned the socially constructed perception of reality begins to fracture and tear apart. It is this undermining of the shared perception of reality that was torn apart with the attacks of September 11. The event escaped from its representation precisely because it tore apart the socially constructed perception of reality. This perception of reality was forged through societal reinforcement and acceptance of this 'common-sense' way of thinking about the world. When this was challenged by another world view, by the view of the terrorists and the reaction of people to the acts, then it blurred the boundaries between many of the basic tenets and shared binary oppositions that underpinned that perception of reality thus forcing an acknowledgement that this way of thinking was not the only way of thinking about the world.

## **Chapter Four - The Abject.**

This chapter deals with the third of the triadic forces that converge and are accelerated through the conduits to allow for the escape of the event from its representation, to become the media-real. This chapter deals with the abject, an active rejection, a feeling of revulsion present within and inspired by the mediation of the event, that both joins and builds upon the concepts presented in the previous two chapters. The media-real is a concept predicated on the transgression and confusion of the boundaries of key binary oppositions within a societally reinforced perception of reality. This disruption of these binaries is theorised as being due to the re-emergence of the Lacanian real and the disruption in the semiotic coding of Western perceptions of reality. This break in the signifying chain conflates reality with the imaginary, the wish with its fulfilment.

The convergence of these three forces - the spectacle, the uncanny and the abject - form the primary impetus for the media-real's ability to escape from its representation. This initial level of the formation of the media-real then needs the conduit or pathway provided by unpreparedness for the impact of this convergence to enable the event to supersede its mediation, or to escape from the realm of what is symbolisable. This conduit is the subject of the following chapter of the thesis.

### ***Abjection***

Julia Kristeva's conception of the abject, described in her book, *The Powers of Horror* (1982), as "...the border where exact limits between the same and other, subject and object, and even beyond these, between inside and outside...[disappear] – hence [becoming] an object of fear and fascination" (Kristeva 1982:185) provides the final impetus for the escape of the media-real from its representation because this

impetus is provided by the individual's rejection of that which is abject. Not only has the event been spectacular and awe-inspiring but there has also been a growing feeling of wrongness, of something being 'not quite right'. Here in the concept of the abject the formation of the media-real solidifies because it is here that an active rejection (but at the same time fascination with and longing for) of the mediation of the event and the event itself begins to occur.

The first section of this chapter will explore Kristeva's concept of the abject and how it can be applied to the representation of the September 11 attacks. In doing so it will place this concept alongside the two key concepts already demonstrated in the preceding chapters and show how the cumulative impact of these forces sets the stage for the event, through the eruption of the Lacanian real, to escape from its representation and become the media-real.

One of the key signifiers of the abject, the corpse, is explored as one of the primary sites of the human reaction to the abject and the relationship that this has with the event of September 11. September 11 is an interesting case due to a lack of the corpse. Although there are many instances in the coverage where reporters, anchors, eyewitnesses and officials discuss the fact that there are corpses and body parts spread throughout a wide area it is very rare that any of this is shown. So the coverage provides a surfeit of linguistic description of the corpse, but few actual images.

The next section of this chapter looks at the idea of the grotesque, how this might be termed an 'embodied abject', and how this relates to the media coverage of the September 11 attacks. It also makes the point that the grotesque is sometimes used in a ludic or comedic sense but that the term itself is not necessarily only used in this way, in many circumstances there are also connotations of horror and the abject to be found.

This chapter also examines Kristeva's exploration of the emergence of the abject that occurs through the incomplete separation from the mother that leaves the subject with a lack, with an incomplete sense of the 'I' and that leads to an extreme reaction whenever the integrity of the 'I' is challenged. This challenge can occur at any time that a core binary opposition is disrupted because as soon as one central boundary is threatened all the others become more questionable. The role of language in the formation of the self is also explored alongside the concept of the rim, as that which exists at the border of the body.

The final two characteristics of the abject that are explored include the relationship of fear to the abject and the way that Kristeva conceptualises the 'borderline' subject. These characteristics build together because it is in the borderline subject that the most intense relationship to the abject can be seen and it is also here where the fear of, yet longing for, the abject can be most clearly discerned.

The second part of this chapter looks at some of the critiques of Kristeva's work, and in particular the Butlerian position that Kristeva's work, due to the influence of Lacan, allows little agency for women in the realm of the symbolic, the only forms of the symbolic that Kristeva sees as feminine being the poetic and the maternal. Fraser's criticism of Kristeva is also included in that while Kristeva could have been positing entirely new theories or actually correcting some of the deficits in Lacanian psychoanalysis she merely adds new concepts to problematic theories without dealing with the underlying problems.

The third part of this chapter investigates the key differences between the abject and the uncanny through an exploration of Hook's article 'Language and the Flesh: Psychoanalysis and the Limits of Discourse' (2003). The limits of discourse and how this ties in with the concept of the abject and the ways of thinking about discourse that have been looked at in Chapter One, is then discussed. This second point is of interest because of the correlation with the idea of the Lacanian real belonging to a

realm outside of the symbolisable; therefore logically existing outside of the limits of discourse.

Overall this chapter explores the added impetus that comes from the 'push and pull' effect inherent to the notion of the abject. It is a concept founded in the relationship between revulsion and fascination, between the internal and the external, existing on the rim of being. It crosses boundaries and collapses binaries and produces *jouissance*. It is at once an object of fear and desire. It is profoundly confronting because it shows that what are often seen as opposites are not only interdependent in that they rely on each other for meaning, but more scarily can't actually exist because nothing is ever totally one or the other.

### ***The Abjection of Wounded Reality***

For Kristeva the transgression, destabilisation and confusion of boundaries, cause a reaction of revulsion and fear in the subject. The abject is something which the subject rejects but cannot part with, however it is not necessarily because it is dirty or unclean, but rather because of its ambiguous nature that challenges neat societal categorisations. As Kristeva describes it:

"It is thus not a lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (1982:4).

So from the very beginning this thesis is looking at a concept bound up in ambiguity and inspiring a reaction of repulsion because it is indeterminate and challenges the binary oppositions that underpin the collective set of ideals and perceptions, shared through representation, that come together to form a societally constructed understanding of reality.

In relation to this thesis, the concept of the media-real is most aptly illustrated by Kristeva's use of the example of the wound, complete with blood and pus (1982:3). This wound is so abject because it shows us what is excreted from the body in order to maintain life, and this waste, this excretion, is abject precisely because it once was of the body but is now no longer. Like the corpse, which will be explored shortly, this waste gives evidence to the subject's mortality. It has been rejected and flung away so that the body might continue to live.

In terms of this thesis the rupture in the perception of reality that the media-real refers to is an eruptive wound. Like a volcano, these wounds breach the boundaries between the inside and the outside and between the surface and the subterranean levels of perception. In becoming a wound of this kind there are forces or elements that are being expelled from within and they travel through particular conduits to erupt through the surface. Moreover, like a typical reaction to a wound filled with pus, it repulses, it is rejected violently so that the subject can continue to live.

It is here that the third impetus for the formation of the media-real can be seen, in this reaction of revulsion the event is propelled away, and as the reality of the event is violently rejected significant propulsion is added to the nascent media-real. The notion of the abject is also particularly important because of the transgression of boundaries and inversion of hierarchies that are inherent in this idea, this inversion becoming a part of the challenge to the 'I' implied by the destabilisation of binaries and the shaking of the societal compact that allows for the binding together of an imagined community. This transgression of boundaries and inversion of hierarchies is fundamental to another related concept, that of the grotesque.

### **The abject corpse**

Kristeva conceptualises the corpse as perhaps the best example of the abject, it is the place where there is a confrontation with mortality within the subject and the

corpse is also perhaps the best illustration of the transgression of boundaries that the abject represents. The corpse, as opposed to other signifiers of death (Kristeva uses the example of the 'flatline' on an encephalograph) confronts the subject with the most brutal example of the loss of the 'I'. Like all the bodily wastes that are expelled each day so that the subject can live - each of which is also abject but to a lesser degree than the corpse - the rejection of the abject allows the subject to live within the boundaries of the 'self' that has been created. This creation of the self has occurred through the interaction of the subject with the broader society in which they live. This is what is immediately confronted when the subject comes into contact with the corpse, particularly the corpse of someone that is known to them. Kristeva claims:

...corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live...If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel, "I" is expelled. The border has become an object...I behold the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders...The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. *Abject* (1982:3-4).

This object, that was a subject, has become abject because it shows how fragile the constructed self is by confronting the subject with the absolute fact of mortality, demonstrating in a way that cannot be avoided that the 'I' is a fleeting condition.

The event of September 11 provided a surplus of corpses (although not visual representations of them within the televisual coverage), and of "I's" in the process of being expelled. So much so that even its mediation was enough to provoke many of the classic reactions to the abject - fear, loathing, sadness, revulsion and rejection were all present in the audience of billions to whom the mediation was so

captivating<sup>46</sup>. Some of the most famous images, one of which ended up becoming a documentary in its own right<sup>47</sup>, encapsulate this loss of the 'I'.

Even with the degree of self censorship that the journalists and camera crews provided<sup>48</sup>, there was no escaping the level of death that burst through the usual news broadcast format. Later on in the coverage much of this footage was edited out, but early on the cameras even zoomed in on the people jumping from the burning towers and followed them as they fell to their deaths. In one particularly relevant moment in the CNN footage, taken immediately before the collapse of the towers, the camera zooms in on someone trapped at a window above the floors where the plane had impacted. No details of the face can be seen but they are obviously still alive because they are waving a white sheet trying to attract the attention of someone, anyone, to provide help and get them out of where they were trapped<sup>49</sup>. Minutes later the tower collapsed.

### **The embodied object - The grotesque.**

The body is the a priori site of the object. The object begins to exist only in relation to the body. It is formed through the division between bodies (self and other) and is at its most repulsive and mesmerizing when dealing with the borders of the body. As Hook points out, drawing on the work of Freud, Lacan, Kristeva and Grosz, the body is the place where we see the limits to discourse, to what it is possible to symbolize, a point that will be returned to later in this chapter. Grosz analyses Kristeva's work in depth and argues, "that it is only through the delimitation of the 'clean and proper' body that the symbolic order, and the acquisition of a sexual and psychical

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<sup>46</sup> Some of these reactions by people in the nearby areas were captured and became part of the footage in the days after the event. In particular the image of an older woman watching out a window as the event unfolded bears evidence of this kind of reaction. At first she just watched but gradually her impassivity cracked and she began to cry and murmur, eventually leading to a near hysterical collapse (CNN 11/9/2001).

<sup>47</sup> *9/11: The Falling Man* is a 2006 documentary about the search for the identity of one of the men photographed as they fell from the burning WTC towers. It was directed by Henry Singer.

<sup>48</sup> A number of the people filming on the day of the attacks, such as the Naudet brothers, mentioned the fact that images considered too graphic were either not captured or edited out of the coverage (Naudet 2001).

<sup>49</sup> CNN coverage 11/9/2001.

identity within it, becomes possible” (1981:86). It is this focus on the ‘clean and proper’ body, and on abjection’s challenge (which it is argued can be termed the grotesque) to this idea that is the focus of this section.

The idea of the grotesque has a long history. Philip Thomson in his book *The Grotesque* (1972), traces the modes of representation of this idea back to Roman times and the use of heterogeneous elements to create ‘monstrous’ artworks. He identifies four main characteristics of the grotesque: disharmony or the clash of disparate parts, the comic or the terrifying, extravagance and exaggeration, and abnormality (1972). Thomson makes the point that the grotesque is primarily the site of “...the unresolved clash of incompatibles” (Thomson 1972:27). Of particular interest to this research, however, is the way that he ties the grotesque to both exaggeration and terror.

The grotesque stands in opposition to the ordered aseptic neatness (and almost prudishness) this ‘clean and proper’ body, that is customarily associated with the classical view of the body and how it should behave and be portrayed. Stallybrass and White, in their book *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (1986), argue that:

The classical statue has no openings or orifices whereas grotesque costume and masks emphasize the gaping mouth, the protuberant belly and buttocks, the feet and the genitals. In this way the grotesque body stands in opposition to the bourgeois individualist conception of the body, which finds its image and legitimation in the classical. The grotesque body is emphasized as a mobile split, multiple self, a subject of pleasure in processes of exchange; and it is never closed off from either its social or ecosystemic context (Stallybrass & White 1986: 22).

The grotesque body is partial (even dismembered) exaggerated, open and excreting, its orifices are emphasized and parodied. It bears little resemblance to the clean classical ideals of bodily perfection and even less to the prudery of Victorian England that was inculcated into its colonies of the time. In many ways it is the

embodiment of abjection, of all that is excluded from the 'Western' view of the body and how that body should look and act – at least publicly.

One of the most disturbing features of the September 11 attacks was the loss of the borders of corporeality. The body was captured in various stages of becoming 'other' than alive. It was filmed<sup>50</sup> falling, burned, broken, bloodied and in some cases unrecognisable as a body. The borders of the self had been breached in a variety of horrific ways and this led to an abject reaction in many of the witnesses to such a catastrophic occurrence. Interestingly the majority of what was captured in terms of the human body never went to air, a fact discussed by the Naudet brothers, the filmmakers who produced the documentary *9/11: A Firefighters Tale*<sup>51</sup>. What was left were fragmentary glimpses and the abject reactions of those who were witnessing the entire scene. It is this lack of what the subject knows that is one of the primary factors for the feelings of uncanniness that the footage provokes. It is through the combination of brief glimpses with verbal description and imagination painting the rest that the most poignant uncanniness is felt.

Kristeva in her writings on the abject, places a great deal of emphasis on the corporeal nature of the abject. The entire concept is intertwined with embodied signifiers. She talks of the abject in terms of bodily functions and fluids, all of which are unacceptable topics for 'polite conversation' – a code for not fitting into the proscribed rules of behaviour and representation in Western society. In short the abject, and particularly the abject where it applies to the body, can be seen as grotesque and repellent. This clash of the abject with the classical body is one of the foundational characteristics of the grotesque. This disharmony between the usual representations of the body within Western media as a clean, non-excreting, non-exaggerated whole, and the representations of the grotesque body displayed

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<sup>50</sup> Though the vast majority of this footage never made it to air.

<sup>51</sup> This documentary was in progress before the event of September 11 and had been following a rookie New York firefighter through his first months on the job. The Naudet brothers captured on film one of the only shots of the first plane striking the WTC.

verbally (and occasionally visually) on September 11 give rise to some of the primary characteristics of the abject – revulsion and rejection.

Thomson's definition of the grotesque also included a reference to the grotesque as either being comic or terrifying. In the case being studied here it is the idea of the grotesque as terror that is of primary interest. Thomson claims: "Those who emphasize the terrifying quality of the grotesque often shift it towards the realm of the uncanny, the mysterious, even the supernatural" (1972:21). In the case of the representation of the September 11 attacks the appearance of the grotesque comes down very firmly on the side of terror and, as was examined in the previous chapter, the uncanniness produced by this representation was quite considerable.

Although it may be argued that the grotesque exceeds the abject in terms of its ludic etiology, it is also apparent that Kristeva felt that laughter was itself, frequently, a cathartic reaction to the confrontation with the abject. To return to a quotation cited earlier "and not without laughter - since laughing is a way of placing or displacing abjection" (1982:8), here Kristeva emphasises the fact that laughter is a way of dealing with the abject, of lightening it, of making it less terrifying and confronting. If the individual is laughing at something then they are not fearing it, or at least they are pretending not to be afraid. In many ways it is another method of pushing it away from the subject: if it is possible laugh at it then its power over the subject is undone and can hence be displaced.

It is illustrative that September 11 is only rarely the subject of jokes – though there are some – and that when it is, this laughter has tended to be more in defiance of the perpetrators of the attack rather than anything to do with those who were victims of the attack or those who helped the victims during and after the attack. It is perhaps forgivable to theorise that there is an unwillingness present to allow the abjectness of this event to be diminished, that to do so might call into question some of the reactions to these feelings of abjectness.

The parody and exaggeration of parts of the body inherent to the idea of the grotesque can be applied to the case being studied, though without the ludic elements mentioned earlier. Some eyewitness accounts from the televisual coverage of September 11 clearly relate to this conception of the grotesque, although again, not in a humorous way. The tales of dismembered body parts flying from the windows of the WTC are a traumatic indication of the escape from the normative/classical conception of the body as an integrated whole. One of the most traumatic scenes to have come from September 11 (even though the images themselves are not overly traumatic) was shown in the documentary *9/11: The Firefighters Tale* where the filmmaker was actually in the lobby of the second tower as the Fire Department began the evacuation. Every couple of minutes you hear a loud 'Bang' and the firefighters all wince visibly, the filmmaker explains that what we are hearing are bodies hitting the ground outside the lobby. That what we are witnessing aurally is someone's death and dismemberment. The filmmakers also describe – though do not show – the scene in the lobby when they first arrive. We are told that the elevators had burned on their way down from the upper floors and then had opened when they reached the lobby. Inside the elevators were a number of bodies of people who had tried to escape through using the elevators. Again even the verbal description of these images, alongside the facial expressions of the people who are there reveal, as much about the nature of the scene as anything that could be directly shown. All of these scenes bear witness to the grotesque's emphasis on the materiality and impermanence of the human body.

In the grotesque we meet the embodiedness of the abject and what Hook points to as the limits of discourse. The grotesque appears as boundary of discourse because it is a concept predicated on the blurring of the boundaries between disharmonious elements. The grotesque inverts hierarchies and exaggerates bodily parts but not the whole. It explodes the discourse of the ascetic classical body and revels in the abnormal and the uncanny. The visual symbolic of the coverage of the September 11 attacks dares not show us directly this embodied abject, instead predominantly relying on verbal description and images of how other people react to the scene in

front of them. In earlier footage, footage less censored, in part because it isn't known what is appearing within the image, more of the grotesque body appears, though even in this case there is more of the implied grotesque rather than the actual.

### ***Jouissance and the abject***

Kristeva describes the subject's relationship with the abject as also being one of *jouissance*. A painful, violent kind of joy. An immersion in sensation that is beyond the pleasant, the good, but again confounding boundaries, this time between a 'good' sensation and a 'bad' one. Kristeva elaborates:

It follows that *jouissance* alone causes the abject to exist as such. One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it...Violently, painfully. A passion. And, as in *jouissance* where the object of desire, known as object *a...*, bursts with the shattered mirror where the ego gives up its image in order to contemplate itself in the Other, there is nothing either objective or objectal to the abject (1982:9).

This above quote illustrates how Kristeva sees the 'other side' of the individual's relationship to the abject. A 'violent joy' that exists at the same time as the revulsion and repulsion talked about earlier. This violent joy is not consciously understood and nor is it objective: it is intensely interior on the same level as a passion or a compulsion. This relationship with the abject, this *jouissance*, explains to some degree the way in which the abject both repels and fascinates. Similar to the relationship described between a dominatrix and her slaves, there is a level of fear and pain but also pleasure and release inherent in the concept of the abject. Letting go of control can be both liberating and terrifying because deliberately giving up power over the self opens the subject to that which is abject above all other things, the loss of the 'I' and in many ways the ego, and the self, is bound up in control over self and environment. In some ways the formation of the self can be seen as the gathering together and then controlling of disparate personality traits and it is in the facade of holistic integrity that the ego resides. The idea of not having to be in

control, of not having to fight this constant war of power and control (or as Nietzsche would have it, sublimating the will to power<sup>52</sup>) fascinates many people within society, often people who have to exercise a great deal of power, over both themselves and others, on a daily basis. The tabloid media provide a myriad of examples of powerful people caught up in scandals for allowing themselves periods of time where they are not under their usual level of control<sup>53</sup>.

This idea also relates to the Foucauldian notion of bio-power and the regulation of the body through internalisation of discipline. As mentioned in Chapter One, Foucault argued that since the 18<sup>th</sup> century and Bentham's conception of the panopticon<sup>54</sup>, there has been a significant growth in the idea of self-disciplining subjects and that this has led to a society of both surveillance and disciplining behaviours. The basic idea behind these concepts is that when a subject feels like they may be watched at any time, and that they will be punished for contravening societal rules, then they will discipline their own behaviour even if they are no longer being watched because they have become accustomed to the surveillance/discipline/punishment routine (Foucault 1977). Power thus becomes a system or a structure for the discipline of society rather than being held in the hands of a single (or a few) person/s as in the older monarchies.

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<sup>52</sup> Nietzsche's concept of the will to power is that every live being exerts a will to power because in living it acquires power over itself and its surroundings. This will to power is what he sees as driving all life and is completely amoral and independent of belief systems but is rather a force of nature, a struggle for survival (Nietzsche 2000:220).

<sup>53</sup> There is of course the counter argument to this that it is the ultimate act of control because it is the subject's decision to relinquish their control, and in most instances a simple word is enough to restore their control.

<sup>54</sup> "Bentham's [Panopticon](#) is the architectural figure of this composition. We know the principle on which it was based: at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible. The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately. In short, it reverses the principle of the dungeon; or rather of its three functions - to enclose, to deprive of light and to hide - it preserves only the first and eliminates the other two. Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap (Foucault 1977:199)

In relation to the representation of the event, *jouissance* can be seen in the fascination exerted by the coverage and in particular the compulsion to repeat parts of the coverage. At times the footage could be categorised as exceedingly painful to watch at the same time as being exciting, breathtaking and fascinating. It was compulsive and it was agonising. This relates to one of Freud's concepts, and is also an instance of similarity between the abject and the uncanny, where:

...it is possible to recognise the dominance in the unconscious mind of a 'compulsion to repeat' proceeding from the instinctual impulses and probably inherent in the very nature of the instincts – a compulsion powerful enough to override the pleasure principle, lending to certain aspects of the mind their daemonic character, and still very clearly expressed in the impulses of small children; a compulsion too, which is responsible for a part of the course taken by the analyses of neurotic patients (Freud 1975: 238).

This compulsion to repeat that Freud discusses is an important concept in terms of *jouissance* because it is this compulsion to repeat despite the pain, revulsion and terror, that can be related to the representation of September 11. This painful longing, can be seen in terms of this compulsion that overrides the pleasure principle because *jouissance* has gone past pleasure into the place where pleasure and pain become intertwined and inseparable. This compulsion to repeat is one of the things, this thesis argues, that kept the representations being replayed as September 11 unfolded. The images were painful to watch - it was explosively exciting at times, gory and grotesque at other times, and also heart rending. However for much of the coverage, it was boring and banal due to the incredibly stretched storyline and the fact that nothing else happened after the first four hours except repetition of the most spectacular scenes. Yet still the representations played on. It was 'compulsive viewing' of the most intense kind.

## **The chora and the loss of the self**

Kristeva theorises that the abject is a regression to (or a repression of) the stage in infancy before the Lacanian mirror-stage where the subject begins to differentiate themselves from animals, from objects and from the mother. She believes that it occurs prior to the divide between conscious and unconscious. Kristeva describes this as a 'primal repression' whereby the subject is trying desperately not to return to that place left behind in infancy, but never far away, where there is no differentiation between anything, there is no symbolic meaning and there is no 'I'. Kristeva states:

On such limits and at the limit one could say that there is no unconscious, which is elaborated when representations and affects (whether or not tied to representations) shape a logic. Here, on the contrary, consciousness has not assumed its rights and transformed into signifiers those fluid demarcations of yet unstable territories where an 'I' that is taking shape is ceaselessly straying (1982:11).

This level of primal repression means that there is never a 'safe place' from the abject, it is always there, within the subject. In many ways it is an 'enemy within'. It is always rejected, pushed violently away but paradoxically desired, as form and meaning are imposed through the symbolic, through signs, through language and through shared codes, on the world around the individual. However this perception of reality, this safety net of meaning is terribly fragile.

Central to this breakdown of meaning, but important enough to be considered in its own right, is the idea of the abject as particularly occurring with a loss of distinction between the self and the other. Kristeva talks about this in terms of what she calls the 'chora' (Kristeva 1982:14) or the stage that immediately precedes Lacan's

mirror phase<sup>55</sup>. In this stage, as mentioned above, there is no differentiation between feelings, needs, perceptions, object, subject, interior, exterior, self or other. It is this state that is so fear provoking, and which returns with the abject. In this state the subject is yet to form the 'I', yet to learn how to differentiate self from other. There is not yet an understanding of where the boundaries are so that limits can be set around things, turning them into discrete objects outside of the self – at this point there is no self, and this is what makes the abject so terrifying. Kristeva claims that: "The abject confronts us...with our earliest attempts to release the hold of *maternal* entity even before existing outside of her, thanks to the autonomy of language" (1982:13). This initial split into a binary opposition between the self and the other, the self and the mother, can be argued to be the basis for all of the binary oppositions that underpin the sharing of values and to a large extent language itself.

## **The abject and language**

Both Kristeva and Lacan argued that language granted the autonomy of the subject through the gaining of concepts of the self and the outside world through the generalising nature of language. Lacan asserts:

If the subject is what I say it is, namely the subject determined by language and speech, it follows that the subject, *in initio*, begins in the locus of the Other, in so far as it is there that the first signifier emerges. (1977:198)

What Lacan is referring to here is the idea that language is other to the subject, it begins in the other, but to become a separate distinct individual the subject must break with the (m)other and they do this through the acquisition of language.

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<sup>55</sup> Lacan's mirror-phase can be described as the process by which a child recognises themselves in a mirror, the process that leads to the understanding that the image is them and more importantly that this 'self' is separate to the (m)other. "This jubilant assumption of his specular image by the child at the *infans* stage, still sunk in his motor incapacity and nursing dependence, would seem to exhibit in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as a subject" (Lacan 1977:2).

Further to this, for language to be able to link between two individual subjects it must be general enough so that it can refer to both subjectivities. However the nature of the subject prior to separation from the mother is that of the particular. In the move from the real to the symbolic this particularity is lost because it is impossible to symbolise.

As with Lacan, one of Kristeva's primary foci is language and the semiotic process of signification. Her early writing proposes a synthesis of semiotics and psychoanalysis which she termed 'semanalysis' (Kristeva 1969). While the patriarchal law forces the subject to break free from the maternal through the use of the generalising characteristics of language there is also a maternal law prefiguring the paternal, which attempts to hold the subject under the sway of the maternal. The break from the maternal is not a surgically clean procedure. Rather "[i]t is a violent, clumsy breaking away, with a constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling" (Kristeva 1982:13). This 'constant risk' that the maternal represents, according to Kristeva, is one of the key characteristics that makes the abject so terrifying. To succumb to the abject means to lose the self entirely and this is what causes the violent rejection of that which is abject. However the abject is not separate to the subject, it is part of the subject. It is at once other to, and a part of, the 'I'. Without the abject there would be no breaking away from the (m)other, Kristeva believes that the abject is one of the ways that humans manage to achieve this breaking away by creating it as 'other', and it is what allows for the continuation of separate entities, a continual and continuing rejection of homogeneity. Again the ordinary nature of the self/mother binary opposition can be seen. Here the destabilisation of binary oppositions reaches its full potential because in the undermining of this binary is the undermining of the self. A return to the chora. And the reaction to this threat is abject in the extreme.

The abject is one element which contributed to the attacks of September 11 creating so much terror, because these events show the 'abyss', the place where language and symbolisation fails. This abyss is actually the place where the Lacanian real re-

emerges, where the structures that give meaning to particular understandings of the world falter and collapse back into the undifferentiated, chaotic real. A number of examples of this can be seen in Chapter Five where the thesis deals with the technical and technological differences between the representation of this event and other events.

### **The abject rim**

Lacan refers to the place where the inside and the outside meet as the *rim* and Elizabeth Grosz continues this idea by saying that the *rim* “ [i]s the place between two corporeal surfaces, an interface between the inside and the outside of the body” (1990:88). She then posits that the sexual drive related to various orifices – or the erotogenic rim (being the place where the inside and the outside of the body are meeting) - is “a hole, a gap or lack seeking an object to satisfy it” (1990:88). Abjection occurs, according to this view when the “object does not adequately fit the rim. A gap re-emerges, a hole which imperils the subject’s identity, for it threatens to draw the subject rather than the objects into it” (Grosz 1990:88)

By rupturing the representations of the social construction of reality the September 11 attacks opened a hole between the inside and the outside of perceived reality. They forced a confrontation with the notion that perceptions of reality are constructed rather than innate. They did this by, as Lewis (2005) refers to and as was discussed in Chapter One, creating a gap in the semiotic code that underpins the social construction of reality. This gap is opened in the first instance by the spectacle but then widened by the uncanniness of the event being represented. Finally it is torn open by the presence of the abject. Reality is shown as not the naturalised, normalised, taken for granted entity that is often referred to. Instead reality was shown to be ephemeral and fleeting and this mingling of the exterior and the interior of perceived realities led to a confrontation with the fact that identity, which is a part of the basis of an understanding of reality, is also fleeting and ephemeral.

In many ways this rupture forced a confrontation with the *rim* of perceptual understanding and for a short while the subject was drawn into the gap to try and fill the lack, the absence that had become apparent. This can be argued to have led to an unconscious<sup>56</sup> recognition that identity is as fragile and as prone to destruction as the ways in which the world can be understood. What this meant was that the threat that the September 11 attacks represented was not just in the material (external) world but also on a very individual level, as identity itself was also drawn into question. As Grosz comments:

Even at times of its strongest cohesion and integration, the subject teeters on the brink of this gaping abyss, which attracts (and also repulses) it. This abyss is the locus of the subject's generation and the place of its potential obliteration (Grosz 1990b: 89).

This abyss that Grosz talks about can be seen as the Lacanian real, the place where the self dissolves back into the undifferentiated chaotic whirl of sense impressions. The fear of this abyss is one of the triggers for the abject.

## **Fear and the abject**

The abject can also be closely linked to fear and phobic reactions. In fact terror is one of the defining traits of the abject. The subject fears that which is expelled but is still a part of them, and there is a significant level of fear even in the idea of the collapse of meaning and loss of differentiation between the 'I' and the 'other'.

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<sup>56</sup> The unconscious, as described Freud, is the "A conception – or any other mental element – which is now present to my consciousness may become absent the next moment, and may become present again, after an interval, unchanged, and as we say, from memory, not as a result from fresh perception by our senses. It is this fact that which we are accustomed to account for by the supposition that during the interval the conception has been present in our mind, although latent in consciousness...let us call 'conscious' the conception which is present to our consciousness and of which we are aware, and let this be the only meaning of the term 'conscious'. As for latent conceptions...let them be denoted by the term 'unconscious'. Thus an unconscious conception is one of which we are not aware, but the existence of which we are nevertheless ready to admit..." (Freud 1971:22).

Kristeva believes that people who are phobic are actually in fear of something other than the object of their phobia, she feels that what they are actually reacting to is a fear of the loss of boundaries that is implicit in the object. Kristeva asserts:

Out of the daze that has petrified him before the untouchable, impossible, absent body of the mother, a daze that has cut off his impulses from their objects, that is from their representations, out of such a daze he causes, along with loathing, one word to crop up – fear. The phobic has no other object than the object (1982: 6).

Kristeva's object occurs with the destabilisation of binaries and the crossing of boundaries: in many ways it is a very infantile reaction, in that it represents a return to the chora, to the breakdown of meaning. "...what is *object*, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses" (Kristeva 1982:2). This return to the undifferentiated world of infancy provokes revulsion, rejection and repulsion because of the level of fear inherent in the loss of this most comforting of safety nets – a world that makes sense, is explainable and logical. A world built on binaries beginning with the first one, self/mother. Kristeva, following the work of Lacan, posits this breakdown of meaning as a return of the real, a return to the unsymbolisable, to the 'kernel that resists dialectisation'. This return is terrifying in part because of the loss of the structures and 'rules' of meaning but also because of the loss of the 'I' or self implicit in such a return. A return to the chora, to the undifferentiated particular, is unsymbolisable precisely because of the loss of the general. In losing the self there is also a concurrent loss of the 'other' because they are defined in relation to each other. In the loss of the 'other' there is a loss of language because language is the structure of generality, that comes from the other, the external world, that allows for the expression, and differentiation, of the self.

Chapter One provided an exploration of the idea of the Lacanian real and in particular the Žižekian reworking of Lacan's ideas on the real. Here the 'traumatic encounter' has been further defined as a traumatic encounter that causes the

potential dissolution of the self because of the destabilisation of binaries that call all binaries into doubt, including the foundational binary between the self and the mother. This traumatic encounter also produces a great deal of fear because of the threat posed by the real to the concept of the self and here it can be seen how the abject and fear are interwoven because the fear inspires the revulsion and rejection which in turn fuel more fear.

The media-real is in many ways a concept centred on fear. Fear, rage and revulsion that is brought about by the collapse of meaning as the Real, in the form of the event of September 11, escaped from the symbolisable, from its own representation. The 'reality confusion', discussed in the previous chapter, and the media's fumbling for possible representations give evidence of this collapse. This event was confusing because the safe, socially constructed and shared reality was shattered. This eruption of the real through perceived reality was dumbfounding in the original sense of the word because there was literally nothing that could be said. Numerous examples of this fumbling for language can be found. Senator Dodd, a senior public official with many years experience, in his telephone interview produced some of the most unenlightening statements in his use of "obviously obvious" and "incredibly incredible". Various news presenters fared little better "...and, I, you know, I can't see, I can't see behind that smoke, obviously, as you can't either, the first tower in front has not changed, and we see this extraordinary and frightening scene behind us, of this second tower now just encased in smoke, what is behind it we, I, I cannot tell you" and again "One of the things that we don't know is that we do not know...". Possibly the best example comes from Mayor Giuliani saying "There's no possible way to describe it"<sup>57</sup>.

Even watching wasn't enough. It was vertiginous but mesmeric, it prompted revulsion but also a perverse form of longing. It was abject, and the more fiercely it was rejected, the more entangling it became. This fear of the loss of boundaries is

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<sup>57</sup> All of these quotes are taken from the primary research done for this thesis and have been transcribed from live-to-air news coverage of 11/9/2001.

again a fear of the loss of the 'I', a return to the place where there is no differentiation between the self and the other. It is this that causes the abject reaction rather than an actual object. The subject struggles violently against any return to the place where the self disappears.

Before discussing further this notion of fear, it is important to reiterate that all analysis of the mediation of the September 11 attacks is partial and fragmentary, that it can only ever be based on the representations available for analysis and therefore cannot be an analysis of the 'whole' event<sup>58</sup>. However it is still possible to analyse the interactions within this partial and fragmentary mediation and to note the factors that stand out as worthy of attention.

This factor of fear is very important to any analysis of the mediation of the September 11 attacks. It is important to reiterate though that all analysis of the mediation of the September 11 attacks is partial and fragmentary, that it can only ever be based on the representations available for analysis and therefore cannot be an analysis of the 'whole' event<sup>59</sup>. This is because of the level of fear that was generated as people overcame their initial reality confusion. This terror was, it is argued, sparked by that realisation that perceptions of reality are actually fleeting, fragile constructions, both permeable and destructible. The safety and certainty that was inherent in the 'Western world's' reality construction, shaped through representation, in the decades leading up to 2001 was torn asunder and this led to a great deal of fear and a sense of loss. It was also shocking because the representation couldn't cope with the re-emergence of the real, the event escaped from its representation. This fear and shock can be argued to be due to the loss of any sense of permanence, an abject fear that couldn't be symbolised, that couldn't be put into words, that escaped from any ability to control it by shaping it into words at

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<sup>58</sup> It is indeed, taking a Foucauldian position on truth, impossible for there to be an absolute truth or a 'whole' representation because all representation is partial fragmentary to begin with.

<sup>59</sup> It is indeed, taking a Foucauldian position on truth, impossible for there to be an absolute truth or a 'whole' representation because all representation is partial fragmentary to begin with.

that time. It was at its most basic level a fear of all meaning collapsing, of all differentiation ending. A fear of the loss of the 'I'.

## The abject and the borderline

Kristeva devotes a significant amount of time to discussing the interaction of the abject and the 'borderline'<sup>60</sup> patient (which began in Freudian terms as the borderline between neurosis and psychosis). These people, and she broadens this to include phobics as well, are seen as repressing things but in an unusual manner. What is being excluded is not done unconsciously in the way that a neurotic would deal with these issues, nor is there an absolute rejection inherent in the Freudian categorisation of the psychotic instead "The "unconscious" contents remain here *excluded* but in a strange fashion: not radically enough to allow for a secure differentiation between subject and object, and yet clearly enough for a defensive *position* to be established – one that implies a refusal but also a sublimating elaboration" (Kristeva 1982: 7). Again the convergence of the abject reaction with the blurring of boundaries and the challenge to binary oppositions can be discerned.

There is a freedom that comes with 'madness' and more so with accepting the madness within. The very definition of madness, of the 'not sane' is the loss of the

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<sup>60</sup> According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – 4<sup>th</sup> Edition – Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR) Borderline Personality Disorder is defined as "A pervasive pattern of instability of interpersonal relationships, self-image, and affects, and marked impulsivity beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts, as indicated by five (or more) of the following:

- (1) frantic attempts to avoid real or imagined abandonment **Note:** Do not include suicidal or self-mutilating behaviour covered in Criterion 5.
- (2) A pattern of unstable and intense interpersonal relationships characterized by alternating between extremes of idealization and devaluation.
- (3) Identity disturbance: markedly and persistently unstable self-image or sense of self
- (4) Impulsivity in at least two areas that are potentially self damaging (e.g., spending, sex, substance abuse, reckless driving, binge eating) **Note:** Do not include suicidal or self-mutilating behaviour covered in Criterion 5.
- (5) Recurrent suicidal behaviour, gestures, or threats, or self-mutilating behaviour
- (6) Affective instability due to a marked reactivity of mood (e.g., intense episodic dysphoria, irritability, or anxiety usually lasting a few hours and only rarely more than a few days)
- (7) Chronic feelings of emptiness
- (8) Inappropriate, intense anger or difficulty controlling anger (e.g., frequent displays of temper, constant anger, recurrent physical fights)
- (9) Transient, stress-related paranoid ideation or severe dissociative symptoms" (2000:710).

boundaries between 'I' and other, of any kind of differentiation between the self and the environment and from the beginnings of the formation of the ego this is what the subject learns to fear and reject<sup>61</sup>. Before the formation of the ego there was nothing to lose so there is no fear of this loss, once there is a 'self' to lose the subject can become fearful and protective. In some forms of madness there is a level of letting go, of not having to (or not being able to) hold on to this fear of the loss of the self. The subject is no longer bound by the binaries that control the rest of society and within this there is a freedom and a pleasure in being free, there is a pleasure in letting go. However it is *jouissance* because the only way of understanding this pleasure, of really feeling it, is to have an understanding of what has been lost and this requires a return to the self at least in part. Here the pleasure of letting go can only be realised in its reverse because, without a sense of self and with no differentiation between the interior and the exterior, there can be no understanding of this pleasure. With the return to the self, even a reconstituted self, there is a return to the fear, a return to abjection, in marking and remarking the boundaries of the self. It is in this see-sawing motion between losing and regaining the self that the borderline lives.

In relation to the concept of the media-real and the mediation of the September 11 attacks what is important here is this 'see-sawing' motion between the losing and regaining of the self. The rupturing of the representations of a shared societal reality can be argued to lead to a distancing of the self or a momentary loss of the self as the boundaries of perception become detached from the structures within which they had been cemented. As form and meaning were applied to the raw coverage of the event this vertiginous loss of shared perception was slowly rebuilt and this allowed for the rebuilding of the self. The self here was rebuilt through the media representations of shared community and collective identity and, because the self is

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<sup>61</sup> As mentioned in Chapter two, Lacan sees schizophrenia in terms of a break in the signifying chain. The schizophrenic in this formulation experiences a series of pure and unrelated presents in times. There is no past nor is there a future. No action is related to any other action (Cited in Jameson 1991).

always defined in terms of the other, the depersonalisation and demonization of the 'other' that had caused the event to occur.

Kristeva talks here in some depth about the 'exile' or the borderline person in terms of their intimate relationship with the abject:

The one by whom the abject exists is thus a *deject* who places (himself), situates (himself), and therefore *strays* instead of getting his bearings, desiring, belonging, or refusing. Situationist in a sense, and not without laughter - since laughing is a way of placing or displacing abjection. Necessarily dichotomous, somewhat Manichaeian, he divides, excludes, and without, properly speaking, wishing to know his abjections is not at all unaware of them, thus casting within himself the scalpel that carries out his separations (Kristeva 1982:8).

Later this chapter further explores Kristeva's work with the abject and the way that it relates to the idea of the ludic and laughter, however for the moment it is important to note that Kristeva is describing here a most curious relationship. An awareness without knowing, a knowledge without understanding.

It is this feeling that can be seen to link to the mesmerism of the September 11 coverage. Language failed. There was a struggle for meaning when (on some levels) there was none. For a short time the media representations that struggled to create meaning allowed for an experience of the abject in the way that the borderline person does. As Kristeva puts it: "Instead of sounding himself as to his "being," he does so concerning his place: "Where am I?" instead of "Who am I?" For the space that engrosses the deject, the excluded, is never *one*, nor *homogenous*, nor *totalizable*, but essentially divisible, foldable, and catastrophic" (1982:8). It can be argued that there was a loss of the self in the moment. As the perceived shared reality foundered in the excess of the real there was a struggle to reject and repel the abject *jouissance* that arose out of the loss of the illusion of control.

## *Critiques of Kristeva*

There have been a number of significant critiques of Kristeva's work, probably the most influential coming from Judith Butler's work. Butler in her article 'The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva' (1989) argues that although Kristeva claims to "expose the limits of Lacan's theory by revealing the semiotic dimension of language that it includes" (1989:104) she actually reproduces Lacan's adherence to the law of the father. Butler is particularly adamant that Kristeva's neglect or denigration of homosexual women constitutes an abandonment of feminist principles and a return to the patriarchal dismissal of the feminine inherent to Lacanian psychoanalysis. She argues:

Kristeva makes several theoretical moves which end up consolidating the power of the Symbolic and paternal authority generally. She defends a maternal instinct as a pre-discursive biological necessity, thereby naturalizing a specific cultural configuration of maternity. In her use of psychoanalytic theory, she ends up claiming the cultural unintelligibility of lesbianism. Her distraction between the semiotic and the Symbolic operates to foreclose a cultural investigation into the genesis of precisely those feminine principles for which she claims a pre-discursive, naturalistic ontology (1989:104).

Butler comments that Kristeva, instead of making a case for the possibility of poetic language as a recovery of the maternal within language, actually re-inscribes and denigrates the feminine within language. In tying all meaning making to the masculine Symbolic, according to Butler, Kristeva is actually reinforcing the idea that women's access to meaning in language comes through their relationship to the male and therefore for those women choosing to forego this connection there is no position for them to be 'culturally intelligible' (Butler 1989:111).

Other feminist theorists such as Nancy Fraser have made similar claims and have deplored the fact that instead of proposing new theories and ways of understanding

that are explicitly feminist in orientation, all Kristeva has done is add to dysfunctional theories such as Lacan's:

The...most serious problem that I want to discuss is Kristeva's additive approach to theorizing. By this I mean her penchant for remedying theoretical problems by simply adding to deficient theories instead of scrapping or overhauling them (Fraser 1990:95).

These critiques may certainly be valid and particularly in terms of the Feminist critique of Kristeva these criticisms are cogent and underline a significant weakness in Kristeva's work. However, what is important to remember here is that this thesis is taking a 'Foucault's toolbox' methodological approach to the case being studied and that this means using the concepts that are useful to the theoretical discussion, without necessarily buying in to the full range of ideas expressed in an individual author's work. Indeed in many cases, work from different periods of time by the same author may display very different characteristics and ideas. In this case Kristeva's concept of the abject is useful because of the way that it allows for an understanding of the 'push and pull' of the representations of the event of September 11. The abject allows for an understanding of the visceral reaction to the loss of the symbolic because it is the reaction of the subject to drawing close to the limits of discourse.

### ***The limits of discourse - The abject uncanny or the uncanny abject.***

This next section of the chapter looks at two key interrelated issues: Firstly, what occurs at the limits of discourse, how might such an idea be theoretically framed and how this relates to the concept of the media-real; and secondly, how to establish the critical differences between the uncanny, the abject and the real.

In examining these issues the work of Derek Hook, who not only collapses the uncanny and the abject together but also the Lacanian real in his exploration of the limits of discourse, will be explored. What this section argues is that while the idea of there being limits to discourse is useful, and is something that will be pursued in this thesis, that collapsing the concepts of the uncanny, the abject and the Lacanian real together produces a result that is imprecise, difficult to apply and prone to the slippage of meaning.

### **The limits of discourse**

Hook's article 'Language and the Flesh: Psychoanalysis and the Limits of Discourse' (2003) argues that there are limits to the usefulness of the concept of discourse and that there are times and events that exceed the discursive frame. In particular Hook makes the point that the body itself is one of the things that exists at the outer borders of the discursive (2003). Talking about bodies can often make people squeamish, talking about the limits of the body, the border areas between the body and not the body, between what was once the body and is no longer, becomes abject. Trying to symbolise the spaces around this borderland is fraught with difficulty and social taboo and it is not just the body that can reside in this borderland.

In the case of September 11 both event and mediation belong to this borderland. The event, in and of itself, was abject. It crossed boundaries, destabilised binaries and eventually erupted through its own mediation as the excess implicit in the notion of the real escaped from representation. Curiously though, this escape could not have occurred without the representation in the first place because the mediation itself had a fundamental impact on the event. To begin with, terrorist acts are about communication. One of the aims of the September 11 attacks was to produce the kind of coverage that was caused. Without the possibility of such coverage it is highly unlikely that the attacks would have gone ahead. The second level of interpenetration is in the human subjects caught up in the event. The

presence of a camera changes people's relationship to an event. There is a recognition that the self is being re-presented and this invokes, recalling Foucault on the panopticon, a different mode of the presentation of the self.

An example of this relationship between the mediation and event can be seen in some of the later coverage of the September 11 attacks where the footage is fed from a young male doctor, Dr Mark Heath, who was in downtown Manhattan at the time of the collapse of the towers<sup>62</sup>. The camera shows a cloud of dust and debris overtaking the cameraman as he dives for cover under a parked car and the camera goes dark. However the camera operator is talking to the audience telling us how he is feeling and trying to describe his environment even though he can see very little and words keep failing him. After a few seconds the camera operator gets up and informs the camera that he is going to go and see if he can help anyone caught in the collapse and in some of the repetitions this is where the clip ends, while in others it continues through to him offering to help various emergency personnel in setting up a triage station or in finding casualties.

By talking to the camera the whole way through the clip the subject (the camera operator) has changed the event not only for himself (and the people in his immediate vicinity) but also for all of those who witness the event through an electronic mediation. In effect what the audience is seeing is a part of the event that is not part of the event because it is a representation of the event, but this representation is having a direct effect on the subject's (both the camera operator and the audience more broadly) perception of the event itself. The borders between representation and event are here very murky and blurred and there is also the issue that the subject's attempts to place himself discursively keep failing, keep falling short, keep trailing behind the now of what is occurring. He keeps repeating "I'm a Doctor, I can help" but because of the presence of the camera he is unable to

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<sup>62</sup> CNN 11/9/2001, taken from original primary research of thesis.

render effective assistance and the other emergency workers seem to take little notice of him.

This idea of the limit of discourse can also be related back to the Lacanian concept of the rim, which was discussed earlier in this chapter. The rim is the border territory between the body and the outside, between the self and the other, and it is fitting that it also be used here to describe the border territory where discourse fades and fails and where binaries become unstable and unusable. One of the markers of this kind of border, or limit, is the fact that borders and limits start to become fluid. There is no hard and fast line between the body and the not-body; in Deleuzian terms it is a process rather than a fixed point. Things being expelled from the body are in the process of becoming not-body in the same way that things being ingested are in the process of becoming part of the body. In this way, while we might talk about the limits of discourse: this cannot be simplistically thought of in terms of a strict 'line' beyond which discourse no longer exists but rather there is a fading out of discourse as we approach the realm of the real, the pre-discursive undifferentiated chaotic real. It is important to remember that this idea of the permeability of borders is not a comforting one when social constructions of reality use as building blocks discreet and firmly delineated binary oppositions. This indeterminacy is actually uncomfortable and is one of the key markers of the rise of the media-real because what is being acknowledged by this 'sense of wrongness', this uncanny blending and bleeding of ideas and categories, is the arbitrary nature of the socially constructed perception of reality.

### **Collapsing the uncanny/object/real**

Of particular relevance to this thesis is Hook's use of the uncanny, the abject and the Lacanian Real as describing, in part, these limits to discourse. In doing so Hook argues that the uncanny and the abject are actually describing the same thing, and

that the Lacanian real, although not reducible to the uncanny and/or the abject, shares many of the same characteristics. He argues:

This body, that proves so elusive to the grasp of representation, is problematic also in the realm of psychic affects. This figure is able to induce a variety of visceral experiences – moments variously described by Freud as the uncanny, by Kristeva as abjection, by Lacan as the Real – reactions of nausea or dread or horror that arise exactly when we confront the limits of the ‘discursive empire’, when meaning break down and signification fails (2003: 44).

A problem occurs here from the very beginning. There are significant differences between the feelings of nausea and horror just to begin with. Although all three of these concepts do occur at the limits of discourse, they spring from different causal pathways to some extent and they differ markedly in terms of the feelings that they induce. The fear and a ‘feeling of wrongness’ described by the uncanny cannot be accurately mapped over the violent rejection and revulsion implicit in the abject while the chaotic dissonance and terror provoked by the irruption of the Lacanian real is again of a different magnitude and order than the other feelings just described.

Angela Connelly in her article ‘Psychoanalytic theory in times of terror’ (2003) provides a very clear delineation of how she sees the difference between the abject and the uncanny. In discussing the differences she turns to the horror film and the monster to show how she sees the difference between them.

In uncanny horror, the monster represents the return of the repressed, that which was once familiar and is now long forgotten, ejected from consciousness... In abject horror the monster represents the return of the Real (Lacan) or the Abject (Kristeva), all that lies outside the symbolic order. In abject horror the monster is no longer even vaguely familiar... (Connelly 2003:419).

Connolly's key point is that the difference between the uncanny and the abject is to be found in the familiarity of feeling that the uncanny is based around while the abject does not have this correlation.

It is interesting to note that in the above quote Connolly appears to conflate the real with the abject and places both of them outside of the symbolic, whereas this thesis has argued that the real is what exists beyond the symbolisable while the abject appears at the borders of discourse, at the borders of the symbolisable. This means that the abject 'lives' in the grey area between the symbolic on one hand and the real on the other. This is a position borne out by Kristeva's description of the abject as drawing the subject *towards* the place where meaning collapses (Kristeva 1982:2). This is the reason for the repulsion and disgust it provokes (alongside fascination and desire), it threatens to return the subject to the place beyond the symbolisable, to the real.

Hook does allow that each of the theorists described were approaching the issue in markedly different ways and that there are significant differences between the concepts. Nonetheless he also makes the point that

...there is also a strand of continuity across their respective approaches, certainly inasmuch as each emphasizes the role of the body and corporeality both in the constitution of the speaking subject and of that subject's ability to produce, through signification, coherent forms of meaning and identity (Hook 2003:44).

This strand of continuity is certainly acknowledged in a number of places within this thesis however later in the same article Hook takes this further than just a 'strand of continuity'. He collapses all three together when he says "...a near encounter of the uncanny, abject, Real..." (Hook 2003:61). In so doing he allows for no differentiation of meaning between the three in terms of their relationship to discourse.

One key difference between the abject and the uncanny put forward by this thesis is that while the abject can be seen, tasted, smelt, heard and provokes a visceral revulsion, the uncanny is more cerebral. Although both concepts deal with fear there is something more primal and powerful about the abject. Whilst the uncanny can give 'goosebumps' and that thrill of horror, it doesn't produce nausea or prompt the same kind of forceful rejection and repulsion that the abject provides. The abject is by definition something that the subject violently excludes, that its mere existence threatens the subject's, at the same time as being a necessary precondition for that existence and exerting a powerful fascination over the subject. The uncanny does not imply the same level of threat to the subject's very existence, in some ways while the uncanny can threaten sanity the abject can erase the very seat of the conscious, merging it back into the unconscious and in that merger losing all sense of differentiation from the other.

LeDrew argues that: "Kristeva's analysis of the subject demonstrates that there is no one identifiable subject, no "core" of the subject as there is in Freud, but a fractured subject that experiences the abject when faced with the blurring of the distinction of I and Other" (LeDrew n.d). This threat to the 'I' is what inspires the feelings of dread and disgust in Kristeva's abject. By positing a 'core' to the subject within Freud this visceral reaction is not replicated because the integrity of the self is not threatened. In other words the integration of the self in Freud is less unstable, less easily threatened by external events. In terms of the uncanny then this means that the concept refers to a less serious issue for the self to deal with as opposed to the Kristevan subject whose sense of self is inherently fractured and unstable always under threat from the real, always existing in a state of abjection.

Hook's usage of these three concepts together in many ways provides an illustration of one of the 'convergences' that the media-real is built from. By showing how the abject, the uncanny and the Lacanian real all occur, and have as their subject matter, that which is at the limits of the symbolisable, it can be argued that there is a level of similarity in certain reactions to stimuli that invoke such feelings. In some ways

there is almost a continuum or a scale along which these concepts occur, even this is however too simplistic because there are fundamental differences between these ideas that are lost when their meanings are collapsed. The uncanny cannot be simply equated with the real anymore than a photograph can be said to show you the entirety of an event that is its subject. In a similar way nor can the uncanny be merged with the abject, nor the abject with the real. These concepts may have related aspects and all spring from psychoanalytic theory but this does not mean that they can simply be equated as representing the same circumstances.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has looked at Kristeva's concept of the abject and how this concept fits into the model of the media-real. The chapter began with an exploration of the major themes that Kristeva uses when discussing the abject. The first to be examined was the idea of the abject corpse and how this relates to the representation of the event of September 11. What was of particular note in this regard was the lack or absence of the corpse in the coverage where censorship, both by reporters themselves and by the stations later on, meant that although verbal descriptors of the carnage were frequent, very few visual references remained.

Following on from this discussion the chapter looked at the idea of the embodied abject or the grotesque and the way that the grotesque is useful to a discussion of the concept of the abject because of the embodiedness that it represents and the way in which it prompts the same repulsion as the abject because it challenges the neat, clean and purified notions of the Western aesthetic ideal.

Next the chapter explored the idea of the abject as part of the 'primal repression' associated with the chora and the beginnings of the separation from the maternal, and hence the beginning of selfhood. However this separation is never complete, never total and that it is in this threat posed by the possibility of the loss of the self,

or a collapse back in to the maternal, that can be seen in the abject. The abject is hence something that is violently and painfully rejected because it is both within the subject and external to the subject at the same time. More complexity is added however when considering the position on the abject that Kristeva takes when she describes the abject as also producing '*jouissance*' or a painful, violent joy or release, and this is particularly tied to the borderline category of mental dysfunction.

Further to this the chapter also looked at the relationship between the abject, art and religion. Of vital importance in this relationship are the notions of catharsis and purification, and although these two concepts are related they are not necessarily the same thing. Kristeva posits that both art and religion are reactions to the abject; they are 'coping mechanisms' by which the subject can manage to negotiate this idea of the 'enemy within'.

Included in this chapter was a brief critique of Kristeva's work by a number of leading feminist writers. Butler's point, that Kristeva's use of Lacan leaves no place for sensical feminine use of the symbolic, unless mediated by the masculine was noted as was Fraser's criticism that Kristeva has not rectified any of the problems in Lacanian theory from a feminist viewpoint. Whilst it has been acknowledged that these criticisms may well be valid the methodological base of this thesis and its appropriation of concepts from a range of sources due to their utility mean that an overarching engagement with every theorist and all of their work is impractical.

Hook's arguments about the nature of the concepts of the uncanny, the abject and the Lacanian real are also examined and it is argued that a simple collapsing of the terms does not do justice to the complexity of their meanings as posited by Freud, Lacan and Kristeva. However it is also acknowledged that these concepts all do occur at the limits of discourse, that is, at the limits of the symbolisable, and in many ways this convergence (with the addition of spectacle) is what the media-real is about – how the mediation of an event became more than the event itself, even though the representation was the first thing shattered by the 'realness' of the event

itself. This event showed the point where language fails, the point where the limits of discourse have been reached and it is no longer possible to symbolize what is occurring because of its relationship with this Lacanian real.

Throughout the chapter there is reference to specific points within the media coverage of the September 11 attacks that illustrate the action of the abject in propelling this event through its representation into the realm of the unsymbolisable.

The third of the forces that come together to form the media-real – the abject - is of significant importance to the concept of the media-real. The abject provides an impetus to the media-real that the convergence of the spectacle and the uncanny cannot. This impetus is in part formed from the impetus given to the abject in repelling it, even though it is always embodied by a subject. This constant pushing away adds more and more acceleration to the concept of the media-real. Not only do these concepts flow together in the witnessing of such a catastrophic event as this convergence in and of itself begins the movement away from the limits of discourse, the limits of the symbolisable. But also because the abject is something which is actively repelled and excluded, an even greater momentum is added to the convergent forces of the media-real.

The final chapter of this thesis will explore the conduit of unpreparedness and the way that the coverage of September 11 differed from standard televisual conventions. In doing so this chapter puts forward the argument that one of the reasons for the way that the representation of this event shaped what possible societal perceptions of reality were available was that it was so different from usual television representation. The chapter proposes two subconduits. The first one looks at the issues of narrative structure, framing and genre while the second looks at the breaking of televisual conventions. Overall the conduit of unpreparedness adds to the media-real model by providing the final impetus to the convergent

forces and a pathway through which they travel to erupt through, and escape from the representation of the event.



## **Chapter Five – The Conduit – Unpreparedness**

The first four chapters of this thesis introduced the key concepts and characteristics that can be seen as the building blocks of the media-real. Each of the ideas and concepts that have been examined are a fundamental part of this examination of how the representation of this event shaped what possible societal perceptions of reality were available and thus lays the foundation for the necessity of a new conceptual model for the understanding of the mediation of catastrophic events.

Chapter One problematised the notion of the event and discussed the social constructivist perspective on understanding reality as well as examining the concept of the Lacanian real. It then proceeded to explore the concept of discourse and the Foucauldian understanding of ‘truth’ as well as Derrida’s use of deconstruction as a form of analysis. Finally it explored Benjamin’s theories on authenticity.

Chapters Two, Three and Four provided the three key forces running through the coverage that are put forward as the most significant contributors to the formation of the proposed model of catastrophic communication that the media-real represents. These chapters demonstrate how no single concept or idea can be seen as the sole reason for the difference between the coverage of this event and others. The argument throughout these chapters is a cumulative one where it is the convergence of these forces that causes the representation of this event be so influential in shaping what possible societal perceptions of reality were available.

This final chapter adds to this picture by identifying and analysing the pathway or conduit by which the convergent forces were accelerated to the point where the representation of the event erupted through, and shattered, the societally shared

perception of reality. In keeping with Kristeva's analogy of an eruptive wound<sup>63</sup>, or indeed of a volcano, the convergent forces that have been dealt with in preceding chapters need some kind of pathway, and an added impetus, to reach the 'surface' and hence escape from their representation. This pathway is produced in the following conduit, Unpreparedness and its two main subconduits; 'indeterminate narrative structure, framing and genre characteristics', and 'breaking televisual conventions'.

### ***Unpreparedness***

Unpreparedness is an integral element in the formation of the media-real. The event of September 11 highlights the constructed nature of more usual media representations because of how different it is to the coverage of other events. This is because there is such a difference between the unprepared nature of the coverage of this event and the standard smooth and scheduled media framing. This is important because there was little time during the representation of this event for a coherent frame to be constructed around the event to contain it within dominant representational strategies.

This conduit has been termed 'Unpreparedness' because, it is argued, this term best categorises the differences between the televisual coverage of September 11 and other televised events. The elements that make up this conduit can all be argued to have come about, or are at least caused to some degree, by the unpreparedness of the media to deal with this event. While the differences that are examined throughout this chapter can each be shown to differ from more usual television conventions, it is the cumulative impact of these differences that significantly differentiates the coverage of September 11 from that of other events.

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<sup>63</sup> Kristeva talks about the abject in terms of an eruptive wound complete with blood and pus that repulses us but at the same time fascinates (1984) as advised in Chapter Five.

One of the key issues for this conduit of 'unpreparedness' is the immediacy and powerfulness of the 'live' coverage. Foundational to the arguments made within this chapter is that the transmission of this event, practically 'live' across the world, meant that there was no time for the more usual types of televisual narrative, framing and genres to be built. Additionally it meant that many of the standard televisual conventions could not be adhered to. Instead, because of the unpreparedness of the media for this event, it was transmitted in a far more 'raw' state than what is usually seen.

One of the most important prerequisites for the emergence of the media-real is 'the erasure of space and time', or what Paul Virilio refers to as the replacement for democracy, 'dromocracy', or the supremacy of speed (2001). He argues: "...it becomes increasingly evident that we live in a world no longer based on geographic expanse but on a temporal distance constantly being decreased by our transportation, transmission and tele-action capacities" (Virilio 2001:84). Visual images and their narrative frames can now be transmitted instantaneously to any corner of the globe. This means that there is a stretching and breaking of the temporal and spatial rules that have previously governed the flow of information between various nation states and peoples.

In terms of the media-real, this means that the role of the image has been amplified and inflated as it reaches an ever-greater audience. As discussed throughout this thesis, the media-real is a concept that occurs with the convergence of three key forces the first of these being spectacle. Spectacle, although not limited to the visual image, is dominated by it, hence the importance of any amplification of the power of the image. By raising the power of the image the importance of spectacle is also raised leading to a further imperative for the reproduction and transmission of such images.

It can be argued that audiences feel 'connected' to both *where* and *what* is happening when it is live or has the appearance of occurring 'at this moment'. As MacGregor puts it: "To this day there is an assumption that live means urgent, important and up to the minute" (1995:85). The audience are more involved because there is a sense of being exposed to the same reality, at the same time as those directly involved in the event and also to the rest of the people living the event vicariously. As Couldry has commented in relation to the claims to liveness by new media, these developments spread the ideology of liveness as access to a shared social reality across all media, as opposed to just television (2004:97). There is a level of identification that can be discerned through sharing a space temporally even though there is a spatial distance. This level of connection can be seen as evolving out of a loss of the traditional ideas of community<sup>64</sup> and in the current media environment in Western nations where one of the primary ways to 'imagine' yourself as part of the 'community'<sup>65</sup> of the nation is through media representations of the shared values and ways of understanding reality. This allows for the viewing public of a given incident to potentially feel like they are sharing something with every other person watching, or experiencing, that same temporal moment.

The liveness discussed above is intertwined with the technological ability to transmit, and receive, these representations. In doing so there is a sharing of both the place and the time of the event as well as the event itself. The idea of dromocracy, and the importance placed on both the visual generally, and the visual spectacle in particular, within Western society, means that the transmission of images such as those captured on September 11 are assured of a speedy and extensive transmission around the world.

The convergent forces discussed in the preceding chapters of this thesis, due to the factors discussed above, were transmitted instantaneously across the globe thus

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<sup>64</sup> What Oldenburg (1977) also described as the loss of the third place, the place outside of work or the home that was important for connections among people in the locale. He felt that instead of using this third place people were increasingly isolated from each other and spent much of their time relaxing in their own homes instead of with others in their community.

<sup>65</sup> See Anderson's concept of the imagined community explored in Chapter Two.

imparted an acceleration (and level of exposure) that would not have been possible without it. It is the provision of this 'acceleration' provided by dromocracy and by the corresponding shrinking of distance and time that is a contributory factor in allowing the event to escape its mediation and become the media-real. This acceleration described in the concept of dromocracy, as well as the other technological factors that will be discussed in this chapter, indicates the potential for events, and representations of events, of this magnitude to happen more frequently. In this case there is significant need for a new model of the communication of catastrophic media events that allows for a multistage analysis of the representations. This is because earlier models are either too simplistic -such as the transmission model - or too focussed within a single theoretical stream to be able to provide a nuanced and detailed analysis that crosses disciplinary lines and can provide an adequate exploration of the range of issues that such representations present.

The conduit, Unpreparedness, is made up of two smaller pathways or subconduits. The first subconduit 'indeterminate narrative structure, framing and genre characteristics' looks at the way in which the narrative structure of the representation of September 11 broke from the more usual narrative structures associated with the news. Additionally it examines the indeterminacy of the genre characteristics of the coverage and the impact that this had on audience expectations. The second subconduit, 'breaking televisual conventions' examines the significant differences that occurred between more usual televisual coverage of catastrophic events, such as those discussed in Chapter Two, and the representation of September 11. Each of these subconduits provides a greater and greater impetus to the convergent forces that are flowing through these pathways and it is in this interaction of the major forces and the propulsion provided by the subconduits that allows for the formation of the media-real.

### ***Subconduit I – Indeterminate narrative structure and genre characteristics***

The first part of this subconduit deals with the lack or the paucity of the narrative structure of the early coverage of September 11. This subconduit is important because it points to how unpreparedness plays such a significant role in the production of the media-real. By lacking a firm 'story' or a firm frame for the story the coverage is indeterminate and nebulous, allowing for a far greater level of personal interpretation than is frequently associated with the commodified news that television provides. This lack of a 'preferred reading' amplifies the indeterminacy and creates a 'feedback loop' where greater and greater degrees of uncertainty are combined.

Before embarking into the analysis of the narrative structures, frames and genres of September 11 a few points about the 'reading' of media texts need to be made. Stuart Hall in his article 'Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse' (2007) describes three ways of understanding how audiences make meaning from media texts and how the texts themselves position the audience. These are the dominant code, the negotiated code and the oppositional code. Hall sees the making of meaning primarily in terms of the encoding and decoding of messages, though not in a linear 'transmission model' way. Hall's model places the encoding – discourse – decoding equation within a paradigm where both encoder and decoder rest upon frameworks of knowledge, relations of production and technical infrastructure. Nor is there an implied linearity, as exists in the 'transmission model', between the encoding and the decoding, the encoded meanings are not necessarily the decoded meanings (Hall 2007).

A dominant or preferred reading is one where the decoded message matches reasonably closely to the encoded message, that is that the meaning intended by the producer of the message, that includes all of the latent, naturalised meanings, is the one that is received by the audience. As Hall argues: "...we say dominant because

there exists a pattern of 'preferred readings'; and these both have the institutional/political/ideological order imprinted in them and have themselves become institutionalised" (2007:483). The decoding in this case is a process whereby "...the viewer takes the connoted meaning...and decodes the message in terms of the reference code in which it was encoded, we might say that the viewer is *operating inside the dominant code*" (Hall 2007: 485).

A negotiated reading occurs when the 'reader' takes on some but not all of the intended meanings, that some parts of the message are interpreted in alternative ways.

Decoding within the *negotiated version* contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements: it acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions...while...it makes its own ground rules – it operates with exceptions to the rule (Hall 2007:486).

This kind of decoding implies the possibility of both deliberate and accidental aberrations from the dominant intended message. Elements of the message may just be misunderstood while others may be reinterpreted to fit within an alternative viewpoint.

Finally an oppositional reading can occur when:

...a viewer perfectly...understand[s] both the literal and the connotative inflection given by the discourse but...decode[s] the message in a *globally* contrary way. He or she detotalises the message in the preferred code in order to retotalise the message within some alternative framework of reference (Hall 2007:487).

In other words the oppositional reading is frequently a factor of deliberation. The preferred or dominant reading is understood but rejected and replaced by a different interpretation of the same message.

The concept of these three levels of 'reading' media texts is useful to the argument raised in this chapter; that the standard structures, frames, codes and conventions of television news were either absent or not applied in the usual way during the coverage of the September 11 attacks. Due to the absence for much of the early coverage of any singular 'dominant reading', a multiplicity of readings were possible, and, it is argued, gave rise to some of the reality confusion and confusion of genre and structure that characterises the initial coverage of the attacks.

The media-real comes about with the unanticipated eruption of the real into the mediated world of the media and hence is non-narratisable at that time. Under these circumstances there is a lack of time for the usual planned style of a news narrative to be developed. This results in a paucity of narrative structure and framing which in turn makes the event more prone to multiple interpretations and reality confusion because there is an absence of the accustomed structures. No clear guidelines on the preferred reading of the event are provided. As time passes on from September 11, 2001 much effort is expended in retrospectively producing a narrative structure and frame for the original images of the event. As Uriccio noted in regards to September 11: "...news coverage shifted from responding to uncertain events to imposing form and meaning upon them" (2001:1). This 'shift' is a gradual process throughout the initial coverage and becomes more and more prominent after the first 24 hours. This shift can also be seen within the language used by the presenters. In the first hours after the attacks there is a hesitancy to the reporting, frequently the anchors say 'this is unconfirmed' or 'this is yet to be confirmed' (abc 11/9/2001; BBC 11/9/2001). After the first 24 hours the 'facts' of the attacks have been established, in so far as there were no more actual attacks, and the reporting is accordingly more definite.

Framing is one of the ways that this gradual imposition of form and meaning can be seen to happen. Framing is a very important analytical tool in examining how the media influence the range of potential meanings that are available to the audience. In terms of news framing it can often be seen to be occurring because of "the

operation of journalistic rules and news typifications or rituals” (Johnson-Cartee 2005:253). In fact this ‘framing’ often has the effect, according to Chibnall, of: “ensur[ing] that large segments of the social world are systematically excluded from representation and discussion in the media and thus public knowledge of those segments is effectively impoverished” (1981:87). The coverage of September 11 did not, at least initially, have the usual level of framing. This lack of a firm frame, and the lack of many of the journalistic practices that go with it is partially responsible for the lack of genre characteristics and narrative structures that this footage bears witness to.

Media theory takes a very specific definition of framing, applying framing to the way that the media create frames for particular issues. “[t]o frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (Entmann 1993: 52). Framing is a key issue in the overall argument of this thesis because framing is one of the ways that representations of social reality are shared and it was this process that was disrupted in the initial coverage of the September 11 attacks. It is this issue of the failure of dominant representational strategies that is the focus of this chapter.

This unusual lack of framing in the early coverage was one of the factors that provided the impetus for this research. Framing is not a concept that implies monolithic control, yet societal ‘molding’ is one of its outcomes. This does not mean that there is some form of ‘top down’ control but that rather the media is one of the societal institutions that help to form and mold the possible and acceptable viewpoints for members of that society. In so doing they produce what might be referred to as a symbolic reality frame in that the cumulative effect of all of the ‘frames’ that we are exposed to can produce a particular way of understanding the world. As Nelson et al elaborate:

By framing social and political issues in specific ways, news organisations declare the underlying causes and likely consequences of a problem and establish criteria for evaluating potential remedies of the problem (1997:567-568).

The issue of framing is important to the overall argument of this thesis because there was no frame pointing to a preferred reading rather, it is argued, this lack of a frame meant that there is a curious hesitancy in the early footage, as if it didn't know what it is yet either.

The gradual imposition of framing began to pick up greater impetus as time went by. More and more shots that displayed US flags began to appear as well as stories of courage and self-sacrifice<sup>66</sup>. In terms of the actual coverage there is a definite shift in the framing paradigm of what is being shown between merely reacting to the event to trying to control the event through representation. It is only in the first phase<sup>67</sup>, in the reactive phase, that we see the presence of the media-real because it is here that the representation has escaped from the tight controls normally present in the institutional discourse of the news.

Television News is produced on a schedule. In general, news stories are extremely edited visual pieces, sometimes with a 'reporter on location', at others with a reporter voice over. They tend to last for between 30 seconds and two minutes with occasional crossbacks to the anchors in the newsroom if the story is considered important enough. As Weiss and Singer explain:

The half-hour nightly network newscasts actually contain about 22 minutes of news. They usually consist of five or six stories with film (usually taped) about the day's events, one or two features, and perhaps a dozen stories in which the anchorperson reads the story accompanied by still pictures or

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<sup>66</sup> The footage analysed for this thesis was drawn from the first 48 hours of television coverage of September 11, 2001. The stations examined were: CNN, BBC, abc (US) and CBS. Six half-hour segments, from CNN, BBC and abc's (US), coverage of the first 12 hours, were additionally analysed on a shot by shot basis.

<sup>67</sup> This 'first phase' of the coverage lasts approximately until after the attacks has stopped occurring, so after the crashing of flight 93 into a field in Pennsylvania.

charts in the background (sometimes called 'tell' stories). Tell stories tend to be short, 30 seconds or less. The average story on network news is about 100 seconds (Weiss & Singer 1988:10).

Television news is also a narrative, so much so that we still refer to 'news stories', even though as Johnson-Cartee points out journalists are "uncomfortable when academicians or social critics refer to their products as either stories or narratives" (2005:156). This point is taken up further in Woodward's argument that:

The word *story* is such a basic descriptor of a news event that we tend to forget that it defines a unique way of organizing ideas. Storytelling involves the organisation of facts and human motives in a definite sequence of stages. To tell a story is to set up a general structure for organizing a set of actors and events in ways that meet certain prior expectations (1997:76-77).

As the above quote illustrates even the most 'factual' of television genres is still structured around a certain manner of relating events and this 'manner' or structure leaves its imprint on both what is told, how it is told, and the subsequent range of possible meanings that can be made from it. Woodward goes on to make the point that:

The story format defines actors moving through a sequence of events filled (usually) with victims, villains, and heroes...The story format exists in most general news reporting because it is an efficient structure for reducing complexity to a minimum, and for collapsing a long time frame into a short and interesting summary (1997:76-77).

What is so interesting with the coverage of September 11 is that it does not conform to many, if any, of the characteristics quoted above. In the earliest coverage there is no villain, nor for that matter are there any heroes because at this point in time it is believed that it may have been an accident<sup>68</sup>. This, however only lasts until the second plane crashes into the north tower of the WTC, which occurs approximately

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<sup>68</sup> For the first 15 minutes of the coverage, until the arrival of the second plane, the CNN and abc network titles bars read 'plane crashes into WTC' (CNN 11/9/01, abc 11/9/01).

fifteen minutes after the first plane. At this time it became obvious that this was no accident<sup>69</sup>. With the arrival of the second plane the narrativisation of the hunt for the 'bad guys', for the people who had committed these acts, begins. President Bush's rhetoric, somewhat akin to the dialogue of a 'western' film when he talks about 'hunting down those folks responsible' gives evidence of this (Bush, CBS 11/9/2001). A little later, perhaps fifteen to thirty minutes later we begin to see the victims, or the 'near victims', those who for whatever reason didn't get to work at their usual times. With the rise of the victims we also begin to see the birth of the heroes, in particular the firefighters, however the hero motif only really comes to the fore in the aftermath of the collapse of both towers.

September 11 also differs from the classic news model in that, initially, it did not collapse the timeline into a short and interesting summary, rather the reverse of this. The footage stretched and extended the event in many ways, through repetition of what had gone before, repetition of the spectacle and by including a great deal of trivial minutiae as part of the initial coverage. By going live and without advertising for close to a week in the United States, and more than 48 hours in countries such as Australia, it was possibly the most stretched 'story' ever aired on television (Spigel 2007). Particularly considering that all of the essential action occurred within the first three hours. It can be argued that this stretching was in some ways an attempt to take back control of the event by making it more commonplace and less scary. On some levels it was trying to reforge the shared perception of reality that had been seriously wounded by the attacks and the initial unframed coverage of them. It also allowed for the process of re-binarisation<sup>70</sup>, which was explored in Chapter One and elsewhere, to begin in earnest. This re-binarisation is one of the key factors in the rebuilding of the representation of a shared reality.

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<sup>69</sup> See Cheney's interview with CNN [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NR7b\\_zofzXU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NR7b_zofzXU)

<sup>70</sup> Re-binarisation is the process of reforming a binary opposition or reconfirming it after its 'naturalness' has been questioned (Lev 2003).

The initial coverage of September 11, unlike much television news, did not reduce complexity at first, instead the focus on minutiae actually increased the complexity into a wide array of 'experts' and commentary about what 'might possibly', 'could be', happening with Government officials right now. What kinds of decisions *might* be being considered. Some examples of this include an interview with a former aide to President Clinton discussing what *might be* happening with the President and senior officials, and another interview with a former advisor to the New York Mayor's office discussing what *might be* occurring within the Mayor's office. In short, the level of conjecture meant that again this coverage differed significantly from the more usual structure of a news story. This level of conjecture was a by-product of the media having a lack of access to the more usual official sources and so therefore were unable to get information about how the government was actually going to respond to the attacks. It also amplified the feeling of dislocation and disbelief that many audience members, and members of the media, commented on at the time. Comments such as the following give evidence of this, where the presenter discusses that this event was something that: "Americans experienced in the heartland for the 1<sup>st</sup> time, believing that it was something that happened somewhere else" (abc (US) 11/9/01).

This paucity of narrative structure and absence of many of the usual frames in the initial coverage of September 11 can be further related to the failure of language to adequately symbolise the nature and scale of the event. In many cases words could not express the magnitude of the initial event, instead the coverage turned to the banal minutiae of conjecture and 'talking heads' to try and cover this lack. This lack of narrative structure and frame gave the footage a curiously indecisive feeling and this meant there was also a lack of stable genre. In many ways, structurally, the coverage was characterised by absence.

The lack of narrative structure and framing was also foundational in the genre hesitancy characteristic of the coverage in the first 48 hours. Genre is, to some degree, built upon the type and style of the narrative structures most commonly

used within it, hence the impact of the lack of clear narrative structures on the genre of the coverage. Genres also tend to work within specific frames of reference, in that there is a tendency for specific types of stories that display specific kinds of values to be operating within a genre<sup>71</sup>. Due to the shock of the event and the unpreparedness of the media to deal with this event and also because of its near instantaneous broadcast there was a discernable hesitancy in its treatment and a lack of the more usual framing. This led to a situation where a great deal of genre hybridisation or, 'swapping between genres', began to occur making it very difficult to figure out what genre the footage fell into. The event, because of this indeterminacy and hesitancy, helped to create some of the reality confusion mentioned in previous chapters.

The media-real particularly arises with the blurring of boundaries between what we are used to thinking of as distinct categories, or in other words the destabilisation of binary oppositions. As mentioned in connection to Freud in Chapter Three, there is an interesting correlation of reality confusion with the blurring of the boundaries between the animate and inanimate as well as between fiction and non-fiction. This can be further elaborated on with the hybridisation of, or blurring of the boundaries between, televisual genres or even between media types - in relation to confusion over the relationship of the coverage to Hollywood films.

It is nearly impossible to categorise the early coverage of September 11 because it does not fit into any of the standard generic frames that are common within the Western media, however it is argued that this did not spring from a deliberate set of choices but rather from the unexpectedness of the event and the unpreparedness of the media's response to it.

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<sup>71</sup> The example of the Western is illustrative in this regard, certain storyline structures can be argued to be prevalent, for example the lone cowboy riding into town to take on the 'bad guys'. However it is broader than just the narrative structure. There are sets of values that are embedded within the story, the characterisation and the structure and all of these work together to produce the frames that appear within a particular film. Many of these frames can be seen across a number of films hence making them common within a particular genre as well (Newcomb 2004).

The September 11 coverage did not conform to the generic conventions of television news. There were no other stories. Instead of 22 minutes of news in a half hour show (Weiss & Singer 1998) there were no breaks, no switching to 'soft' news stories or the sport or the weather. For the first 24 hours<sup>72</sup> it was just wall to wall coverage with talking heads, expert opinions, official statements, and a plethora of reporters 'on location' as close to the sites of the various attacks as they could be. This type of coverage did not fit within any of the genre conventions that are expected with the news genre. Things such as the structuring of a standard news bulletin<sup>73</sup> were absent. As was mentioned in the previous section on many US stations the coverage lasted for a week without stopping (Spigel 2007).

It can be argued that genres have always become hybridised<sup>74</sup> before they break apart into new genres, however the rise in the new digital and convergent technologies has allowed for more hybridisation than ever before. Some of the theorised reality confusion that occurred as a result of September 11 stems from the hybridisation of genres, it also potentially arose from so many different genres being tried and then discarded as time went by in an attempt to find the best 'frame' for representation<sup>75</sup>. Particular genres often 'frame' issues in specific ways. Framing can be used as a 'shorthand' method of tying a group of values together. Genres frequently use similar types of value systems in their presentation of a particular issue. An example of this can be seen in film noir with the use of the femme fatale and the flawed protagonist. The protagonist in these films is seen as a flawed character, they are not heroic, nor are they villainous but there can never be a happy resolution to the issues of the film because of the character flaws that they possess.

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<sup>72</sup> Australian coverage as mentioned in the previous section went for 48 hours before normal programming began to reappear (Australian Parliament House Library recording).

<sup>73</sup> As Fiske and Hartley comment: "...news reporting progresses by means of short scenes which superficially present unconnected material. A wide variety of signifiers using a variety of modes, from different newsreaders...is used to present a very limited number of signifieds...in the presentation of news there is...clarity, consistency, 'logical' exposition of causes, balance, precision; all are derived via journalistic codes..." (1980:190).

<sup>74</sup> An example of a hybridised genre that ended up encompassing its own genre is that of film noir. Although strictly speaking a drama, in many instances it set the precedence for the arrival of the 'thriller' and has links to other genres such as horror and crime fiction (Hayward 2006).

<sup>75</sup> See Schirato & Webb (2004) on the following page.

The femme fatale, in many cases is the key to showing these flaws within the lead character. This framing of the key thematic elements within film noir films shows how framing can be argued to be one of the building blocks of genre because it is the grouping of a particular value set that is often reproduced in other films within a particular genre.

The coverage of September 11 was unplanned and to a large degree unprecedented, because of this there was a hesitancy and indeterminacy in its representation. Due to the fact that an event of this magnitude had never occurred 'live' before it meant that there was no set formula for how to represent it. The closest images to the ones that were occurring belonged to the realm of fiction, and in particular the almost wistful portrayal of disaster found within the Hollywood disaster film. This is a point that has been raised a number of times in previous chapters. As Žižek put it:

For the great majority of the public, the WTC explosions were events on the TV screen, and when we watched the oft-repeated shot of frightened people running towards the camera ahead of the giant cloud of dust from the collapsing tower, was not the framing of the shot itself reminiscent of spectacular shots in catastrophe movies, a special effect which outdid all others – as Jeremy Bentham knew – reality is the best appearance of itself (Žižek 2002:11).

Žižek's reference to Bentham is interesting here. Bentham's notion of the panopticon, as was mentioned in Chapter Four in terms of Foucault's work on the disciplining gaze, is related to the idea of a prison where the central guard tower can see into every tower, hence producing self regulating the prisoners who can never tell when someone will be watching them. Žižek's reference here draws attention to the idea that this 'special effect', that was the actual event, outdid all others because of its 'realness'. The link to Bentham being that in the panopticon the prisoners always feel that there are watchers, and the 'realness' of this surveillance is reinforced to the prisoners through the disciplining structures that are set in place,

the panopticon becomes effective because of the reality of the internalized disciplining gaze.

As time went by more and more genres and frames and narrative structures were used to represent the event. As Schirato and Webb note:

...many genres were in fact put to work: we saw versions of reality television (point the camera at the Twin Towers' remains and see what happens), drama ("How will the President take control and lead America?"), documentary ("When and why were the towers built?"; "Who is bin-Laden and what are his origins?"), action adventure (the struggle on one of the doomed flights), rescue shows (the search for survivors; the heroism of the fire fighters), current affairs ("What are the political ramifications of September 11?"), the Western (Bush's "wanted dead or alive" announcement), the epic (Bush's "Let's mount a crusade!") and even sport (announcements that America would hit terrorists "like a linebacker crunching a quarterback) (2004:419).

Here the authors are identifying the genres and frames that were provided within the coverage as possible ways of making meaning from the event. The different formats do not invoke only one way of understanding but they do provide links to expectations and particular pathways that provide conventions for making meaning.

As Schirato and Webb suggest, another move in the representation was a swing away from the disaster/action film, perhaps in an attempt to bring the reality confusion under control, through shifting the representation onto more familiar and personalised ground – that of the soap opera/docu-soap. They elaborate:

...behind all these generic forms we can identify an affiliation with the genre of the soap in terms of its deployment of what might be called the order of hysteria...Although soaps are meant to run at "real life time", what actually distinguishes them from real life is the extraordinary richness of symptoms of desire and crisis...these crises are crammed by the dozen into half-hour or hour episodes, they are expected, and they are never the subject of closure:

the resolution of one crisis is always the prelude to another crisis that drives the story relentlessly on (2004:419).

This use of some of the characteristics of the soap opera genre can be argued to be due in part to the extraordinarily stretched story line. When the story is expanded out to a week without commercials many elements need to be added so that the coverage does not become merely repetition, though there was a great deal of this in the first 48 hours of the coverage as well. This personalisation of the story could never fit within the expectations of the 'hard news' genre so the stretched story starts to be appropriated into other genres whose characteristics are more of a 'fit'.

In the reportage of September 11...symptoms of the crisis were found (stories, statistics, photographs), and these then led to more symptoms, which were themselves replaced by new symptoms. The ultimate object of desire and line of closure was the capture or elimination of bin-Laden (Schirato & Webb 2004:419).

This significant shift meant, on a practical level, that eyewitness accounts from members of the general public and stories from members of known victims' families rather than media professional phone interviews<sup>76</sup> began to appear by approximately the 2-4 hour mark within the coverage. It had the effect of enhancing the perception of 'realness' that this was really happening instead of something out of someone's imagination. This may be due in part to sporadic and vague nature of the official statements on what was happening, particularly in the first few hours of the coverage<sup>77</sup>. There is even anecdotal evidence that the US Vice President was getting some of his information on the current situation from CNN<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> This varied somewhat between the stations. The BBC coverage began to use eyewitness interviews earlier than the American stations, by the two hour mark in the coverage. With CNN this did not happen in such a consolidated manner until after approximately the four hour mark. These figures have been taken from the original primary research for this thesis.

<sup>77</sup> There were two official appearances from current government figures in the first 6 hours of the coverage. President Bush spoke from the Florida school at 9.25am EDT and then there was a news conference with both New York Mayor Giuliani and New York Governor Pataki at approximately 1 pm EDT.

<sup>78</sup> According to a CNN interview with Cheney he witnessed the 2nd plane hitting the tower on CNN's coverage. This interview can be found at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NR7b\\_zofzXU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NR7b_zofzXU)

However, in terms of audience expectations, the lack of narrative structure, framing and genre that usually accompanies news reportage meant many people misread the event as belonging to the fictional, dreamlike, imaginary world of Hollywood disaster films.

As it was often remarked after September 11, watching the twin towers fall was like 'watching a movie'; that is to say the event was uncannily recognizable from the outset (Rodney 2005:38).

This lack of a neat categorisation or frame to hang meanings from resulted, it is argued, in a confusion of reality for many people. In terms of the usual televisual representation of an event, September 11 was highly unusual in this lack of framing. The absence of a set form of categorisation meant that there was no preferred reading and this allowed for an unusually high degree of autonomy on the part of the audience. This does not mean that a 'normal' audience is viewed as passive but that rather this audience was actively confused, actively searching for meaning, in part due to confusion and that this lack of a preferred reading meant that the audience had to work harder to make meaning. There was no 'normal' for this particular event because it was so unprecedented.

This first subconduit, 'indeterminate narrative structure, framing and generic characteristics', is important to the concept of the media real because it shows how difficult it can be to 'read' a 'text' that lacks a dominant reading. That is because of the indeterminacy of the footage, particularly in the initial coverage, the audience expectations of the news genre were not met because the audience were given no clear guidelines or framing to show even what genre it belonged to. This led, for many people, to a situation where the event was curiously free from our usual frames and conventions making finding the 'preferred reading' very difficult. In this case it led, for some, to a kind of reality confusion where it became very difficult to determine whether the events were actually occurring or whether it belonged to the

fictional realm of the action or disaster film. This indeterminacy caused by the lack of a clear frame or genre also added to the feeling of unpreparedness and hence to the impetus for the media-real to escape from its representation.

### ***Subconduit II - The Breaking of Televisual Conventions***

This section of the thesis argues that there were six noticeable differences from more usual televisual news coverage<sup>79</sup> and that these differences amounted to a significant break, or a significant series of breaks with standard televisual technological conventions. These six areas were a significant difference in length of shot, an unusually high level of repetition, unusual shot selection, the lack of live sound, the high use of 'phoners' and the high incidence of handheld shots. Additionally this subconduit examines the impact that the proliferation of communicative devices, in particular hand held cameras, had on the coverage of September 11.

This second subconduit is of significant importance to the formation of the media-real because it is one of the most obvious answers to how the representation of this event shaped what possible societal perceptions of reality were available. This thesis argues that the breaking of televisual conventions occurred primarily because the television news media were unprepared for an event of this magnitude to happen. It is argued that it was transmitted live around the globe with far less of the usual media framing that usually surrounds such a transmission – one of the most obvious examples of this being the lack of advertising throughout the first 24 hours of the coverage and also the length of the coverage itself. In doing so many of the standard conventions of the broadcast of television news were broken. As Spigel outlines it:

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<sup>79</sup> Selby and Cowdry propose 15 news values that determine whether an event will make it in to a television news bulletin. These are: 1. Magnitude. 2. Clarity or unambiguity. 3. Ethnocentricity. 4. Consonance. 5. Surprise. 6. Elite centeredness. 7. Negativity. 8. Human Interest. 9. Composition. 10. Location reporting. 11. Actuality reporting. 12. Inheritance. 13. Frequency. 14. Impartiality. 15. Sources. (1995). The greater the number of these factors that are present the greater the likelihood of inclusion.

Most fundamentally, on September 11, the everydayness of television itself was suddenly disrupted by news of something completely 'alien' to the usual patterns of domestic TV viewing. (2007:626).

This was exacerbated by:

The non-stop commercial-free viewing, which lasted for a full week on major broadcast networks and cable news networks, [and] contributed to a sense of estrangement from ordinary life, not simply because of the unexpected nature of the attack itself but also because television's normal routines – its everyday schedule and ritualised flow – had been disordered (Spigel 2007:626).

This sense of estrangement, as described by Spigel, is one part of what is more broadly examined in this thesis. In terms of the television coverage more specifically, this commercial-free<sup>80</sup> reporting produced a kind of television very different from more usual televisual conventions.

The first of these televisual conventions broken by the coverage of September 11 was a significant difference, as compared to more usual programming, in the length of time individual shots were played for. Television is a medium that tends to move quickly from shot to shot. The average length of a single television shot is 7 or 8 seconds (Chandler 1994). A news story focussed on an important speech will have a lengthier shot averaging approximately 10 seconds (Tiemens 2005). The average shot length in early footage from September 11 was closer to 35 seconds<sup>81</sup> with some shots lasting for close to five minutes<sup>82</sup>. This remarkable difference was due, it is argued, to a lack of other shots to cut to. In the earliest coverage media stations were still trying to get people closer to the WTC and the Pentagon but it was very

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<sup>80</sup> On Australian television this was closer to 48 hours on Channels 9, 7 and 10 than a week. Taken from footage recorded by the Australian Parliament House Library.

<sup>81</sup> This figure is taken from an averaging of the average shot length from CNN's initial coverage, BBC's initial coverage, ABC's (US) initial coverage and CBC's initial coverage, and is taken from the original primary research for this thesis. Obviously it is an approximate figure only and there was an extremely high variation in shot length both within a single stations coverage and between the different stations themselves.

<sup>82</sup> A shot length of 4 minutes 52 seconds was recorded from abc (US) initial footage in the primary research undertaken for this thesis.

difficult for camera crews to get closer. Evidence of this can be seen on both CNN and abc when reporters nearby to either scene comment on being unable to get any closer (abc 11/9/2001; CNN 11/9/2001).

Another factor was perhaps unwillingness on the part of the producers to go to a shot that didn't have the towers in them in case something happened while attention was focussed elsewhere – after all, the abc (US) presenter, Peter Jennings, missed the collapse of the first tower because he was talking to someone else, even though it played live on the screen for the audience:

Peter: Let's go back to the trade tower again, because, John, we now have...eh...what do we have? We don't [Peter can be heard to say Wow!]<sup>83</sup>

John:... it looks like a new plume, a new large plume of smoke...

Peter: Now it may be that something fell off the building...it may be that something has fallen...we just don't know to be perfectly honest. But that is what you are looking at, is the current, that, that's the scene at this moment at the World Trade Center. [throughout this time there is a great deal of studio noise, people yelling, phones going, general noise] Don Dayler from abc's Good Morning America is down in, ah, general vicinity. Don can you tell us what has just happened?

Don: Yes Peter, it's Don Dayler here, I'm 4 blocks north of the World Trade Center, The 2<sup>nd</sup> building that was hit by a plane has just completely collapsed. The *entire* building has just collapsed as if a demolition team set off, when you see the old demolitions, in old buildings...

Peter: My God!

Don: It folded in, down on itself.

Peter: My God...

Don: And it's not there anymore.

[Voice from studio]: That should be it.

Peter: Thanks very much.

Don: It has completely collapsed.

Peter: The whole side has collapsed?

Don: The whole *building* has collapsed.

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<sup>83</sup> In this transcript '...' indicates a gap in the commentary. The transcript is drawn from the original primary research undertaken for this thesis.

Peter: The whole *building* has collapsed?

Don: The building has collapsed.

Peter: That's the...southern...tower...that you're talking about?<sup>84</sup>

While the burning building from the first plane attack would have made news across the world, the fact that the second plane was captured live as it slammed into the second tower was spectacle of the highest order. The second plane had been 'caught' accidentally when filming the first tower so to cut away at such an uncertain time

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<sup>84</sup> The rest of this segment of the transcript is included below:

Don: Exactly, the 2<sup>nd</sup> building that we witnessed the airplane...enter, has been, the top half had been fully involved...in flame...it just collapsed. There is panic on the streets. Thousands of people running up Church Street, which is what I'm looking out on...Trying to get away. But the entire, at least as far as I can see, the top half of the building, at least half of it, I can't see below that, half of it just... started with a gigantic rumble, folded in on itself. And collapsed in a huge plume of smoke and dust...

Peter: [clears throat] we are talking about massive casualties here at the moment and we have...[whoohf]...quite an extraordinary

Don: There is panic on the streets, there are people screaming and running from the site...The gigantic plume of smoke has reached me and I'm probably a quarter of a mile north of there.

[Voice from studio]: Peter?...[10 second gap]...

Peter: Now this is a...this is what it looked like moments ago [visuals replay tower collapse]...My God...[deep breath]...The southern...tower...10 o'clock eastern time this morning, just collapsing on itself. This is a place where thousands of people work. We have no idea of what caused this. Um, if you wish to bring, anybody who has ever watched a building being demolished on purpose knows that if you are going to do this you have to get at the, at the under infrastructure of a building and bring it down.

Don: Peter?

Peter: Yes Don

Don: Ah, what, what appeared to happen from my vantage point, the top part of the building was totally involved in fire and there was no, there appeared to be no effort possible to put that fire out, it looked like the top part of the building was so weakened by the fire that it, that the weight of it collapsed the rest of the building, I did not see anything happening at the base of the building, it all appeared to start at the top and collapse the rest of the building by the sheer weight of the top...There was no explosion or anything at the base part of it, but I did see the top part of it started to collapse, the walls started to...bulge out, breaks glass, things coming out and then it collapsed in on itself. It appears to just fold down from there, from the very top.

Peter: Thanks Don very much, um, just looking at that I don't know why, but I'm ah, when was the last time the United States was attacked in this fashion? It was Pearl Harbour in 1941. John?

John: From the scene there are obviously massive casualties, ah, um, during these things there's a little bit of a high pitch but basic calm over the police radio's, among emergency workers, um, I can hear them screaming 'signal 10/13' which is the police code for help, ah, calling for help at the triage center where other people who were already injured have been injured more, um...confirming that the building has collapsed, ah, dozens of officers and more civilians are injured, and we don't know, although I'd have to suggest given the size of that building, what progress the evacuation was in, um, of the tower that collapsed" (abc (US)11/9/2001).

would mean the possibility of missing further action as it was occurring. Possibly the most significant point though is that this was news of the greatest magnitude, hence the focus on what has happened tinged with 'what might happen'. Events were moving so quickly and seemed so out of control that the possibility of further attacks was considered a high priority. A number of terrorism 'experts'<sup>85</sup> interviewed emphasised the fact that with this kind of attack the object for the terrorists is to continue the attacks for as long as possible.

The second key difference was the unusually high level of repetition of some shots. Although television is a repetitious medium this level of repetition was unusual; "the footage of the jet smashing into the second tower [was] repeated up to 30 times per hour" (Uriccio 2001) To repeat this image 30 times in a single hour breaks away from most news, and even more broadly, televisual conventions. It can be argued that there were two reasons for this level of repetition. The first was that the moment of impact was so spectacular, uncanny and mesmerising that there was a compulsion to keep playing and viewing it over and over again. In some ways reaffirming that it had actually happened by replaying it over and over<sup>86</sup>. Žižek describes this phenomena:

When in the days after September 11 our gaze was transfixed by the images of the plane hitting one of the WTC towers, we were all forced to experience what 'the compulsion to repeat' and *jouissance* beyond the pleasure principle are: we wanted to see it again and again, the same shots were repeated ad nauseum, and the uncanny satisfaction we got from it was *jouissance* at its purest. It was when we watched the two WTC towers collapsing on the TV screen that it became possible to experience the falsity of 'reality TV' shows (2002:12).

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<sup>85</sup> Each network had their own battery of experts that they drew upon, these people such as Mike Blustone and Kyle Olsen tended to be consultants either for government agencies or for large corporations.

<sup>86</sup> The focus of this thesis is on the first 48 hours of the coverage of the September 11 attacks. In concentrating on the initial coverage the intention was to delimit the amount of footage actually under discussion. The further from the time of the initial impact that one gets the more variation across channels, nations and demographics can be seen. The primary research undertaken for this thesis showed a gradual peak in the level of repetition of both the impacts and the towers collapsing by the 16-24hr mark.

Here Žižek is pointing to this central idea of repetition as a means of experiencing it as real. By contrasting the mediation of this event to ‘the falsity of reality TV shows’, Žižek is making the point that this was real to the point of *jouissance*, to the point of pleasure/pain. This idea of *jouissance*, was discussed in depth in Chapter Four’s discussion of the abject where Kristeva likened the abject to an immersion in sensation beyond pleasant, overwhelming to the point of pain; a collapse of the boundaries between pleasure and pain (1982). Žižek’s point also draws us back to the discussion of his work in Chapter One which looked at the different ways we can understand the real. By drawing attention to ‘reality TV’ shows, whose very name highlights the irony of the production of reality by the media, Žižek is drawing a clear distinction between this kind of ‘produced spectacle’ and the spectacle of the real evident in the mediation of the September 11 attacks.

A second kind of repetition witnessed in the coverage can be argued to have occurred because of the lack of new shots. There simply wasn’t a great deal of choice in terms of the shots available to cut to because of, as mentioned previously, how difficult it was to get reporters in to, or footage out from, the sites of the attacks. At the time of the early footage access to the affected area of Manhattan was being strictly controlled and police were blockading the public, and the media, from having access to the immediate area<sup>87</sup>. This meant that there was little opportunity for crews to be able to get new shots if they weren’t already in the area. The crews that were already in the area were having trouble being able to leave and in many cases didn’t want to leave because they were getting footage that would be in high demand once they could forward it to their home stations. In addition because of the grounding of all aircraft across the US, media crews could not be choppered in nor could new aerial shots be taken. What this added up to was a significant lag in terms of new footage becoming available.

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<sup>87</sup> There are a number of incidences from within the early coverage where police officers are shown moving people on or keeping them back from particular scenes (CBS 11/9/2001; abc 11/9/2001; CNN 11/9/2001).

An analysis of a half-hour section of the CNN coverage from approximately 45 minutes after the attack showed the introduction of 12 new shots in that time, eight of which occur in the last six minutes of this section<sup>88</sup>. This emphasizes the unusual nature of this footage because as has been mentioned previously most television news stories are only 100 seconds long (for a feature story) with an average shot length of approximately 7 seconds. This means that there should be roughly 15 shot changes in such a piece. While some of these will be repeated, for example crossing back to the reporter on location, it seems likely that even within the exemplar 100 second story there will be 10 separate shots. The example given runs for approximately 1,800 seconds with only 12 *new* shots being introduced and 81 individual shot changes. If the exemplar ratio were multiplied out to fit this sample then there should have been approximately 270 shot changes<sup>89</sup>.

The third key place where televisual conventions can be seen to be broken is in the unusual type of shot being used. The majority of shots that went to air in the first couple of hours relied on wide-angle or long shots. In film and television wide-angle and long shots are frequently used as establishing shots before we are brought closer to the story through the use of tighter framing (Bordwell & Thompson 2009). As it was very difficult for reporters to either get closer to the WTC, or if they were already there to get their footage out, the static long shot became the most prominent feature of the early camera work of the event. The obvious addition to the above statement is the striking nature of many of these long shots. They tended to be spectacular and imposing with either one or both of the towers belching fire, smoke and debris into the air (See Figure 4). They often showed the towers in three quarter profile, filling the screen with the smoke and flames fanning out from them like a flag (See Figure 5). The occurrence of these shots was so habitual during the time before the collapse of the towers that it was rare for the coverage to go longer than a minute or two without the towers filling the screen; the exception to this rule being if the media were showing the Pentagon burning instead. So while the reliance

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<sup>88</sup> Taken from the original primary research undertaken for this thesis.

<sup>89</sup> These figures are taken from the original primary research undertaken for this thesis.

on these shots was somewhat unusual, and it was reasonably rare to be able to get closer shots that hadn't already been played, it is likely that due to their spectacular nature these shots would have been repeated frequently regardless (See Figure 5). Figures 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 show examples of the different types of shots referred to throughout this thesis.

Figure 4. (CNN 11/9/2001)



Figure 5. (abc 11/9/2001)



Figure 6. (CBS 11/9/2001)



Figure 7. An example of what has been termed a 'wide-angle' shot of the WTC on September 11, 2001. (CNN 11/9/2001)



Figure 8. An example of what has been termed a 'long shot' of the WTC on September 11, 2001. (CNN 11/9/2001)



Figure 9. An example of what has been termed a 'mid shot' of the WTC on September 11, 2001. (abc 11/9/2001)



Figure 10. An example of what has been termed a 'close-up' of the WTC on September 11, 2001. (BBC 11/9/2001)



Figure 11. An example of what has been termed an 'extreme close-up' of the WTC on September 11, 2001 (Christensen 11/9/2001).



The fourth major area where televisual conventions are not followed is in the lack of live sound and the 'roughness' of the sound design. This was caused by many of the reasons already discussed, in particular the difficulty in either getting crews into the affected areas or getting footage out from those areas. In later coverage, after the collapse of the towers and as media were able to be stationed somewhat closer to the site (after the first 8-10 hours) more and more live sound was used, sirens, passers-by talking, general atmospheric sounds in contrast to the early footage which was often eerily silent. This actually added to the air of suspense that characterised some of the early footage.

A classic horror film convention is the use of silence, near silence or sparse sound design in the lead-up to something horrific happening. This makes the occurrence more shocking and more startling because of the return of sound, often including screaming and dramatic sound effects, which adds impetus to the visual occurrence that is taking place. As Gianetti comments: "Any significant stretch of silence [in a film] creates an eerie vacuum – a sense of something impending, about to burst" (1996:209). In the case of the September 11 footage, live sound - that wasn't from

within the studio - only returned after the key events had already occurred and so it formed part of the denouement rather than the climax of the mediation.

The effect of this lack of 'live' sound was an uncanny distance in the places without the live sound and an accentuating of the impact of the scenes where the sound was synchronised with the visuals. It can be argued that this increased the impact of the eyewitness accounts because these were some of the primary times when the sound was fully synchronised with the visuals. For much of the footage the soundtrack is of the anchor talking either to the audience, to a reporter or interviewing an eyewitness. The following is an example of one of the eyewitness interviews that included live sound.

Debbie Troy, an employee who worked in the WTC, was being interviewed for BBC news, about 2 hours into the coverage<sup>90</sup>, in the background there are sirens, people yelling, other people talking as well as a general 'hubbub' of atmospheric sounds from the street.

DT: In 1 World Trade Center it hit somewhere on the 67<sup>th</sup> floor, I was on the 56<sup>th</sup>.

R: And was it chaos trying to come down the steps?

DT: Yes

R: What was it like? Describe it.

DT: Everybody was on top of each other trying to come down and then somebody finally calmed the crowd down to get them to come down the stairs in an orderly fashion and get them out of the building.

R: And what just happened now?

DT: The building just came down. One of them. I don't know which one came down. I don't know if it was one or two.

R: And what did you do, what did you start doing when that happened?

DT: Running. Like everybody else. But trying to calm the people down while they were running cause I told them that's how people get hurt when they

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<sup>90</sup> This was one of the rarer interviews that included the reporter talking to the interviewee, though the BBC was notable for including this in a number of their interviews.

start trying to, you know, get out of the way and... its just crazy and I just thank God I made it down (BBC News 11/9/2001).

The fifth key area where televisual conventions were broken was in the high level of reliance on eyewitness accounts somewhat later in the coverage. This process began on some channels, such as the BBC, from approximately two hours after the attacks, though other channels such as CNN didn't begin to do this until approximately five hours after the attacks. Earlier in the coverage, prior to the four hour mark, there was an unusually high usage of phone interviews or 'phoners'<sup>91</sup>. This reliance on 'phoners' meant a break with the more usual discursive structure of television news.

There is a hierarchy of discourse at work in the presentation of the news (Ryan 2004). At the top of this apex is the news reader or anchor. This is supposedly the person with the most 'objectivity' and with the most implied credibility. They are distant from the events and so they embody calmness and reason. Next in the hierarchy is the reporter who is frequently on location. The reporters are involved to some degree in their locality but at the same time dispassionate because they are there to 'report the facts'. At the bottom of the hierarchy is the eyewitness, who due to their involvement, their subjectivity, cannot be trusted to provide 'the whole picture' because their understanding will be partial and predicated on their experience. However it is this experience that provides the whole structure with its authenticity. This purportedly authentic experience is then 'framed' or placed within a particular context and surrounded by layers of meaning provided by both the reporter and by the news anchor (Ryan 2004).

Despite their position in the hierarchy of discourses, eyewitnesses play a significant role in the presentation of news stories. In print they are normally used to provide a sentence that either sums up or otherwise confirms the story that has been structured around the information provided by the eyewitness (or several eyewitnesses, as the case may be). The journalist's voice is the one that provides the

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<sup>91</sup> Figures taken from original primary research for this thesis.

description, the context and the overview of the entire incident including some of the likely outcomes. The eyewitness' statement is there as confirmation that what the journalist is saying is what actually occurred - even if the quote has, within this discourse, been taken out of context or misquoted it still acts as evidence of the veracity of the story. In essence the eyewitness' one or two line quote adds authenticity to the story that is being told<sup>92</sup>. Indeed, Fiske writes that:

Furthest from the studio, both geographically and discursively, is the eyewitness, the involved spokesperson, the actuality film, the voices that appear to speak the real, and that therefore need to be brought under discursive control. There is a vital contradiction here. The 'truth' exists only in the studio, yet that 'truth' depends for its authenticity upon the eyewitness...(1987:288)<sup>93</sup>.

As the above quote illustrates the eyewitness stands in for the 'real'. This is because the audience can actually see and hear them speak for themselves. If they are covered in debris and blood it can actually be 'seen'<sup>94</sup> that something has happened to them and this means that there is little questioning of whether or not this matches the story that they are being told. Their voices and body language also provide an 'aura of authenticity', for instance, if they are frightened or breathless it adds credence to what they are describing if they have been talking about having had to run for their lives. Additionally the eyewitness provides a link between the audience and the story, it makes it personal and immediate. News stories are supposedly presented by objective reporters, emotionally distanced from the actual

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<sup>92</sup> This idea of authenticity is one that has been discussed in Chapters Two and Three in relation to Benjamin's theories on the aura of authenticity. Authenticity is a problematic notion because of the contradiction inherent in claiming something as an authentic event or experience. However the point being made is that authenticity adds an aura to the text under discussion and bolsters the 'regime of truth' that is being constructed.

<sup>93</sup> The first part of this quote is as follows: "Television news typically works with three levels of 'clawback' [Clawback is defined as The structure of reporting that works to claw back potentially deviant or disruptive events into the dominant value system] that correspond with spaces that are both material and symbolic. The central space is that of the studio news reader, who does not appear to be author of his/her own discourse, but who speaks with the objective discourse of 'the truth'. Paradoxically, the news reader's personal traits, such as reliability or credibility are often used to underwrite the objectivity of the discourse...Spatially positioned further away and discursively subordinated is the reporter, who signs off as both an individual and an institutional voice. Her/his function is to mediate between 'raw reality' and the final truth spoken by the news reader..." (Fiske 1987:288).

<sup>94</sup> This relates back to the idea, discussed in Chapter Two, of the privileging of the visual in Western society.

substance of the story, thus, allowing them to objectively report the facts behind whatever event is being described. “The oft-stated and highly desired goal of modern journalism is objectivity, the detached and unprejudiced gathering and dissemination of news and information” (Taflinger 1996). It can be argued that the eyewitness, particularly in the case of audio-visual journalism, links the audience to the story in a way that is not available to the normally far more remote journalist who is covering the story.

This supposedly emotion free, detached reporting has become the epitome of what the television news should be because this detachment is equated with having a claim to objectivity, to being an uninvolved disinterested observer rather than an actor in the events as they unfold. In *The Media Students Handbook* (2007), designed for students studying journalism or the media more generally, it describes the way journalists are encouraged to see objectivity “...many journalists would say that their main ideal is the achievement of objectivity or truth, and this remains an important aspiration, whatever the problems with stating it as an absolute standard” (Branston & Stafford 2007: 196). It is interesting to note here the relationship that is drawn between objectivity and truth in that they are positioned as synonymous. Chapter One already noted the problems with notions of truth and here that is extended to objectivity. Without going too far into the argument the idea of objectivity as an absolute is problematic because it is logically impossible to step outside of the self. Regardless of this, objectivity in journalism is an ideal that is aspired to and this was something impossible for many journalists who were present in New York during the attacks to maintain.

Throughout the coverage of the September 11 attacks, this authority and hierarchy of discourse can be seen, possibly in more manifest ways than in the more usual flow of television news. For example at a number of points in the abc television (US) coverage of the attacks, the anchor, Peter Jennings, interrupted people who were being interviewed in order to change focus onto another feed that was coming into the studio: “John, John, I’m sorry I’m going to have to interrupt you now and go to...”

(Jennings [abc] 11/9/2001)<sup>95</sup>. While this single example is not that unusual what was unusual was the number of times that this continued to happen<sup>96</sup>.

What was different about the use of eyewitnesses for much of the coverage of the WTC attacks was that the eyewitnesses were the ones who were providing much of the story from a specific location. For example the following interview excerpt is from an unnamed female interviewed for CNN, covered with dust and exhausted, who described what had happened inside the WTC:

I was from, on, the 82<sup>nd</sup> floor. I don't know where my [word indecipherable] are. I don't know. I hope to God they're ok. It's all I can say. I don't know what... we saw a shadow – it looked like a plane, the next thing we know it was like BOOM! And the floor started shaking. And then we saw debris fall down and next thing we know we have to get out of the building. We stuck on the stairs for awhile then we finally got down to the lobby and there's a huge explosion (CNN 11/9/2001).

Part of the reason for this comes from the fact that the eyewitnesses in many cases had as much information as the media did, and when it came to specific locations they had more. Instead of creating a story and then cutting in small pieces of eyewitness stories, the media, because of the unprecedented nature of what was occurring, and the stretched nature of the coverage from after the first 12 hours, found themselves relying on the eyewitnesses to provide more and more of the story. Eyewitness stories became increasingly common as time went on and more people were able to get clear of the immediate environs of the towers. An example of another eyewitness account, a Caucasian woman in her mid twenties to early thirties, from early on in the footage (approximately an hour and ten minutes into the CNN coverage) is included below.

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<sup>95</sup> Transcript taken from original primary research for this thesis.

<sup>96</sup> The majority of interviews conducted by the anchor concluded with the anchor crossing to someone or something else.

We heard a big bang and then we saw smoke coming out and we saw the plane on the other side of the building and there was smoke everywhere and there are people jumping out of the windows over there, they're jumping out the windows, I guess 'cause they're trying to save themselves, I don't know, and, and, er, I don't know, everybody just doesn't know where to go they won't let...everything is blocked off, you can't even, they are telling us to get out but there's nowhere to go, and then I heard another plane hit, and if you go over by there you can see the people jumping out the window, they're jumping out the window right now (CNN 11/9/2001).

The unknown woman in this interview was being filmed as she tried to make her way out of the lower Manhattan region. She is obviously distressed and is one of a number of interviews that have a similar backdrop, leading to the conclusion that a number of interviews were conducted in the same location chosen from the people streaming by trying to find their way out of the immediate vicinity. This particular interview was repeated a number of times during the first 48 hours of the coverage, possibly due to the emotional nature of the interviewee and the impact that the event has had on her. Her fear, trauma and grief provide authenticity to the coverage by showing rather than telling us about the impact on eyewitnesses. Most frequently, from after the 12 hour mark, this interview appeared as part of a 'compilation' of eyewitness interviews. It appears in one of the early BBC compilations of interviews that appeared approximately three hours into the coverage.

The high frequency of eyewitness reports was made even more unusual throughout the coverage because of the use of phone interviews or 'phoners'. The place of the telephone in television news can be traced back to the early days of television where 'radio-phones' and telephones more generally were a vital part of the link between the reporter on location and the news organisation that they worked for. Due to the length of time it would take to get images back to the home office reporters frequently took the images, sent them, but then reported 'live' by phone on what the current state of affairs was. This meant that there was often a disjuncture between

the images being shown at a given time and what the reporter was saying (Peacock 1963).

While phone interviews are not uncommon in news reports they don't tend to last as long as a visual interview because of the lack of visual stimuli. They are mainly used in cases where the reporter is a long way from the nearest communication centre or has no access to an audio-visual satellite uplink and there is breaking news in that area. Places that lack a communications infrastructure, such as in the mountainous areas of Papua New Guinea, Borneo or remote areas of Africa, are often reported on by phone interviews because it is possible to carry a satellite phone with you whereas it is reasonably difficult to take an entire outside broadcast team (Kawamoto 2003). The important part of this equation is that the reporter has witnessed breaking news and there is no other way to get that news across, at this point in time, other than to tell it over the phone. As Chouliaraki comments:

In the direct link, sentiment relies on the telephone and the visual shots, creating a space-time of 'instantaneous proximity'. The summary of events combines visuals with brief voice-over – a space-time of omnipresence (Chouliaraki 2004:197).

This 'instantaneous proximity' of the distant (phoner) yet present (television) is an interesting phenomenon. Unlike many of the new media like email and Social Networking Sites (SNS), the old media of the telephone is very instantaneous and its interactions occur in real time. During the coverage, the combination of the spatial proximity of the image was reinforced through the temporal proximity of the telephone.

Interestingly the majority of phoners that went to air in the early stages of the coverage, in the first 4-6 hours, were from employees and 'producers' from the various channels. However in many ways they were not their 'professional selves', instead many of them seemed scared and confused as were most members of the public thus blurring the lines between the professional world of reporting the news and the private lives of these employees. In many sections of the footage it is

obvious that the journalists are afraid for their lives, at others they are bewildered and unable to understand what is happening around them, let alone explain it for the audience. In one particular scene the anchorman starts to lose his temper:

...but we're not quite sure what we're looking at, we are [visuals have been playing for approximately 30 seconds already], we are...looking now at Air Force 1, it's 9.49, has been in Sarasota Florida...I wanna get someone to fix the monitors here for me please. I want this monitor in front of me here, to look like that monitor, so I know what I'm looking at. *Right Now*. Thank you (Jennings, abc 11/9/2001)<sup>97</sup>.

As the hours pass after the collapse of the towers and the crash in Pennsylvania and no new events occur, and more editing and voice-overs are added, this feeling of rawness and realness fades as a more unified frame is constructed around the footage.

As mentioned before it is frequently a reporter, who has been sent on assignment to a remote location, or it is a 'stringer'<sup>98</sup>, who is reporting via the telephone. However this was only partially the case on September 11, as many of the 'phoners' were employees of the stations who did not normally report on the news. There were also a number of members of the public, though these tended to come in later in the coverage possibly due to mobile phone frequency congestion. One possible reason for this high level of 'audio only' interview was the difficulty in getting images out from the immediate areas and also because stations couldn't reach their own reporters who were in the area. In part, it was also due to mobile phone network congestion, a fact mentioned frequently on all of the major news networks. In some cases it was also because the eyewitness' had themselves called the stations to report what they had seen.

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<sup>97</sup> These problems with the coverage were not limited to abc (US) approximately 30 minutes after the second plane strikes the CNN anchor, Aaron Brown, remarks "What you are looking at now it...at least if I could see the monitor in front of me..." (Brown CNN 11/9/2001).

<sup>98</sup> Masterton and Patching state: "A stringer is a reporter who works for a news organization on a casual or part-time basis in an area of Australia or overseas where that organization does not maintain a staff reporter. Such a person is usually, though not necessarily, a reporter for a local paper or radio station, who offers to provide news from his or her area if and when it occurs" (1986:19).

There were a number of people who called in about the attacks on the Pentagon, like 'Barbara', a friend of one of the CNN producers:

As we were driving into town on 395 there was an exit, we were trying to get off the exit to the memorial bridge, off to the left hand side was a commercial plane that came in and was coming in too fast, too low and the next thing we saw was it go down below the side of the road and we just saw the fire that came up after that (CNN 11/9/2001).

These people remain amongst the few who have reported seeing this particular part of the attacks live. There were many more who had witnessed the WTC attacks and these people were used frequently as 'audio tracks' while the image on the screen continued to be one of the towers with flames and smoke pouring from it. An example of this can be seen in the phone interview with Denis Kraus on abc television (US). As Denis describes his experience of being evacuated from the 36<sup>th</sup> floor of WTC 1, images of New York and Washington, both obscured by smoke, are played (abc 11/9/2001) a title bar underneath the images give Denis' name and the location of the shot currently on the screen. All of the major stations examined<sup>99</sup> shared this characteristic to greater and lesser degrees. This point is interesting because it undermines the usual hierarchy of discourse that operates on the three levels of television news journalism. In some cases the 'reporter level' was absent entirely and the news presenter had to fill this role as well as their own. There is no doubt however of who is in control of the interview. The following is an excerpt from the same phone interview between Peter Jennings (abc US anchor) and Denis Kraus:

Denis: As I was, er [other voices can be heard on the line]

Peter: Hey Denis, just let me stop you for a second, ah somebody is trying another telephone on this line. Could they please not do that. We are listening to Mr Kraus. Go ahead Mr Kraus. (Jennings abc 11/9/2001).

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<sup>99</sup> The major stations looked at in this analysis were CNN, abc (US), CBS, BBC. The Australian networks that were providing the news feed from the US were ABC (Aust), WIN, PRIME and TEN.

As the above quote illustrates, the anchor, has a great deal of authority, not only the interview but also the newsroom.

A further reason for the high incidence of the use of 'phoners' was because of the iconic nature of the images of the flaming towers bleeding detritus and debris (See Figure 4). This image was such a strong and unprecedented one that the stations wanted to show what was happening and this picture was far better than showing audio visual interviews with people not directly caught up in the events. This links to the point raised in previous chapters concerning the difficulties that occurred in trying to symbolise such an event. Words were not able to express the full symbolic range of what was occurring, in many ways this event had exceeded the borders of discourse, as discussed in Chapter Four. Many of the words that would normally be used to describe such an attack in a distant place could no longer function in the same way because they had become overused. For example, if 150 different car accidents are described as catastrophic, even though they may well be catastrophic to the 300 odd people directly involved, the word loses its impact to describe an event on the scale of the WTC attacks. This can be seen in a number of places within the coverage. As the second tower of the WTC collapsed the CNN anchor Aaron Brown quietly said, "...good Lord...there are no words" (Brown CNN 11/9/2001) (See Figure 12).

Figure 12 (abc 11/9/2001).



The sixth key difference between this coverage and coverage of other events, a difference that increased the immediacy and identificatory nature of this coverage, was the fact that so much of it was shot with handheld cameras. This factor comes partially from the fact that there were a number of shots filmed by members of the public<sup>100</sup>, however it also comes from the fact that many of the journalists in the area were forced to abandon their tripods and neat shot composition because they

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<sup>100</sup> These shots from members of the public did not tend to get to air earlier than the first six hours of the coverage. As time passed there was an increase in the variety of the shots that were available and this is due in part to shots being forwarded by members of the public.

believed they were running for their lives. This made for very different kinds of news images to what is more usual in television news (See Figure 13).

Figure 13 (Reuters 11/9/2001).



In some ways this can also be linked to the issue of the eyewitness, as Rodney describes:

The emphasis on 'real life' confusion as conveyed in the jerky, vertiginous sequences, dirty lenses and hysterical commentary that came through on the

camcorder tapes of the World Trade Center collapse gave new life to the old form of the eyewitness account (2005:39).<sup>101</sup>

A handheld shot, by its very nature, gives an immediacy and identificatory aspect that the serene and still steadycam shot can never achieve. It's almost as if the audience become one with the camera operator for the period that this footage lasts for. It is far more difficult to remain remote and unaffected by footage such as this.

Hand held footage also operates in a privileged position in regards to perceptions of authenticity and truthfulness. As discussed in Chapter One the notion of 'truth is a very problematic one. Foucault discusses 'truth' in terms of 'regimes of truth' where what is actually being examined is the way that some pieces of information or communication are privileged over others and how this can be discerned with careful examination. This can then give evidence to the hierarchies of discourse and position at play with a society at a given time. In relation to news, both the eyewitness and the 'actuality footage' - that is footage taken at the scene or at the time of an event - has a high degree of verisimilitude due to the value placed within Western society on the visual image (McLuhan 1967). This is a point that was discussed in the section on visual language in Chapter One. This kind of footage has an even more powerful 'truth claim' if it is framed with the power hierarchy of news presenter and reporter. This is because of the authority of the discourses that come from media professionals, as was discussed earlier in this chapter.

There are those that feel there is a tendency to believe footage that is handheld rather than 'cinematically' shot. As Cohen et al remark: "Today, the handheld shot proliferates as a signifier of unmediated reality (that we are watching the real thing)..."(2009: 146). Part of this reason comes from the nature of the eyewitness and their position in regards to truth and the other part comes from the truth claims

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<sup>101</sup> This quote goes on to describe the fact that this was taken notice of when structuring the later footage of the Invasion of Iraq and the coverage of that conflict. To build up the identificatory nature of the coverage of this war, elements of the September 11 coverage were deliberately introduced including handheld shots, dirty lenses and jerky cinematography. The use of embedded reporters was another element to add to the feeling of liveness.

that all images make but that remains particularly strong with hand held images. As has already been discussed the eyewitness holds 'pride of place' when it comes to relating an event that they have witnessed.

In this case, if the eyewitness happened to film the event, those images have even stronger claims on being the 'actual truth' of what happened. If there has been time for the shots to be taken steadily with beautiful pans, zooms and smooth edits between each shot then its position as not just a representation, but what many people accept as the facts of what has happened, recedes. This is because it is obvious, even to the less media literate, that there has been enough time to take the raw footage and sculpt it into a professional media product and in the media saturated world that we live in, it draws comparison to films and television fiction. Again, as was mentioned in the previous paragraph the power of the image is particularly strong in Western societies in terms of the valuing of the visual as 'true' simply because it is a visual representation. Masterton and Patching sum it up clearly:

...in television the picture is the master. Anyone working in the medium must realise, whether they like the fact or not, that the picture is paramount. What people see will override anything they hear (1986:103).

As audiences have become more familiar with cinematic techniques and in particular with new media's capacity for image manipulation there has started to be a move away from the notion that an image is necessarily true just because it is an image. Lodriguss puts it succinctly by arguing that: "Because of the ease in manipulating digital images with Photoshop, some people are questioning whether images are "real" or "art", and wondering if they can believe anything they see anymore" (n.d). Digital technologies and their ability to splice, morph and 'touch up' images is now a well known fact, and this has led to a downgrading of the primacy of the image as 'proof' that an event occurred. However the handheld image still maintains some connection with these older ideas of the veracity of the mechanical

reproduction of reality. More than most forms of imagery, the handheld video image still seems to invoke a sense of reality. The use of handheld imagery in such films as *Blair Witch Project* and others, with their marketing being based on the fraudulent, though only semi serious, attempt to make the audience believe that what they were presenting ‘actually happened’, have also helped to reduce the veracity claims of the hand held image, but not yet to the extent that the handheld image no longer has an impact. As Cohen et al discuss:

Camera movement can create a sense of dynamism and viscerality; for example the handheld camera produces a heightened sense of tension in films such as *The Celebration* (1998) or *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) (2009:146).

This dynamism and viscerality can be argued to be a contributing factor when some commentators spoke about the way that coverage of the attacks mesmerised them for many hours. It was possible to get lost in a welter of confusing identificatory snippets, where each new piece of footage brings a new person’s point of view and story. After a while there seems to almost be a loss of the self involved here. Instead of managing to remain as detached<sup>102</sup> viewers, the coverage of September 11 was unusual due to the number of different people’s traumas that were presented. Some examples of full audio-visual interviews are included below.

The following example is from an interview with an unnamed male eyewitness on CNN who is almost crying as he relates his story:

After the first plane hit I just saw another plane come in from the south and hit the south tower, half way between the bottom and the top of the tower. I can’t tell you anything more than that, I saw the plane hit the building (He begins to cry) (CNN 11/9/2001).

Another example comes from an unnamed man who struggles to control his emotions as he relates his story for abc (US):

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<sup>102</sup> This idea of the distracted gaze of the television viewer was discussed in Chapter Three.

I started seeing people um...just [he starts to cry] they started jumping out of the window. Like the 96<sup>th</sup> floor. It's just, um, like one at a time, from different points of the building, I just started seeing people just drop and drop and drop. And, ah, I must have counted like 30 or 40 (abc 11/9/2001).

Lastly, in another BBC interview, the account of events is even more graphic:

M: I was in B tower, A tower,...

R: What floor were you on?

M: B1

R: What floor?

M: The first one.

R: What happened? Tell me.

M: A big explosion happened. Some guy came out, his skin was all off. I helped him out. This is him all over. There's people jumping out of windows. They said there was at least 14 people jumping out of windows. It's horrific. I can't believe this is happening.

R: Anything else that you saw? Were you there for the second hit by a plane?

M: Yeah about 10 minutes later the second building went off.

R: Did you see it?

M: Yes. I saw it. It just blew up. A big explosion and people started running, it was just chaos everywhere...People jumping out, people just kept jumping and jumping. And you could see that they were still alive cause they were flailing around...

R: The FBI has already stepped in to investigate, it could possibly be a terrorist strike.

M: It could be. It could be. Cause the first one went off and then 10 minutes later this just blew up out of nowhere.

R: It's hard to think that that would just be accidental.

M: No I don't think it would be accidental (BBC News 11/9/2001).

This welter of viewpoints was somewhat unusual for news coverage which, as was shown earlier, is predicated on a reasonably strict hierarchy of discourse. However

this 'stitching together' of a large number of eyewitness interviews only began to be prevalent after the first 10 hours of the coverage on the American networks.<sup>103</sup>.

## **The Challenger Disaster**

An illustration of some of the differences between the coverage of September 11 and more usual television conventions that have been looked at in this subconduit can be provided by reference to a brief comparison with the footage of the Challenger space shuttle disaster from 1986<sup>104</sup>. This event has been chosen for comparison because there were a number of similarities with the coverage of September 11, however there are also many distinct differences. For example although the footage of the space shuttle exploding had a similar level of repetition of the event in the television news the coverage of the Challenger disaster was very different because it was a 'contained' event<sup>105</sup>. There were no 'follow on' events in the same way that September 11 continued because of the number of distinct attacks. With the Challenger disaster there were no further explosions, no further loss of life.

There is also a significant difference in terms of scale. In the case of the September 11 attacks, as mentioned previously, one particular shot was shown for almost five minutes without cutting to a different shot. The Challenger explosion occurred 63 seconds into the takeoff<sup>106</sup> of the space shuttle, The key footage going for a little over 2 and a half minutes. The key footage from September 11, from the impact of the first plane to the collapse of the second tower is 1 hour and 45 minutes (CNN Chronology of Terror)<sup>107</sup>.

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<sup>103</sup> The BBC began this process far earlier, even during the first three hours of the coverage Noted in the original primary research for this thesis.

<sup>104</sup> On January 28 1986, the space shuttle *Challenger* exploded during launch from Kennedy Space Center. All seven astronauts on board were killed (NASA 2010).

<sup>105</sup> Footage of the CNN live coverage of this event can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j4lOjcDFtBE>

<sup>106</sup> abc (US) television coverage 28/1/1986.

<sup>107</sup> It should be noted that the final spectacular 'event' within September 11 was the collapse of WTC 7 which occurred approximately 8 and a half hours after the first plane crashed into the WTC.

Another difference was the immediate personalisation of the Challenger disaster. In the first hours after the disaster the focus of much of the news coverage had swapped to the families and friends of those who were lost<sup>108</sup>. Indeed much more attention was focussed on the family, friends and students of the civilian school teacher who had been included as a mission specialist<sup>109</sup>. Whilst this personalisation did occur with the event of September 11, in particular as soon as the story of Barbara Olson (US media commentator and wife of US Solicitor General Theodore Olson) and her call to her husband from the doomed plane was made public<sup>110</sup>, it did not occur so quickly nor was it focussed so exclusively. The event of September 11 had directly impacted on so many more people than the Challenger disaster, in terms of the number of victims and their immediate families, that this close focus was impossible to begin with. One interesting similarity between the abc (US) coverage of the Challenger disaster and the abc (US) coverage of the September 11 attacks is that it was the same anchor, Peter Jennings, reporting on each event.

Whilst the coverage of the Challenger disaster did have elements of spectacle and some elements of the uncanny it did not invoke the same degree of either and nor did it produce such an abject sensation. It was a disaster, a spectacular accident and a very sad event but it did not produce the level of terror and fear that the deliberate attacks of September 11 did. In other words although a number of the elements of the media-real were present in the coverage the event did not escape from its representation because there was a lack of some of the elements that come together to provide the basis for the eruption of the Lacanian real. The coverage of the Challenger disaster did produce shock in the media reporters covering the launch and they were not 'prepared' for it to happen it but it did not produce the same level of awestruck bewilderment that the coverage of September 11 did. It was a short, contained news report, that even as it was personalised and expanded in news

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<sup>108</sup> As shown on abc (US) television coverage 28/1/1986

<sup>109</sup> This may be due in part to the fact that her parents were filmed as they watched the launch and subsequent explosion. Their horror as the shuttle explodes and they realise their daughters likely fate automatically personalises the disaster.

<sup>110</sup> The story on Barbara Olson went to air for the first time on CNN at approximately 3pm 11/9/2001.

segments over the following days, did not stop the entire broadcasting structure of television as the representation of September did.

## **Proliferation of communicative devices**

The proliferation of new and convergent media of communication is the second key theme examined in this subconduit. This idea is vital to the concept of the media-real because these are the means by which the images are captured, reproduced and transmitted. The ubiquitousness of these forms of communication has also meant a change in the role of the eyewitness as discussed earlier in this subconduit. Many of the most poignant moments in the coverage of September 11 were either filmed by private citizens on home camcorders, mobile phones or captured accidentally by media professionals who happened to be doing something else in the area. An example of this is the Naudet brothers who were filming their 'rookie'<sup>111</sup> firefighter as he and his crew investigated a gas leak in Manhattan. They managed to capture the first plane as it went almost directly over their heads. The portable nature of many of the new media technologies also meant an increase in the ability of ordinary people to be the ones supplying the images to the mass media companies.

New types of material began making their way into the transmission of the attacks on the WTC in the hours after the actual impact. Footage from private citizens started to appear combined with the news broadcasters, and in particular footage from personal camcorders also began to appear reasonably quickly (See figure 14)<sup>112</sup>. It had an immediacy and an identificatory aspect that is normally missing in news reports that were filmed, edited and prepared by the experts<sup>113</sup>. It can be argued that there was more danger, more awareness of immediacy than what is

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<sup>111</sup> *9/11 The Firefighters tale*

<sup>112</sup> Footage such as that taken by Devlin Clark (an animator) and Evan Fairbanks (a professional freelance camera operator) was with the major networks within 4 hours according to an abc (US) interview.

<sup>113</sup> A list that details all of the amateur footage used in the coverage of September 11 can be found at <http://killtown.911review.org/2nd-hit.html> however due to the conspiracy theory angle taken by this website much of the information can be called into question. It remains however one of the most comprehensive sources for the identification of amateur footage from the event.

usual news footage, and in some ways it could be argued, as Schirato and Webb do, that in some ways it was more akin to soap opera than 'hard news' because of these identificatory aspects (2004).

Figure 14<sup>114</sup> (Foreman, CNN 11/9/2001).



The gap between images shot by professionals and images shot by amateurs virtually disappeared. Examples can be seen even in the voices of the news anchors, the most distanced of the journalists from the scene:

Peter: Here's a picture that doesn't exist anymore, because that's not a live picture anymore [the 2<sup>nd</sup> tower collapses again]... [5-10second break in voice over, a the camera has panned down towards the base of the tower debris and dust is everywhere] ...Good Lord...it just...[5 second break] ...Can I ask where this picture is from? Do we know where this, ah, this, is this, this is...

John: This is outside the World Trade Center, the sign, ah, indicates the approach to the Brooklyn bridge (abc (US) 11/9/01).

<sup>114</sup> This image, allegedly taken by Park Foreman was apparently submitted to CNN by 12pm on 11/9/2001. Source <http://killtown.911review.org/2nd-hit.html>

One of the few ways that it was possible to tell whether an image had been filmed by a professional media employee or by an amateur was in the type of technology used. Some of the, now iconic, images of the attacks were filmed by random members of the public on personal camcorders and mobile phones (See Figure 15). One of the only shots of the first plane striking the building was taken by a tourist with a camcorder who was driving into the centre of the city as it occurred.

Figure 15. (unknown amateur CBS 11/9/2001)



Figure 16. (Fairbanks abc 11/9/2001)



Figure 17 (Clark CNN 11/9/2001).



This second subconduit has looked at the ways in which the coverage of September 11 differed from more standard news events. There were six key differences explored in this section. The first dealt with the unusual shot length of footage from September 11 and why this difference was so eminent. The second key difference was an unusually high level of repetition of the same shots again likely caused by the reasons stated above. The third significant difference was the unusual selection of shots used again in part likely to have occurred due to a lack of closer footage but also, it was argued, because of the iconic nature of the wide and long shots that were being used. The fourth key difference was the lack of live sound which was also a factor in the lack of crews close to the scene and able to get footage to the station. The fifth significant difference was the unusual reliance on eyewitness accounts and use of 'phoners'. The sixth and final key difference was the significant usage of handheld shots and the impact that this had on the coverage.

This second part of the subconduit explored the impact of the proliferation of communicative media on the coverage of September 11 and how this proliferation led to an amateurisation of the coverage with a resulting rise in possible identification between the audience and those directly involved in the attacks. This part of the subconduit is important because it emphasises the role of technological products in the way that the event was captured and also in the ways in which identificatory aspects were included. It is this cumulative impact of the changes in communicative media, tied with the impact of instantaneous transmission, that make this overall conduit so important to the model of the media-real.

## **Conclusion**

The conduit of unpreparedness, is made up of a number of different issues. The two subconduits that flow together to form the overarching conduit of unpreparedness are the 'indeterminate narrative structure, framing and genre characteristics', and 'the breaking of televisual conventions'. As these subconduits join this pressure reaches a critical mass and provides the impetus for the escape of the event from its representation and the creation of the media-real.

The first subconduit looked at how the issue of indeterminate narrative structure, framing and genre characteristics marked the representation of this event as something different from what had come before. It began by examining how the early footage has little narrative structure while as time goes on the narrativisation becomes more and more prominent. Heroes, villains and victims all appear and by the time of the first anniversary of the attacks this level of narrative is well entrenched with the release of a number of major films and documentaries that mostly focus on the individuals rather than on the event as a whole. The second part of this subconduit looked at the way that coverage did not fit within a standard genre frame. This part builds upon the first by showing how the indeterminacy of the narrative structure is one part of the hesitancy over genre that marked the

event. The lack of framing of the event meant that there were a multiplicity of possible readings of the event and that the audience were not directed towards one preferred reading. This added to the hesitancy over genre because the usual news frames were missing. Added to this were the similarities that many parts of the footage bore to Hollywood disaster films. This feature of genre uncertainty contributed to an argued level of 'reality confusion' amongst the audience where a significant percentage of the audience reported being uncertain as to the 'realness' or otherwise of the coverage and did not at first believe that the event being portrayed was actually taking place in the real world rather than as part of a Hollywood set.

The second subconduit explored the ways that the representation of September 11 broke the standard televisual conventions. It examined the six key differences between the coverage of September 11 and more usual news footage. These differences included a significant difference in length of shot, an unusually high level of repetition, unusual shot selection, the lack of live sound, the high use of 'phoners' and the use of handheld shots. The first key difference that was examined was the difference in the length of shot. It was found that the coverage of September 11 had a significantly longer average shot length than that more usually seen within the televisual news arena. A lack of a variety of shots was one of the reasons proposed as being the cause of this difference as well as the general unpreparedness of the news media to respond to an event of this magnitude. The second difference, an unusually high level of repetition, was also theorised as arising from a lack of available shots but also from a stunned 'compulsion to repeat' that involved repeating the footage because it was difficult to accept that it was really happening.

The third key difference was the unusual shot selection that was used in the early coverage with a preponderance of wide and long shots showing the towers burning before they collapsed or the clouds of dust and debris over the city after they collapsed. It is argued that again a lack of available shots played a role in the selection however the epic nature of many of these shots speaks to the possibility of

their use because they were iconic and also they would quickly show it if anything else were to happen in the area, which they did when the towers collapsed. The fourth key difference was the lack of live sound again potentially due to the lack of available shots and the difficulties involved with getting crews close to the scene.

The fifth difference revolves around the use of eyewitness accounts and 'phoners' or telephone interviews with eyewitnesses. Again, probably due in part to the lack of available material from professional crews, these 'phoners' and interviews actually provided much of the context of the early footage and the nature of the usual hierarchy of discourses was changed due to the lack of the reporter's framing and the fact that the media were relying in many instances on being informed of events by the public. The final difference that was explored was the use of handheld shots and in particular amateur footage by the major media outlets. This reliance on amateur quality had the effect of making the coverage appear more 'live' and raw than it would otherwise appear and also making claims to authenticity that would otherwise have been lacking from the coverage of the event.

All of these differences come together to provide a coverage that was markedly different from that which is normally associated with the news genre and in many ways is more akin to the Hollywood disaster film than to news coverage. In this way the subconduit of the breaking of televisual conventions formed a part of the pathway that the convergent forces of the media-real were accelerated through to exceed their representation through an encounter with the symbolic real.

The conduit of unpreparedness is the final factor that comes for the formation of the media-real. Although a more external factor than the three forces looked at in the earlier chapters, the pathway, or conduit, on Unpreparedness is vital because it provides the acceleration needed to boost the convergent forces through their representation in an eruption of the real unlike any news representation of an event witnessed before. This conduit was formed from three subconduits; 'indeterminate narrative structure and genre characteristics' and 'breaking televisual conventions'.





## Conclusion

This thesis began from my experience of the September 11 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States. My experience, like many other people's, was mediated through the television coverage provided by the major US media organizations. What embarked this particular project was the reaction of my father to these attacks and his reality confusion as to whether what was occurring on his television screen was happening in actuality or whether it was part of a Hollywood disaster/horror film. This confusion was something that recurred in the recounting of the experience by numerous people after the attacks and this eventually grew into a desire on my part to be able to understand why. The argument contained in this thesis is my attempt to answer this question and to theoretically explore the issues that arose in conjunction with the initial exploration of the question.

This thesis has looked at a broad range of theories and concepts in its proposition of a new communication model for the understanding of the representation of catastrophic events. This thesis adopted an interdisciplinary approach draws on research from sociology, psychology, philosophy, media theory, cultural studies and a number of other related fields. In doing so it has relied upon a methodology described variously as a 'Fractured Lens' approach or as 'Foucault's Toolbox'. What this has meant is that a vast array of concepts have been drawn together in the construction of this model and that many of these come from widely different areas of theoretical enquiry. By allowing for this breadth of conceptual thinking this thesis allows for a deep and nuanced understanding of the place of this particular model in the explication of such events.

Following Kristeva's analogy of the eruptive wound, the model of the media-real can be summarized in the following way; the media-real comes about through the convergence of the three key forces; the spectacle, the *unheimliche* and the abject. These convergent forces then both travel and are propelled through two key

channels or conduits, unpreparedness and technological hyperefficiency. Once propelled through these conduits the convergent forces gain an 'escape velocity', that is, they reach a critical mass whereby the event escapes from its own representation, this escape allowing for a re-emergence of the Lacanian real. This eruption of the Lacanian real breaches the boundaries of discourse and in doing so breaks apart the fabric of the symbolisable and shatters the societal shared understanding of reality. In many ways the analogy can also be likened to that of a volcano whereby the convergent forces sit in the place of a large build up of magma beneath a volcano, given the right conditions these convergent forces then build up pressure until they find the channels or conduits through which they travel to the surface, blowing apart the accepted or known landscape in the process.

In practice, the concept of the media-real is predicated on a number of key factors. The event of September 11 is located within a specific historical context and this context is not the simple media (or instant history) version but is a complex interplay of many different forces, some with centuries of historical development behind them. Chapter One begins by drawing on the Deleuzian understanding of an event as a process rather than as a product. By seeing the event in this way we are forced to confront the open-endedness of what we term history. This exploration of the Deleuzian event is important to this thesis because it outlines how an event is never actually separates from the flow of time within which it occurs. Yet despite this, how it is possible to analyse an event when an event is understood as being part of a much larger process rather than being the end result of a causal chain? The present, in the Deleuzian understanding, exists only as a moment in the meeting of the past and future but at the same time is the only time in existence. This paradoxical understanding of time as always becoming, never complete, but always at the same time past, already gone and yet again always present, allows for an understanding of the event as something that does not exist just in the 'now' but is intricately connected to all of the moments that lead up to this 'critical point' and all of the moments that lead away from it.

It is at this point that Deleuze's understanding of the place of the event can be compared and examined to Virilio's understanding of the relationship between technology and the accident that it presupposes. Virilio makes the point that the birth of any new technology contains within it the potential for the accident that comes from it. In other words, to create the motorcycle is to create the motorcycle crash. In some ways this is a very self evident statement yet on another level it shows the linkages through time of the technology with the accident. This is to say that it works on a similar understanding of the flow of times and events as in Deleuze's work because the technology and the accident are co-existent, the accident cannot exist without this link to the past. Additionally no technology is built in a vacuum: there are always social factors driving the development of new technology so the accident itself is linked to the social factors that give rise to the technology. This chain also extends into the future as well. As the technology *becomes* so too does the accident and, given the interdependence of technology with the social, then so too does each social development connect back into the chain of *becoming*. All of these points lead us back to the point that the event of September 11 did not occur in one splendidly spectacular moment, nor did it occur without a spreading ripple of effects into the future and to isolate the event from the stream of time within which it resides is to make it less than what it was and is.

Having said this, there is a 'stream' of the event which has already branched and that is the representation of the event. Representation does not equal reality and can never do so. At best it is a partial understanding from a given place at a given time with any number of other 'givens'. This thesis is only analysing the mediation of the event, not the event itself. Some contextualization of the event is provided in order to place the event but this is by no means expansive because that aspect of the event is not the aim of this research. Rather this research has investigated how this representation shaped what possible societal perceptions of reality were available. The argument put forward throughout this thesis has been that it is the convergence of a number of different factors that led to the eruption of the Lacanian real and the escape of the event from its representation.

The concept of the media-real requires a broad theoretical contextualization. This model does not occur in a vacuum but rather arises from many different areas of theoretical work. By using a 'Foucault's toolbox' methodology this thesis has drawn upon a wide array of different theories. Within this theoretical context the concept of the media-real is particularly founded in the Lacanian understanding of reality as a traumatic irruption and the different ways of understanding reality and the real are the subject of the second part of Chapter One. The key point about reality that is central to this concept is taken from the social constructivist viewpoint whereby any understanding of reality is seen as being formed through the society within which the subject lives. Any socially constructed understanding of reality is built upon shared values and understandings, discourses and hierarchies and all of these are to some degree arbitrary decisions. They set in place a set of commonly held values in an hierarchicalised form, binary oppositions. These oppositions, and the value structure that they inform, are the foundations for the ways in which members of a given society understand the world, their perception of reality. It is important to note that this does not negate any place for dissent, rather this dissent is formed through a rejection of a particular value set but it is still formed in relation to that set. The sharing of these values and discourses has led to a structure of beliefs and understandings and while it is possible to disagree with individual beliefs or discourses it is far more difficult to question the entire structure.

Yet this is what this thesis argues occurred with the representation of September 11. In allowing for an eruption of the Lacanian real, in the escape of the event from the symbolisable, the socially shared and maintained understanding of reality was shattered. The naturalized binary oppositions that are so foundational to the construction of a socially shared worldview were shaken and shown to be arbitrary rather than 'given' and natural.

A Žižekian reworking of the Lacanian real was chosen for the underpinnings of this thesis and the argument for the re-emergence of the real because of the emphasis

placed by Žižek on the real as a 'traumatic encounter'. It is also important to remember that this Žižekian interpretation is not the only one and a number of theorists, such as Belsey, take issue with his interpretation. However, by using this formulation of the real as traumatic encounter there is greater latitude for the application of this concept to the question being studied in this research, namely how did the representation of this event shape the availability of possible societal perceptions of reality? What is posited is that one key reason for the shaping is this eruption of this traumatic encounter through its representation.

The third major section of Chapter One explores the Foucauldian concept of discourse and the idea of biopower. By examining the ways in which discourses are shaped across epistemes, according to the requirements of the society of the time Foucault makes the point that the way in which it is possible to speak at any time comes from the society within which the speaker resides. He shows that discourses change across time, across locality and can be very different between different cultures. The idea of biopower is further examined in relation to this way of understanding self-disciplining bodies and the reasons why such a body is productive to society. The fourth major part of this chapter draws upon the work of Derrida on deconstruction and the importance of the examination of binary oppositions in any analysis of cultural products. The chapter then goes on to discuss some of the commonly occurring discourses that are evident in the representation of September 11 and how these relate to the binary oppositions underpinning them. The argument running throughout this chapter is that it is the destabilization of these binaries by the eruption of the Lacanian real that caused a shattering of a shared understanding of reality and that it is this that marks this representation as different to other catastrophic media events.

As mentioned previously the media-real only comes about with the convergence of the three major forces of spectacle, the *unheimliche* and the abject. These three forces converge in the case of the mediation of September 11 and provide the

substance for the eruption of the traumatic real which, it is argued, shatters the societally shared understanding of reality that was in place at that time.

The first force to be examined was the spectacle in Chapter Two. Spectacle, it is argued, provides the initial impetus for the formation of the media-real. It is the visceral blow that mesmerized many as the representation of September 11 unfolded. The explosions, the violence, the screams and sirens all formed part of this spectacle that fascinated so many. This chapter begins with an exploration of Debord's ideas on the society of the spectacle. Debord suggested that the period from the 1960's onwards has seen the rise of a society completely mesmerized by the spectacle, so much so that spectacle becomes its own purpose. He claims that there is a loss of depth, of context and of the bonds that originally tied people to each other because of the influence of the spectacle. He argued that this was a deliberate series of actions designed to keep people isolated and alienated from each other. In his writings on this controlling entity Debord appears to believe in a monolithic level of control over society by a nameless and faceless totality. Kellner's usage of Debord is predicated on the notion that Debord's theories are important and interesting but that his idea of the monolithic control of the use of spectacle is at best overemphasized. Following Kellner's view of the utility of Debord's work this thesis takes a similar stance and uses many of the understandings of spectacle provided by Debord without ascribing some controlling totality.

The second part of the chapter deals with the idea of the spectator as being the necessary reverse angle of the spectacle. Without the spectator the spectacle loses its reason for existence. This section of the chapter explores the psychoanalytic understanding of the spectator and their relationship to what appears on the screen. The section also further explores Benjamin's ideas on the role of the aura of authenticity in the activeness of the audience. Benjamin felt that, as the aura disappeared, so to did the entranced relationship of the subject to the object, that the subject was set free by the lack of an aura. What this thesis argues is that the representation of the September 11, due to the presence of the Lacanian real,

regained its aura and thus promoted the entranced, mesmeric relationship that Benjamin describes as belonging to the 'cult value' mode of engagement between subject and object.

The overall argument of Chapter Two is that the mediation of September 11 represented something quite different in terms of both the spectacle and its relationship to the spectator. The difference in both primarily comes from the re-emergence of the Lacanian real which explodes through the representation resetting both the spectacle and the relationship between spectacle and spectator. By belonging to the real the event existed outside of the boundaries of discourse. This meant a very different relationship between the subject and the object because the aura of authenticity regained its strength. This wasn't a copy of a copy of a copy but a far more rare and frightening experience, a real event. It also meant that the spectacle was orders of magnitude above what is so frequently presented on television screens. This accident in the real returned the spectacle to something uncontrolled and vital, it was not possible to know what would happen next, and this meant that the coverage was fascinating and mesmeric.

However if the mediation of the event was only tied to spectacle this would have eventually become mundane. There are only so many times that the explosion can be replayed. The event and its representation was also highly *unheimliche*. Chapter Three explores the Freudian concept of the *unheimliche* and looks at the different formulations of the concept provided by Freud. Freud's understanding of this concept is tied to a distinction between the *unheimliche* which comes about because of so-called 'primitive' understandings that have been supplanted and also by deeper issues which have been repressed. He also posits a more problematic distinction between the *unheimliche* in unrealistic fiction and realistic fiction. What is central to the idea of the *unheimliche*, however, is something that is both familiar and strange at the same time. Other ways that Freud sees the *unheimliche* occurring include; a loss of distinction between imagination and reality, a fear of the double,

the omnipotence of thought and the blurring of the lines between animate and inanimate.

The argument made throughout the chapter is that the representation of the event of September 11 was inherently uncanny. It was both familiar and strange at the same time in that the spectacle, which is so familiar due to the influence of Hollywood and television, was also unfamiliar in that it was real and it was happening live. For many people this led to some confusion over the distinction between the imaginary and reality and this enhanced the sensation of uncanniness. The twin towers hit by twin planes, with twinned explosions and twinned collapses, ties into the idea of the uncanniness of the double. Baudrillard's statement about the complicity of the audience in wishing for the destruction of the perfect system and that this complicity was a part of the reaction to the event fits with the idea of the uncanny as being formed by the convergence of wish and fulfilment. Finally there was the blurring of the boundaries of the animate and the inanimate in the transformation of domestic, commonplace pieces of machinery into flying bombs bringing death and destruction on an awe inspiring level. Overall the impact of these factors leads to an uncommon level of the uncanny present in the representation of this event. This level of '*unheimlichkeit*' converged with the already exceedingly high degree of spectacle to create a deep sense of wrongness, a fear that hadn't existed to such a level before.

Chapter Four examines the third force of the media-real, the abject. Kristeva puts forward the concept of the abject as one that occurs with the blurring of the boundaries between distinct categories because this threatens the system of meaning that is built through interaction in language. The abject occurs at the boundaries of the body. It is found in the things that inspire revulsion and repulsion but yet frequently are things that are also desired and produce *jouissance*. Kristeva provides the example of the corpse as the best example of the abject. It is something that was once an 'I' there was a self but although the shell remains the 'I' is nowhere to be seen. The body without the self is abject because it blurs the boundaries

between existing and not existing. It also reminds the subject of the fleeting condition of selfhood and this exposure to mortality inspires rejection and revulsion but also a longing. It is best described through the notion of madness, in terms of the borderline patient, as a letting go of the self, a descent back into the chora where nothing is differentiated, where everything is particular to the subject but there is no subject because there is no distinction between the self and the other, between the past and the present, between the interior and the exterior. While this is a terrifying experience, there is also a level of *jouissance* in letting go, a pleasure, painful, violent and horrific as it is.

What this chapter argues is that the abject is the final element of the triadic convergent forces that begins the process of becoming that eventuates into the media-real. The abject is necessary because of the 'push and pull' aspect inherent in its nature. It is almost insidious, it almost seeped into consciousness as the spectator watched transfixed by the spectacle and terrified by the uncanny. It was the feeling of revulsion and repugnance at what was being witnessed. At the same time there was the tacit understanding, pointed to by Baudrillard, that the audience was complicit in the wish for a return of the real, in an escape from the hyperreal, from endless simulation.

The final chapter of the thesis explores the conduit or pathway that provided the means, and the final impetus, for the escape of the event from its representation. This conduit of unpreparedness is vital to the formulation of the media-real because without this element the convergent forces have no way to be propagated and nor is there the added impetus of a mediation so different to the kinds of representation that are standard for television, hence shaping the availability of possible shared meanings and perceptions of reality.

The first subconduit looks at the indeterminacy of the narrative structure, framing and genre characteristics. These factors meant that there was less coding of the visual language for the preferred reading, opening the event to a plethora of

different understandings. While all representation is able to be read differently this event's mediation was unusual in that its initial presentation was exceedingly open and this meant a far broader array of available understandings and, it is argued, added to the sense of reality confusion mentioned in connection to the uncanny.

The second subconduit examined the breaking of televisual conventions and this issue was one where the unexpected nature of the event and its magnitude left the television coverage in the unusual situation where the usual kinds of framing of events were not mobilized at first. There were also many differences in the technical conventions that are normally present in news and absent in the initial coverage. The second part of this subconduit looked at the impact of the spread of communicative devices had on the coverage of the event. Unusually, at that time, there were a high percentage of original shots of the event that were captured by amateur members of the public. These images were then sent in to the stations and used in the coverage of the event. The difference here was the use of unconventional shots and the reactions of those who were filming. Many shots are blurry or unfocussed, they are at strange angles and they are handheld. All of these factors add to the sense of liveness and immediacy provided by the footage, that the event is occurring while it is being watched, it is not merely something that happened to someone else hours ago, even though in most cases it was. Each part of each conduit played a role in both channelling and propelling this event beyond the reach of language, beyond the symbolisable into the place where discourse no longer can exist.

It is here that we find the media-real, at the fringes of what it is possible to understand. Existing in fleeting glimpses, in moments within larger events but always a part of this process never a discreet product in its own right. It is produced through the convergence of the three key forces of the spectacle, the *unheimliche* and the abject which come together and then are propelled through the two conduits of unpreparedness and technological hyperefficiency to promote the

eruption of the Lacanian real. This eruption allows for the escape of the event from its representation, for the rise of the media-real.



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