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Deconstructing Terror: The Political Theatre of Harold Pinter, Caryl Churchill, and Martin Crimp

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Martin Crimp

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Introductory Notes

Throughout this paper, I will use the following citation abbreviations for frequently used texts:

>*OG: Of Grammatology*
>*ST: The Spirit of Terrorism*
>*PT: Philosophy in a Time of Terror*
>*GW: The Gulf War*

Note: All American administration speeches on terrorism are available online through the White House archives: https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-and-remarks, the public archives of the U.S. State Department: http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/speeches/, and the American Presidency Project Online: http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu

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Because my husband is sent out on one operation after another
with the aim—the apparent aim—of eradicating terror;
not understanding that the more he fights terror—
the more he creates terror—who has no eyelids—into his own bed.
      Martin Crimp (*Cruel and Tender* 2)

I. Introduction: Terrorism as a "Structure of Feeling"

In what follows, I want to develop an understanding of terrorism as a concept that,

as its varied rhetorical employments throughout history prove, has evaded semantic

consistency or stable meaning. The events of 9/11 and the corresponding public discourse

of the "War On Terror" mark an engagement with "terrorism" that is explained in terms

of a traditional "us" against "them" scenario, which, as evidenced in the political rhetoric

of the Bush administration, is discursively constructed using the logic of the binary to an

extreme. And yet, if terrorism is defined as both precisely what "we" are not, as well as

precisely what we know nothing about (*PT* 90), then the causes and effects of how

terrorism is conceived and experienced by the individual cannot be ultimately reducible

to the fear of the "bad guy."

I argue that the contemporary understanding of how the West conceives of "the

enemy" is distinguished by the emergence of the "new world order" following the

aftermath of the Cold War, which was a struggle between two competing ideological

systems— socialism and democracy. In contrast to the fight for global dominance, which

characterized most of the 20th century, the enemy to the "new world order" does not pose

a substantive threat to the norms and values spearheaded by the United States and

inculcated by the tentacles of global capital. Instead the enemy poses a symbolic

challenge by its mere refusal to "get with the picture." It is not a matter of "us" being

dominated or taken over by the "them," but rather "they" refuse to be dominated by "us."

On the basis of three contemporary British[1] playwrights: Harold Pinter, Caryl Churchill,

and Martin Crimp, I will develop an understanding of how the pathological imperative to

forge binaries undergirds any normative system that purports to be founded on

transparent knowledge and truth.

      How is language complicit with terrorism? In what way is the individual both the

cause and effect of fear? In what ways might the threat of political terror to the

established order (capitalism, Western dominance, etc.) be explained by the unconscious

of texts—political, journalistic, or literary? How might language be employed to

construct or deconstruct the psychological underpinnings of fear, paranoia, and

vulnerability? It is these questions that this study will interrogate, so as to articulate an

understanding of terrorism as a "structure of feeling."[2]

      This study is not concerned with the slew of overtly political plays that directly

and explicitly address 9/11, Gaza, the Gulf War and other events since the dawn of the

90's. The political slants, the policy alignments, the activist quality inherent in these

plays are not my focus, and neither are the specifics of the events in question. The main

concern will be to build a working definition of terrorism, examine its textures,

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[1] British drama is privileged here in part because of its long and consistent engagement with questions of collectivist politics in the postwar period: the 'angry young man' of the 50's and 60's; socialist drama of the 70's and 80's; anti-authoritarian and 'in-yer-face' drama of the 90's. British drama was thus well situated to anticipate some of the problems and feelings of terror that would be amplified in the wake of 9/11. Beyond the historically based "special relationship" between the U.S. and Britain, events such as the Gulf War and Gaza were far more unpopular in the U.K. than in the U.S., providing an energizing context for a political theatre that took aim at American foreign policies, as well as Prime Minister Tony Blair's unyielding support of them (Spencer 5).
[2] A "structure of feeling," as formulated and defined by Raymond Williams is "the continuity of experience from a particular work, through its particular form, to its recognition as a general form, and then the relation of this general form to a period" (Williams 17).

understand how it constitutes an entire structure of feeling that is not limited to the terrorist attacks and wars that belong to a discourse of international relations, but one that is fundamental to the psychological structuration of the individual and her relation to ideology, language, and society. The objective will not be to distinguish an idealist and universalizing "spirit of the age," but to articulate a distinct network of how meanings and values are lived and felt without sanding over its specific contradictions and complex internal relations. For critic Raymond Williams, a structure of feeling of a period of time is accessed primarily through artistic forms and conventions (16-17); therefore, this study will have as its point of focus the modern dramatic form as that which will illuminate the discourses of terrorism imbedded in the lived experience of contemporary Western reality.

In contrast to the mantra of art for art's sake, the modern theatre has the potential to "mirror every phase of life and embrace every strata of society" (Goldman 3) by virtue of the fact that every production is *interested* and works against the supposed objectivity of theatrical realism. The political import of the modern theatre emerges not only in the thematic content, but more importantly in the disclosure of the ideology at work in the process of making meaning in the theatre, the shaping of the audience's experiences. The theatre necessarily frames the interpretive activity of the audience because in staging the activities of production (acting, action, participation), the performance produces a social microcosm of subjects (actor, character, spectator) negotiating the terms of a cultural and social order—the order of the theatre and society as well. Thus in the ability of political theatre to transform and play with the field of theatrical relations, the theatre spotlights alternatives to the world beyond the stage in such a way that "undermines superstitions,

shakes the social pillars, and prepares men and women for the reconstruction" (Goldman 3).

This study is concerned with language as it relates to the formation and deployment of the discourses of terror and how language is implicit in the sensation and evocation of terror. This focus serves as an explanation for the method of analysis that will be employed, as well as the rationale behind the objects of textual inquiry. I want to suggest that a deconstructive intervention can cut through self-enclosed totalities by placing them face-to-face with their internal differentiations. There will be two levels of deconstructive work at play throughout this study; the first is strictly textual and will seek to understand how terror, anxiety, and paranoia are imbedded in texts. Through a deconstruction of narrative structures, I hope to demonstrate how specific employments of language are structured by psychic material. Lastly, I will address how the textual unconscious teased out from the selected plays might correspond to the same structures of power that distinguish contemporary Western life.

II. Deconstruction and Method

Given the method of this study, a brief overview of deconstruction is warranted. Indeed, "terrorism" seems a sort of Derridean sign, one in which the signifier is only tenuously linked to its signified (though with a gruesomely real referent). In an interview after 9/11, Jacques Derrida remarked that when we speak of that day's events, in a strict sense, "we don't know what we're talking about" (*PT* 87). More recently, the question has often been asked: "What does ISIS want?"—a point to which I return in conclusion.

The idea that the linguistic structure of the sign is divided between the derivate of meaning, the signifier, and the meaning itself, the signified, is founded on the desire to interpret "being" as "presence;" a metaphysical longing for what Jacques Derrida defines as the "transcendental signified" (*OG* 20). The implications of a transcendental signified that transcends all signifiers-- all already interpreted and thus violated modes of expression—betrays a theological longing for a concept independent from language. Such a concept mitigates ontological anxiety by providing a comforting link that unites all disparate cultures, languages, and systems of thought to "a history and system of metaphysics" (*OG* 19); This realm of pure transparency and full knowledge becomes the object of our striving, constitutive of our desire. By undertaking a "deconstruction" of the transcendental signified, that is, by picking apart the internal contradictions of the metaphysics of presence, something, too, can be learned about the nature of individual and collective desire.

If a reduced temporality—presence—constitutes an unmediated relationship to truth, then presence is also the essence of the signified. If the signified is defined by its universal relationship to meaning, representation that defines perfection must be grasped in terms of its success or failure to locate what was originally missing: the presence of the thing itself, the original content of the empirical form of representation. Ultimately, the longing for a transcendental signified betrays a desire for a world in which, in the words of Jonathan Culler, "everything would be itself, with no gap between form or meaning" (154).

The impossibility of this ideal, as well as the faulty logic underlying this hierarchy of signification can be deconstructed using Ferdinand de Saussure's own writings,

namely the notion of the arbitrariness of the sign, which asserts that the signifier bears no calculated or meaningful relationship to the signified it seeks to represent. If signs are in fact "unmotivated," then, as Derrida points out, it can also be understood that they have no "natural attachment to the signified within reality" (*OG* 46). The link between signifier and signified is not natural—therefore, neither is the link between speech and reality. Derrida writes, "The general structure of the unmotivated trace connects with the same possibility, and they cannot be separated except by abstraction, the structure of the relationship with the other, the movement of temporalization, and language as writing" (*OG* 47). To express meaning, to announce the sign by way of the signifier is therefore not to extend the signified into intelligibility by way of "any simplicity, any identity, any resemblance or continuity" (*OG* 47), but to announce it as such. By this same logic, if the sign is arbitrary and denies any substantial reference to reality, it would appear that the nature of the sign, whether conveyed through speech or writing, cannot assume a more perfect relationship to reality that would otherwise create an objectively real hierarchy of signs.

A spontaneous crossroad of meaning goes contrary to the signifier and signified as structuring oppositions of symbol and reality. Instead, reality is conceived of as irreducible absence and the symbol as expression is seen as an insufficient mode of substitution—a cheap knockoff. With such a reliance on this foundational opposition, binary logic becomes the mode by which truth and knowledge are constructed, a fetish for pure presence and a fear of pure absence. Derrida argues that this understanding of reality is merely a product of our desires, a wistful idea that we can somehow touch the reality of things, and that somewhere or somehow reality can be revealed to us in its

fullness and true character. On the contrary, meaning cannot be self-evident because it is necessarily filtered and mediated as a condition of its intelligibility. For Derrida, intelligibility is only possible by the necessary absence of meaning: the trace that is the very condition of non-presence in presence. This process of infinite deferral, of necessarily never being able to come to a full meaning is central to Derridean thought, and can be explicated by the concept of *différance.*

Though not a real French word, *différance* is related to several: *la différence* (the difference)*, différer* (to differ, and to defer)*,* and *différant* (the condition of differing, or of deferring). These derivatives offer Derrida's neologism an interesting reach; for instance, the verb *différer* hails both space and time. Things differ spatially and things are deferred temporally. Likewise, there can be "differing forms" and "deferring strategies." Despite this flickering between the presence of a noun or a verb, *différance* remains a non-word, and is therefore neither noun nor verb. *Différance* can therefore cover all other absences and occlusions of meaning across these related nouns, verbs, etc. Is this to say that *différance* dwells in the unknown, the realm of monstrous indeterminacy that knows not good or bad, east or west, high or low? In fact, *différance* is the very plaything that disrupts this oppositional logic because it is both present and absent and as such, indicates the fundamental unknowability that constitutes and underlies our linguistic cognition (Collins and Mayblin 79). From this logic of *différance,* Derrida found that language can only function upon imperfection and instability, upon the incessant sliding between presence and absence, a play across both sides of the Saussurian sign that is an interweaving between what is there (the signified) and not there (its related sounds and concepts).

For the deconstructionist, reading is not the task of grasping the true single meaning of the text, but its multiple meanings, which are often contradictory and unstable. Yet how can the reader trust the text if description does not fulfill, or "hit," its intention? According to Derrida, undecidability disrupts foundational oppositions, a play that introduces disorder into communication, preventing language, thought, and meaning from nesting in the comfort of their daily routines. The deconstructionist system of inquiry is an assault against metaphysics and its concern with logocentrism, or the pursuit of truth and nature as desirable categories of purity and transcendence. In Barbara Johnson's application of deconstruction to Herman Melville's *Billy Budd, Sailor,* for example, naïve and ironic readings fall into such philosophical traps because they "attempt to impose upon language the functioning of an absolute, timeless, universal law (the sign as either motivated or arbitrary)" ("Melville's Fist" 590). This inclination towards the magnetic pull of opposing binaries is, for a deconstructionist reader, fundamentally linked to the desire for absolute presence, which necessarily imposes a hierarchy that privileges presence and subordinates absence. Deconstructive thought would posit that there is a historical necessity to relinquish the dream of full presence, the reassuring foundation or origin that denies play. In any case, the trace, or the sliding between presence and absence that constitutes language and meaning, confirms that the establishment of full presence is in fact only an illusion.

To define deconstruction is to rein it into the confines of logocentrism and its movement towards thinking in terms of simple elements or origins. Instead, deconstruction is concerned with movements across and between metaphysical binaries. As a matrix of inquiry, deconstruction is not outside the text in the sense that it assumes a

position of mastery or authority. Deconstruction is parasitic; it is a strategy of inhabiting

meaning and texts, making a destabilizing passage through them, undoing what is taken

for granted, and unearthing their underlying and relational levels (Collins and Mayblin

97). Deconstruction analyzes the internal logic of a text in a way that reveals

contradictions, carving out the limits of the political, or the boundaries in which action is

linked to understanding. In this way, deconstruction is a powerful tool in the critique of

ideology (e.g. For Johnson, a deconstructive intervention pulls apart the layers that

constitute literal, ironic, or historical forms of judgment). Deconstruction loses nothing

from admitting that it is impossible because it wants nothing to do with possibility, if

possibility is that which can be usurped by easily distinguishable procedures, accessible

approaches, or the seductive closure of meaning and presence.

To return to the idea of "terror" as a Derridean sign, this study argues that terror is

like a signifier without a signified, a deeply uncertain sign that points desperately to the

palpable but unbridgeable horizon of History, of the Real. Moreover, reactions to such

overwhelming uncertainty betray a similar struggle to achieve full "presence" of

knowledge as a means of psychically grounding the subject in a sense of comfort, which

can also double as mastery.

III. Harold Pinter and Authoritarianism

A brief discussion of two plays by Harold Pinter, *The New World Order* (1991),

and *Ashes to Ashes* (1996), will serve as a preliminary analysis, prompting key questions

about how knowledge and truth are achieved, while grounding such understandings in

two very different political scenarios. *The New World Order,* I will argue, poses the

fundamental question of what it means to be at odds with democracy and then

deconstructs the enemy by reducing her linguistically. On one level, Pinter's play

suggests that the enemy is precisely the unintelligible, that which refuses to be reined in

by the language of the victors. On another level, the play mocks the very foundations by

which order is assembled and binaries distinguished by poking fun at the logic by which

"truth" and meaning are constructed, while altogether preserving their potential to enact

real violence.

When Derrida wrote that "*there is nothing outside the text*"[3] (*OG* 158), he was not

aligning himself with the view that everything can be reduced to language, but rather, that

if language is constituted by a movement of difference with no stable center, it is futile to

appeal to a reality as a refuge independent of language. In deconstruction, the basis of

terror, of how horror is produced in texts, is that which is unknown, indeterminate—that

which escapes our mastery and rests immune to the mechanisms by which we produce

knowledge. Terror is that which frustrates the imperative to forge binaries that allow us to

distinguish between categories or "sides." Nostalgia for "easier times" or peace is not the

case in this world, but nostalgia for the sort of war archived today in history books or

strategic board games persists. In our efforts to master this terror, to overcome or defeat

it, we tend to demarcate imaginary borders, corral the graspable content into units; what

falls within these limits is the illusion of total knowledge. In literature this might occur in

what Shoshana Felman would call "vulgar" (107) interpretation, or the production of

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[3] Opponents of Derrida often misinterpret his mantra to mean nothing exists outside of
language, but Derrida elaborates in the brackets that follow his initial declaration: "[there
is no outside-text; *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*]" (*OG* 158).

rigid, coherent meanings, which, on the contrary, stifles potential richness through literal, "dead-end" interpretation. Censorship, voluntary blind-ness is a requisite— to assert dominance would not be to unveil the secrets of the unknown, but to cast them off, distance them, place them into the realm of the Other insofar as the Other is something that is impenetrable by virtue of its resistance to categorization.

Towards the end of his career, the playwright Harold Pinter ended his political silence and wrote several plays that pointed his distinct style in the direction of outwardly "political" themes; *The New World Order* (1991) is one such example. In it, there are three characters: two "prosecutors" named Des and Lionel, and one "blind-folded man," whose name and origin the audience knows nothing about—is he a terrorist? A dissenter? An enemy of the state? Does it matter? In any case, Des declares that the prisoner sits before them because he stands opposed to, or in some way obstructs the world's movement towards perfection, given that his presumed torture will be executed for the sake of "keeping the world clean for democracy" (60). While the blind-folded man is literally in the dark about what is going to be done to him, Lionel and Des, similarly know nothing about their victim.

The play begins with a revelation, but not the answer the audience expects: "Do you want to know something about this man? / What? / He doesn't got any idea at all what we're going to do to him" (53). For the audience, knowledge of the blindfolded man does not pre-exist the play; such knowledge will be built throughout the play because it is limited to the possible "number of things" that can be done to him by his assailants. The audience, however, never gets to see any of the number of physical acts implied by Des and Lionel's exchange; instead, all we get is empty language mediated by an interplay of

seeing, exchanges of looking, glances, and stares. Consider how the few stage directions are, in fact, different postures of observation and seeing, akin to standing before a work of abstract art and attempting to find a suitable interpretation for the incoherent: "*A blind-folded man sitting on a chair. Two men looking at him/ They study the man. He is still / Des bends over the man / They walk round the chair*" (53-57). The victim here is speechless, regarded, acted upon by language, by Des and Lionel's attempts to make sense of him: "Who is this cunt anyway? / He's a lecturer in fucking peasant theology" (58). Ultimately the duo conjure up some empty signifiers to describe the blind-folded man—a peasant theologian, a motherfucker, a cunt, a prick—none of these "hit" the target of signification, but merely float around the unstable concept that is to be at odds with democracy while simultaneously leaving open, if not fertilizing, the realm of possibilities through the use of words whose meanings are extensive as opposed to sealed off.

Yet Des and Lionel "know what language means" (58), what it can do to them, and what it can mean to them— thus, the imperative to "define your terms and stick to them" (57). The blindfolded man can't be both a prick and a cunt, according to Des, because these terms are mutually contradictory: "You'd lose face in any linguistic discussion group. Take my tip" (57). To lose face would be to come across as ignorant, admitting to not really *knowing* what you're talking about, failing to make sense of your own terms, being unable to determine what *is* and what *is not*, to give up your claim to power and understanding. Language must be coerced into intelligibility and order so that it can be employed neatly to certain ends. In fact, knowledge or claims to knowledge are premised on the exclusion of contradictions in order to establish a stable link between

signifier and signified. But knowledge is a funny proposition. When Des insists that

Lionel must pick between calling their victim a cunt or a prick, the speech comes across

as humorous because making such a decision seems awkwardly inconsequential,

secondary to the *real* violence looming in the near future. Knowledge (like the illusion

that language can accurately and fully transmit the signified) is always already trumped

by the process by which meaning is achieved—seeing, interpreting, and reading. These

processes are necessarily characterized by filtering, by weeding out, by focusing the

image, by censoring that which does not fit within the mold of coherent meaning and

intelligibility. In short, knowledge is the art of discriminating. By insisting on the need to

decide between cunt and prick, Des hopes to erase, distance, place one as an absent

signifier in order to accentuate the palpability of the other, while also hoping to better

concentrate and stabilize, through language, the very object that he will, and has already

started to, enact violence upon. While laughing, we are compelled to ask, "cunt, prick?

What does it matter?" The idea that knowledge captures truth, captures something that

matters, is the joke we are laughing at when Des delivers his "tip."

  This laughing matter, however, is the basis of power. Judgments must be made for

sentences to be carried out. Pinter illustrates how the dominant order views the individual

who resists the tenets of established knowledge. The blindfolded man is considered

internally confused, emptied of meaning and principles that would otherwise assure his

place within the order. Such an ambiguity of character necessarily produces a judgment

of guilt:

> Look at this man here, for example. He's a first class example. Before he
> came in here he was a big shot, he never stopped shooting his mouth off,
> he never stopped questioning received ideas. Now—because he's
> apprehensive about what's about to happen to him—he's stopped all that,

> he's got nothing more to say, he's more or less called it a day. I mean
> once—not too long ago—this man was a man of conviction, wasn't he, a
> man of principle. Now he's just a prick. (58)

The prisoner, based on this explanation, is characterized as a political dissident who openly protested against the established order's monopoly on truth. As in the inscriptions of the white pyramid of the Ministry of Truth in George Orwell's *1984* (1949) that reads "War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength," this "new world order" is predicated on the passive adherence to "received ideas," suggesting that ignorance forms the very basis of "conviction," "principle," and meaning in this society. By turning against these values, the blind-folded man transitions from being a loaded sign—a carrier of "received" ideas—to an empty sign, a "prick" that refuses to be made sense of by the language of the dominant order. Simultaneously, the expectations and vulnerabilities of this new world order are betrayed by characterizing the opponent as precisely that which dances around stable meaning and furthermore adopting a sign (prick or cunt) that only functions as an invective—an accusation of guilt. This order is predicated on the obedience of subjects made meaning-full by the knowledge it commands.

But Des and Lionel are constantly announcing that they both "haven't even finished with him" and "haven't even begun," which comes across as both humorous and tense— the former because the "number of things" threatened are never made explicit nor enacted, indicating a certain inertness on behalf of the two, an intentional delay. At the same time, the horizon of torture is implicit and its non-appearance throughout the play leaves its finer details up to the imagination, which wells up in expectancy to the point of bursting forth an onslaught of ropes, knives, buckets of water, clippers, guns, sweat, and blood. To not have finished and to not have even begun— is this not like language, which

never fully offers that which it purports to deliver, but nonetheless hails a wealth of metonymically related signifiers? Language slides back and forth from fertility to impotency and refuses to land; it is undecided and un-decidable. It is this very indeterminacy of mood, this instability of feeling that dominates the text and allows anxiety and nervous laughter to reign. This is the "new world order" in which we live; violence and politics no longer meet at the frontlines, head-on. They flirt and tease and keep us waiting—desire and terror become two sides of the same coin.

Pinter's anti-torture plays, however, are not always concerned with direct political statements by way of mimetic representation, but rather, they seek to implicate entire symbolic structures—linguistic, rhetorical, and social systems—as displaced manifestations of un-representable barbarisms. By way of abstraction, Harold Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes* (1996) seeks to politicize aesthetic representation in order to estrange the violence of authoritarian terror. In contrast to *The New World Order,* which directly addresses political abuses in the name of democratic principles, *Ashes to Ashes* signals a return to the private sphere in order to interrupt our complacent distinctions between the safe-haven of the domestic and the violence of the "real world" beyond.

Ashes to Ashes is set in the quaint living room of a suburban home, a seemingly guilt-less scenario depicting an intimate conversation between Rebecca and Devlin, a married couple. The play, however, defies any expectations of a "normal" talk, when Rebecca begins to describe her abusive ex-lover, calmly explaining that he would lovingly put his fist to her mouth and grasp her throat. As the dialogue continues, however, Rebecca proves unwilling or unable to provide a clear and coherent description of this man. Describing him as a travel agent, and more ambiguously, as a guide, Rebecca

seems to contradict herself when she describes her lover as both a man known for his "purity and conviction" ("Ashes" 25), as well as a man who would "walk down the platform and tear all the babies from the arms of their screaming mothers" (27). Rebecca's opaque and contradicting descriptions prove unsettling and unsatisfactory. Frustrated with Rebecca's ambiguous responses to his incessant questioning, Devlin insists that he is in the dark and "needs light" (11): "It would mean a great deal to me if you could define him more clearly (…) I want a concrete image of him, you see…an image I can carry about with me" (11-12).

The distinction between Rebecca and Devlin can be, based off of this interplay between her ambiguity and his desire for concrete detail, understood as a dialogue between metonymy and metaphor (Begley 182). If metonymy functions like the psychic work of combination and displacement, bringing a variety of related images and details into one "context," metaphor enacts violence by bringing together unrelated images into a contrived relationship as a work of repression. Indeed, while Rebecca makes vague, lyrical references to interrelated events:

> I looked out the garden window […] I was looking out the window in that house in Dorset and I saw a whole crowd of people walking through the woods, on their way to the sea, in the direction of the sea […] And I saw all these people walk into the sea. The tide covered them slowly ("Ashes" 48-49),

Devlin berates her mental oscillations, effectively putting her in her place: "Now look. We live here. You don't live…in Dorset…or *anywhere else*. You live here with me" (65). The narrative moves forward through number of similar fluctuations between Rebecca's dreamy memories and Devlin's absolutist proclamations, but ultimately Rebecca's "song" seems to dominate as she enters into a monologue about a boy and man "dragging

suitcases" (72) into the night, and a woman and baby trailing close behind. Such a climax of ambiguity proves unbearable for Devlin, who at this point has stopped asking questions. Unable to fix meaning at any single point of Rebecca's story, Devlin stops using words and ultimately replaces her ex-lover by assuming the same position of mastery over her body, clenching one hand to her throat, and the other fist to her mouth, demanding her to "kiss it" (75). As the stage directions at the beginning of the play indicate, the room darkens during the course of their exchange, while the lamplight placed at center stage intensifies and ultimately peaks (indeed, a literal "point" of light in the middle of darkness) during Devlin's final act of dominance. This visual companion seems to trace Devlin's imperative to fix knowledge and pinpoint truth. When Devlin's verbal sparring proves insufficient, he assumes a physical position of dominance that enacts his symbolic mastery over the situation.

In his relentless search for truth, Devlin rejects Rebecca's trauma by positioning her as a subject to be mastered, an object of lust to be fixed and controlled. Devlin's imperative betrays an absolutist desire for fullness, transparency, and an absence of contradiction that would otherwise liquidate the textures and incoherencies with which Rebecca's experience finds authentic expression. By manipulating cultural signifiers in such a way that encodes violence as substitution as opposed to consummation, Pinter forestalls any easy mimetic truth or facile moral binary. Indeed, Rebecca and Devlin's conversation can double as an interrogation, blurring the distinctions between the personal and the political in such a way that makes complicit all symbolic displacements with unrepresented barbarities (Begley 178). Ultimately, their interaction is an exemplary instance of how "civilized" culture is steeped in violent imagery.

IV. Terror as Fact? : A New World Order

I want to argue that "terror" is not only about the encounter of something unfamiliar and Other, but also the apprehension and frustration of confronting something—a thing, an event—that resists the structuring principles of a normative world. Terror is precisely that which refuses to fit neatly in any one of the established categories determined by the political order, which has as its main interest the preservation of boundaries, the demarcations that constitute its very claim to power. Indeed, terrorism often figures as an event of disruption that breaks through illusory spheres of truth and knowledge by allowing "reality" to make unsettling appearances. I argue in the following brief section that the structuring principles of the dominant political order, namely Western democracy and capitalism as championed by the United States, can find its roots in the "new world order" discourse coming out of the Cold War, a discourse that will help contextualize later approaches to the ever-ambiguous concept of terrorism.

Terrorism is a word that has proven itself semantically elusive, making an appearance in political discourse, the media, and everyday conversation throughout history in different forms. Dictionaries prove to be of little help in the pursuit of a precise definition; according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, terrorism is defined thus:

> A system of terror. 1. Government by intimidation as directed and carried out by the party in power in France during the revolution of 1789-94; the system of `Terror'. 2. gen. A policy intended to strike with terror those against whom it is adopted; the employment of methods of intimidation; the fact of terrorizing or condition of being terrorized. ("Terrorism" *OED Online*)

From this interpretation of terrorism, its meaning comes across as either too literal or historically obsolete to be applied to contemporary understandings and experiences of terrorism ("Inside Terrorism" Hoffman). A slightly more helpful definition might come from the word "terror," defined again by the *OED* as "the state of being terrified or extremely frightened; intense fear or dread; an instance of feeling this" ("Terror" *OED Online*), but this interpretation is useful only insofar as it remains opaque and thus capable of extending to essentially any act that might evoke fear. The political history of the word terrorism is, as the *OED* acknowledges, derived from the Reign of Terror during the French Revolution, a terror that was executed by the *revolutionary* state and that exercised a complete monopoly on violence in order to squash counter-revolutionary sentiment. Terrorism assumes new dimensions in the 20th century, however, as the concept becomes linked to the tactics of mass oppression and intimidation used by authoritarian regimes such as the Stalinist Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, and Fascist Italy to exert complete control of the country and its peoples in the name of a ruling political party. Following the end of the Second World War, the emergence of newly independent countries and distinct political contexts in Africa, Asia, and Latin America quickened the swing of the pendulum of meaning with ever-increasing speed, as separatist groups, radical organizations, and rogue governments employed terror through multiple violent manifestations and in the name of distinct political goals.

In today's international context, in which terror can be packaged, shipped, and disseminated from one continent to another (e.g. the anthrax scares, terrorist propaganda videos), and amplified in limitless dimensions through the capacities of global media, the term "international terrorism" has emerged as a response to what appears to be a

fundamentally new staple of discourse, at once more useful than the basic distinction between the terror of governments and opponents of the government, while also more susceptible to abuses. While international terrorism may be defined as "acts of violence or campaigns of violence waged outside the accepted rules and procedures of international diplomacy and war" (Jenkins 2) by such normative institutional bodies as the United Nations, it often seems to depend on the point of view—terrorism is often reduced to merely what the "bad guys" do. As the concept of terrorism becomes increasingly more muddled as the world assumes greater dimensions of inter-connectedness, "defining" terrorism beyond its obvious anti-normative dimensions proves challenging if not impossible. Moreover, such semantic elusiveness provokes proportionally grave responses from cultural authorities that can lead to abusive, even violent results.

Following the end of the Cold War around 1989, the new decade saw a distinct form of political violence and international aggression that, while fundamentally more elusive, complex, and unstable, sought to preserve the structuring elements that defined the 45-year long struggle between the world's two ultimate superpowers: the United States and the Soviet Union. The heritage of the Cold War extended well into the 90's, and the world saw the implosion of several hotspots within the network of countries formerly mobilized, recruited, and armed in the name of democracy or socialism. Upon naming a victor, however, a new era was heralded in so that the old tensions and political imperatives could be distinguished from the new. The Western crusade for democracy and freedom inherited this throne. Former President Bush described the scenario as such: "Out of these troubled times, our…objective—a New World Order—can emerge…Today

the new world is struggling to be born, a world quite different from the one we have known […] A world where the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle" ("Address" 11 Sept. 1990). A few months later, Bush declared his vision for a "new world order" defined by a normative rule of law that extends to all corners of the world, an international political scene in which an all-encompassing institutional body "can use its peacekeeping role to fulfill the promise and vision of the UN's founders" ("Address 2" 16 Jan. 1991).

Meanwhile, the Gulf War raged on in Iraq, and the for the first time in history people all over the world were able to watch live coverage of a confrontation distinguished by its startling precision: missiles and air strikes constantly hitting targets, clear strategic advances being made—the war seemed to unfold as a necessary outcome, the predestined triumph of Good over Evil. The Gulf War soon came to represent the archetypal expression of a justified use of force attached to an ethical normative framework that reduces the world to a global common denominator of democracy. "The Gulf War is the first consensual war," writes Baudrillard, "the first war conducted legally and globally with a view to putting an end to war" (*GW* 83). By this comment, Baudrillard points to the fact that the West has comfortably assumed its dominance in such a way that neutralizes the "enemy" from meaningfully threatening Western claims to norms or justice—in other words, the West has monopoly over the way the world "should" be. Indeed, there is no longer an enemy so much as there is only "a refractory element" (*GW* 84) that needs to be tamed and domesticated by whatever means. "Bearing electroshocks," Baudrillard adds, "these missionary people will shepherd everybody towards democracy" (*GW* 84).

In distinct ways, conservative theorists such as Samuel Huntington and Francis Fukuyama posit a new post-Cold War order that is ultimately reducible to the final showdown of the West against Islam. It is here unnecessary to go into the various historical and political details that might further elucidate Islam's opposition to the West. In the political imaginary of not only public officials, but in the minds of everyday "normal" citizens, Islam stands as a clear and distinct Other that poses a symbolic challenge to Western hegemony in all domains of life. *The Guardian's* Judith Williamson writes, "it is the unreality of anywhere outside the U.S., in the eyes of its citizens, which must frighten any foreigner. Like an infant who has yet to learn there are other centers of self, this culture sees others merely as fodder for its dreams and nightmares" ("It's Mad" 1991). Indeed, it is the very inconceivability of Islam that characterizes its opposition to the values and norms exhaustively defined and exalted by Western culture. And yet, as Williamson points out, the Other is only un-real because it resists being understood by the same mechanisms with which the "new world order" has created meaning for itself— its roles and duties on the world stage. Instead the Other functions as the repository of psychic material that cannot be sorted out by the ordering principles of the Ego, forever striving to preserve its own coherency. This new era cannot accept a fundamentally convoluted and contradicting political dynamic because it is in the highest interest of the new world order to remain precisely that—ordered—so that the complications of its own foundational motives can be overlooked, glossed over, and cemented by way of an oversimplification, a neat discourse premised on a logic of binaries: Good and Evil, blue and red, us and them.

V. Far Away…But Close to Home

Caryl Churchill's *Far Away* (2000) demonstrates the problem of reading and interpretation, ultimately revealing the ethical and political implications of a world premised on the ideology of binaries. Parts I and II of *Far Away,* I will argue, deconstruct the foundations by which binaries—namely the "right" and "wrong" sides—are assembled by demonstrating how meaning is achieved through a process that is always already tainted, that is, by the violence of interpretation. The play, however, uses the motif of maturing and puberty to illustrate how assuming a certain method of reading serves as a precondition for entry into a normative order. As in the Western media's exclusion of real bodies from its celebratory footage of military gains during the Gulf War, assuming a way of reading that corresponds to any normative framework necessitates a voluntary blindness to internal contradictions. Ultimately, such normative obedience reaches morbid dimensions of ignorance that disavow human suffering and the realities of barbarism.

The world of total war in Part III of *Far Away* will be used to contextualize the fears pre-existing the attacks of 9/11 as already saturated in the anxiety of being unable to distinguish friend from foe, rendering everything a potential threat. Since all things have the potential to be recruited on either the good or bad side through the very interpretative mechanisms we utilized to stake our claims to dominance, our usual defense mechanism proves obsolete. The very basis of terror in its contemporary form, I will argue, is precisely that which defies our attempts to create differences "between[4]"—the forging of

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[4] The distinction between differences "within" and differences "between" refers to a concept explained on page 597 of Barbara Johnson's essay "*Melville's Fist: The Execution of Billy Budd.*" Later in this study, I will explain this concept in further detail.

binary categories— by insisting on its own differences "within." The persistence of internal ambiguities in effect render the thing or event in question unknowable, resulting in psychic insecurity lived as terror.

In the original mise-en-scene of *Far Away* by Stephen Daldry, part I begins in Harper's home, an idyllic scene-scape reminiscent of a Thomas Kinkade painting. Everything appears dreamily harmless and soft, which serves to mock the very possibility of a reality devoid of danger while simultaneously opening the scene up to the intrusion of menace as a precondition for action. When young Joan, teddy bear in hand, approaches Harper claiming that she can't sleep, nothing seems out of the ordinary. Joan then begins to make some unsettling revelations: in a matter of time it is discovered that Joan went out the window, climbed down a tree, heard a person screaming, slipped on blood, and saw her uncle beating a man and a child. Upon each new discovery, Harper responds with some form of justification, some fluffy interpretation that might mislead and quell the suspicions of a curious Joan: a herd of nameless people becomes a party, victims become traitors, and execution becomes assisted escape. Nevertheless, Joan always eludes Harper's expectations by gradually admitting to knowing more than expected.

Harper tries to possess mastery over the situation by consciously *mis*interpreting the signified (each revelation that Joan describes) in such a way that preserves the innocence of the sign. Joan's final observation, however, functions as an irreducibly *real* referent, immune to being interpreted as anything other than what it is: "There was a light on. That's how I could see the blood on their faces and which ones had blood on" (11). This final revelation causes Harper to admit to her artifice and shift strategies, suggesting that any action can be justified if performed for the sake of the "good." Despite the fact

that Joan sees clearly *in the light,* Joan *only* sees. As Shoshana Felman has taught us, the act of seeing is linked to the ambiguity and obscurity of the signifier and that of knowing to the "certainty" of the signified (232). Indeed, Joan sees the blood on the bodies but as a child she is unable to *know* what it means and make her own judgment. She has gathered all the pieces, but her youth, her unfamiliarity with the order of the world, prevents her from making connections and offering a coherent interpretation of her own.

Joan never makes assumptions, she only asks questions, because to make statements and declare "facts" would be to take sides, to enter a "mature" experience of lived reality that is characterized by the need to make judgments and inhabit a position. When Joan sees the blood on the faces she not only finds out "something secret," but reaches puberty. In Freudian terms, the child subject undergoes a stage of identification with authority, in which the father's behaviors and values are internalized. If puberty is the stage in which gender binaries are defined, in which certain psychosexual "realities" come to light, Joan assumes entry into an order structured by a similar reductive logic: the existence of a good and a bad, a right and a wrong side.

With this secret "truth" revealed, it is impossible to remain distant, elusive, or un-recruited. Thus, Harper decrees that Joan is "part of a bigger movement now to make things better" (14)—the "right" side. Joan thus enters the "order of the binary" on the side of the "right," but this alignment proves arbitrary: "You can look at the stars and think here we are in our little bit of space, and I'm on the side of the people who are putting things right, and your soul will expand right into the sky" (14-15). If the stars are the origin from which "sides" are determined, then the origin is constantly shifting and the right and wrong sides determined by the stars are, simply put, relative. However

arbitrary, Joan's final words suggest that such determinations constitute an illusory sense of ontological transcendence.

Part II transports the spectator into a radically different world—the "professional" world of the hat-maker as seen through the eyes of Joan and Todd several years after the first installment of the play. Joan, now a young woman, has stopped "questioning received ideas" and is settling into her first job as a hat-maker after supposedly earning her degree in "hat" in college. In the "real" world, however, the art of hat-making is subject to a number of dampening conditions that reflect the discontents of alienated labor. For instance, when Joan mentions her impressive degree hat (a six-foot tall giraffe), Todd indicates that she won't have time to do work of that quality because the "management is corrupt" (21) and the wages are too low. The casual conversation between Todd and Joan serves to ground the unfamiliarity of a career in hat-making into a normalized discourse about labor rights while still retaining the distinct particularities of this world's market dynamic of supply and demand.

The hat-making industry is sustained by the "parades," whose increased frequency is the cause of continued worker exploitation: "we used to get two weeks before a parade and they took it down to one and now they're talking about cutting a day" (17). As Todd, a "valued old hand" (22) who has been "doing parades for six years" (22), continues to acquaint Joan with the inner-workings of the hat factory, two staples of the society in which they live make casual appearances throughout their conversations: the trials and the parades. While Joan admits to disliking having to stay in the evenings to watch the trials, Todd on the other hand "stays up till four every morning watching the trials and drinking pernod" (18). Joan is a relatively new working member of this society,

which suggests that after several more years of work and obedience, the time will come in which she will be able to enjoy the fruits of her labor and perhaps one day, indulge in the prescribed pleasures that Todd seems to have made a habit of.

Despite the belief that he is taking a stand against authority by recruiting the help of a journalist to unearth and bring to light the workers' rights infringements of the hat industry at the potential cost of his job—a move that impresses Joan—Todd is, ironically, a testament to the success of the system: a system that has seamlessly woven systematic violence and brutality into the fabric of its normative framework. Todd's "dangerous" or anti-authority demeanor is therefore only an aesthetic posture, which functions less as a real affront to the system, and more as an accepted personality that poses no real substantive threat to the dynamics of power aside from adding a bit of color, a little zest to the structures in play. For example, when Todd points out that "there's something wrong with how [they] get the contracts" (19) to make the hats, he ultimately boils the problem down to a question of hiring protocol: "What if we don't deserve them? What if our work isn't really the best?" (19). Todd's logic goes contrary to the obvious mystery surrounding the parades and trials, two types of spectacles that for the audience, seem to loom mysteriously in the background, but for the characters, seem to blend smoothly into the social landscape.

Over the course of five days from when Joan begins work at the hat factory, the audience bears witness to Todd and Joan's diligent and steady assembling of wild hats while they engage in conversation. According to the stage directions, the beginning of each of the first five scenes indicates the status of the hats as they near completion. Each day, the hats assume more gratuitous qualities; they are "*more brightly decorated*" (18),

then "*big and extravagant*" (20), and on the fourth day "*enormous and preposterous*"

(22). The fifth scene has no dialogue, but rather, makes explicit the purpose of the hats in

the following stage directions: "*Next day. A procession of ragged, beaten, chained*

prisoners, each wearing a hat, on their way to execution. The finished hats are even more

enormous and preposterous than in the previous scene" (24). The hats are ridiculous and

extravagant creations that come in all sorts of grotesque and overblown proportions—

they silently announce the essential continuity between civilization and barbarism, the

complicity of aesthetics with the system of brutality from which it derives its very

purpose. This co-existence of two categorically opposed concepts—civilization and

barbarism—cuts across any facile binary understanding of good and evil "sides."

Una Chaudhuri points out that Churchill's hats, like the hats exchanged between

and looked into by Vladimir and Estragon in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, seem

to reflect upon the subject's relations to the objects around her and how these

supplementary "things" makes palpable the ethos of the dramatic world they belong to

(132-4). Whereas the absurdism of Didi and Gogo's hats—along with Lucky's rope and

Pozzo's watch—underlines the characters' incessant search for meaning (132-4), the

gratuitousness of the hats of *Far Away* suggest a nightmarish indifference to a spectacular

and absurd engagement with violence.

The hats, which decorate the heads of bodies soon to be burned, seem to make

real the nonsensical fascism mocked in Lewis Carroll's[5] saga, *Alice's Adventures in*

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[5] Lewis Carroll is considered a part of the British "nonsense" tradition, a strain of writing that emerged in the late 1800's that sought to demonstrate how "certain formal elements of language and logic that facilitate meaning are balanced by elements that negate meaning" (Tigges 47). These objectives warranted the use of gibberish, faulty cause and effect, repetition, etc. The influence of literary nonsense on Caryl Churchill is best

Wonderland, in which the hot-tempered Queen of Hearts makes a hobby out of ordering

executions at the slightest offense. Furthermore, Carroll's infamously eccentric character,

the Hatter, otherwise known as the Mad Hatter,[6] was also subject to one of the Queen's

impulsive death sentences, though he manages to escape. In Carroll's second *Alice*

installment, *Through the Looking Glass*, while talking about the Hatter's latest run-in

with the law, the White Queen makes clear to Alice that the crime doesn't necessarily

precede the punishment, and that in some instances there need be no crime committed in

order to be sentenced: "[The Mad Hatter] is in prison now, being punished: and the trial

doesn't even begin till next Wednesday: and of course the crime comes last of all!"

(Carroll, Ch. V). While Carroll's comic portrayal of political injustice prevents the

majority of the Queen's numerous sentences from coming to fruition, Churchill's

rendering of unhinged authoritarianism is linked to a grisly referent—the systematic and

sensational burning of bodies.

　　The prisoners march towards death— bearing numbers on their chests, their eyes

covered by the shadows of their enormous hats[7]—and yet, when Joan and Todd reappear

on stage to resume another week of work, the spectacle of death is not the object of

Joan's disbelief: "Joan: I still can't believe it/ Todd: No one's ever won in their first week

before/ Joan: It's all going to be downhill from now on" (Churchill 24). Joan and Todd

continue to outrageously elude the audience's expectations by musing on the artistic

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exemplified by her short play, *Blue Kettle* (1997), in which the words "blue" and "kettle"
(and by the end of the play "bl" and "ke") are arbitrarily substituted for other words.
[6] Interestingly enough, the phrase "mad as a hatter," though popularized by Carroll's
novels, dates 30 years prior to the publication and makes reference to the mercurial
disease commonly experienced by industrial felt hat workers in 19th century England.
Mercury poisoning often led to intense psychotic effects such as irritability and mental
instability (Waldron 1961).
[7] The 2000 Stephen Daldry Production at the Royal Court Theatre.

merits of the hats, honoring their aesthetic value over any consideration of the bodies that

perish alongside them:

> Joan: It seems so sad to burn them with the bodies.
> Todd: No I think that's the joy of it. The hats are ephemeral. It's like a metaphor for something or other.
> Joan: Well, life.
> Todd: Well, life, there you are. Out of nearly three hundred hats I've made here I've only had three win and go in the museum. But that's never bothered me. You make beauty and it disappears, I love that. (25)

Herein we see the extent to which Joan and Todd have internalized the values of the

dominant political culture in an ironic, and yet chilling rendering of what Hannah Arendt

deemed the "banality of evil" in her analysis of Adolf Eichmann's role in the Nazi

regime. For Arendt, Eichmann's actions did not result from his overwhelming hatred of

Jews, but rather the absence of imaginative and critical capacities that would have

allowed him to reflect on the moral dimensions of his deeds. In contrast to the prevalent

understanding of Nazi motivations as inextricably linked to a desire to commit murder,

Eichmann was a relatively innocuous individual who unthinkingly followed orders and

obeyed the law; the extermination of bodies blended into the spectrum of all other

bureaucratic assignments ("Hannah Arendt" Majid). In this same vein, Joan and Todd's

inability to recognize the cruelty of the system that they serve places them in a

questionable ethical position. The human cost of the trials and parades that finance their

employment remains indistinguishable from any other element pertaining to their daily

lives. These automatons, programmed to blot out the moral stipulations of such heinous

practices, do not exercise the free and creative thinking once practiced by the spirited and

inquisitive young Joan of Part I.

While the dystopian world of *Far Away* intentionally depicts an extreme outcome of normative assimilation, Churchill's invented society might serve as a response to psychologically distorting political practices such as the U.S. military censorship of the Gulf War—specifically, the denial to acknowledge the body count. In many ways the media coverage of the Gulf War and the resulting positive public reception heralded the emergence of a new form of violence—one that is unrecognizably distorted and justified by reference to a singular voice.

The suppression of the body count was of central concern for the Pentagon because in order to project and implant the representation of a "clean" and "just" military victory in the public, the materiality of the corpse had to be erased from the picture. The body count, in this case, had to be suppressed in order to distinguish war from genocide (Norris 228-30). In his polemic against the political motivations fueling the Gulf War, Baudrillard declared that the gulf war did not take place, which means that for the public the reality of what amounted to be a massacre of Iraqi troops[8] was excluded from the perfect borders of the image of an "enlightened" war. This conflict exalted the ethical and practical superiority of democracy by emphasizing its sophisticated and rational use of advanced weaponry to conduct a universally justified war. In her important analysis of discursive control of public information entitled "Military Censorship and the Body Count in the Persian Gulf War," Margot Norris writes that the continuity between the progressive rationalism of advanced weaponry and the disavowal and apathy towards the experiential standpoint of the victims "takes on the pornological contours of the Sadean writing that is another enlightenment product" (232). Indeed, through the lens of

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[8] "Fewer than 400 U.S. soldiers killed and unknowable and unverifiable estimates of 80,000 and 120,000 killed Iraqis" (Norris 224).

enlightened rationalism, the brutality of what truly occurred "on the ground" throughout those six months of war was disowned for the sake of perpetuating a pure image—a hyper-reality—of civilized warfare.

As Arendt champions the potential of critical thinking to resist the "truths" imposed on us by any dominant power, Baudrillard argues that the individual must do more than merely question the war and the media's censoring role. She must, rather, interrogate the very idea of truth that the image—the simulacrum—has to offer. Baudrillard writes, "All political and ideological speculations fall under mental deterrence (stupidity). By virtue of their immediate consensus on the evidence they feed the unreality of this war, they reinforce its bluff by their unconscious dupery" (*GF* 67). A reality whose primary signifier is the virtual simulation of a "just" war must yield suspicion; otherwise, the individual becomes a spectator without even realizing her position, allowing representation to be mistaken for the real.

Todd and Joan's frame of reference is limited to whether they should risk losing their jobs by "exposing the corrupt financial basis of how the whole hat industry is run" (Churchill 26). In an overwhelmingly dark climax of irony, Part II concludes with Joan proclaiming that Todd has opened her eyes to the truth of the hat industry: "You make me think in different ways. Like I'd never have thought about how this place is run and now I see how important it is" (26). Despite their belief that they are challenging the system, Joan and Todd's speculations only continue to feed the "unreality" of the society in which they live, a society that considers the burning of bodies to be a banal and common practice. Todd and Joan, like the citizen spectators of censored wartime coverage, seem to be stuck in a purified system of "truth" that disavows human suffering. Whereas

Baudrillard's critique of the Gulf War alerts us to the dangers of an uncritical relationship to media representation that poses as reality, Churchill interrogates the entire framework of normative discourse by demonstrating how unquestioning recruitment into an order, into a way of reading reality, makes one blind to the internal contradictions that produce barbarism. Ultimately, she concludes that in a world that perpetually seeks to subdue subjectivity into the neat borders of an objective truth, the act of questioning ("received ideas") is an ethical imperative, perhaps the only means we have to regulate power. In today's technologically saturated society, our constant exposure to the hyper-reality of television and online media (and in many cases, this hyper-reality is our only point of access to phenomenon occurring "far away") distorts or hinders our ability to read the reality beyond the image. Considering the extent to which media discourse frames and directs public opinion, Churchill's dystopia might be closer to home than one may think.

In part III of Churchill's *Far Away*, the audience is plunged into a world of total war, in which all things, from the wasps to the thunderstorms to the Koreans, are recruited onto competing "sides." Yet the status of things, whether they are one side or the other side, is unstable, constantly shifting with no rhyme or reason at a pace that at times, escapes one's ability to pin it down and to ascribe to it the appropriate justifications:

> Harper: Take deer
> Todd: You mean sweet little bambis?
> Harper: You mean that ironically?
> Todd: I mean it sarcastically.
> Harper: Because they burst out of parks and storm down from mountains
> and terrorise shopping malls. If the does run away when you shoot they
> run into somebody else and trample them with their vicious little shining
> hooves, the fawns get under the feet of shoppers and send them crashing
> down escalators, the young bucks charge the plate glass windows—
> Todd: I know to hate deer.

> Harper: and the old ones, do you know how heavy their antlers are or how
> sharp the prongs are when they twist into teenagers running down the
> street?
> Todd: Yes I do know that.
> […]
> Harper: So you'd say the deer are vicious?
> Todd: We've been over that.
> Harper: If a hungry deer came into the yard you wouldn't feed it?
> Todd: Of course not.
> Harper: I don't understand that because the deer are with us. They have
> been for weeks.
> Todd: I didn't know. You said yourself.
> Harper: Their natural goodness has come through. You can see it in their soft
> brown eyes. (Churchill 36)

Herein the extensive potential of interpretation becomes apparent, but while its prowess and duplicitous nature is affirmed, so is its claim to certainty, to truth—disavowed. Identities, definitions, characterizations are constructed by language, which re-arranges its objects according to political imperatives that demand justification. Only by distinguishing the self from the Other, the good side from the bad side, can the repository of the unfamiliar, the "opposed," be squared off into solid, palpable categories—targets that can be hit, mastered, dominated. To establish binaries or sides is to attempt to understand the world in its totality via the application of a reductive formula that clarifies uncertainties through omission, expulsion, and violence. The world of *Far Away is* ordered by a logic of binaries to the extreme, thus whatever "war" seems to be occurring (and expanding) throughout the play is a struggle to fix an endless number of signifiers into a hierarchy in such a way that ensures one's place on top.

This scene of total war resists the reductive logic by which binaries are formed and sides distinguished by characterizing the entire world as a compendium of unstable signifiers, constantly shifting between sides in such a way that disavows any one side's claims to knowledge and truth. Such a world seems to prefigure the fear and anxiety

resulting from the phenomenon of international terrorism, in which signifiers as such prove insufficient indicators of allegiance. The innocent plane and the law-abiding passenger are equally capable of being (or simply just being interpreted as) a weapon of destruction and a malicious terrorist. This cloud of indeterminacy is the basis for an omnipresent fear that anything and anyone can be recruited as the enemy but disguised as a friend. Likewise, in Joan's final monologue that explains her journey back to Harper's home, social experiences are seeped in such overwhelming uncertainty, rendering all interactions, even mere glance exchanges, terrifying and unknowable: "Of course birds saw me, everyone saw me walking along but nobody knew why, I could have been on a mission, everyone's moving about and no one knows why, and in fact I killed two cats and a child under five so it wasn't that different from a mission" (37). Indeed, things and people are constantly shifting; they are fickle signifiers detached from any stable meaning or purpose, divesting the process of reading and interpretation of its capacity to make "truthful" judgments.

At the end of Joan's final monologue, she describes her uncertainty about whose side the river is on: "[The river] might help me swim or drown me. In the middle the current was running much faster, the water was brown. I didn't know if that meant anything" (38). The river is indeterminate. Its signs cannot be read or interpreted to mean something. It is therefore resistant to the assault of literal thinking that sweeps things onto "sides" that can be easily understood. Joan's paranoid reaction to the fluid and dynamic river is comparable to encountering a child in a war zone: to correctly "read" the child is impossible. It might be hiding an explosive or it might very well be an innocent civilian. Nevertheless, there is an imperative to decide, to make a judgment: Joan decides she must

continue so she puts one foot in the river. In the recent film by Clint Eastwood, *American Sniper* (2015), the sniper, too, must make a call when determining whether the signifier before him is an innocent child or a bomb about to detonate. Uncertainties such as these seem to characterize the modern difficulty of coming to a clear, distinct, and correct judgment.

In three parts, *Far Away* follows Joan through different stages of her life, from a child to a young woman to an "old hand." While each section places Joan in different contexts with respect to the political order, each of the three parts also function as distinct expressions of how terror is felt. By moving from the realism of the first section, to the absurdism of the second, and finally the postmodernism of the third, Churchill creates a triptych that demonstrates three ways of representing an un-representable structure of feeling. The narrative of Part I is structured by each of Joan's revelations, events which disrupt conventional signifying practices in such a way that produces suspicion. Joan sees an ambiguous sign— a mystery, as it were, that Harper ultimately solves. Harper's justification for the bloodied faces—belonging to the "right" side—brings closure to the scene with a final re-establishment of meaning invested with an illusory truth-value.

Part II, on the other hand, depicts a deeply corrupt world of weekly State executions mandated by a dominant political order. The privileging of Joan and Todd's subjectivity, ironically, demonstrates a jarring indifference to violence and suffering legitimized by a static conception of the world, a world that cannot be changed. By negating the outward reality of the death parades through an emphasis on the workers' concern with the creation of the hats (and the shady hiring practices of their employers), Joan and Todd are implicated in the perpetuation of violence. Ultimately, when Todd

describes the hats as "metaphors [...] for life" (25), Churchill seems to accuse him of considering the work of art as a distant and abstract refuge, disconnected from a harsh reality in such a way that also denies the context in which it was born.

Lastly, Part III typifies the extreme skepticism of postmodernism by plunging the audience into a world in which the signifying chain has broken down and scattered forth distinct and yet unrelated signifiers. By essentially removing the "cushion" of presence and absence through which signification is achieved, the meaning of "things" in this world—whether these are groups of people, animals, or inanimate objects— lose any claim to certainty. Indeed, the binary logic through which hierarchies of good and evil "sides" are erected proves inadequate for a world that thrives off of ambiguity, disorder, and discontinuity.

VI. Fewer Emergencies

Martin Crimp's triptych, *Fewer Emergencies,* undermines the binary logic that finds its roots in the discourse of the "new world order" discussed earlier. *Face to the Wall* (2001)*,* fleshes out the experience of confronting "differences within" by allowing it to figure formally as a co-existence of "good" and "evil" that cuts across normative logic. An analysis of *Whole Blue Sky*[9] (2005) and *Fewer Emergencies* (2001) will serve to critique the neoliberal ideology of progress by demonstrating how "differences within," which might otherwise tear the seams of "a picture of happiness" or contradict the idea that "things are getting better day by day," makes formal appearances throughout the two

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[9] *Fewer Emergencies* is a set of three plays performed in the following order: *Whole Blue Sky, Face to the Wall, and Fewer Emergencies*. Crimp had written *Whole Blue Sky* in order to strengthen the cohesion of the other two before translating the three plays into a production.

short plays. Through this, I hope to illustrate how terror can be understood as a symbolic

structure, capable of finding expression through formal signifying practices.

Interestingly enough, the discourse that emerged out of the attacks on the World

Trade Center on September 11, 2001 mirror in part the sort of spontaneous production of

meaning at work in *Fewer Emergencies.* The original playtext to two of Crimp's plays, in

fact, were dated September 10, 2001, on "one of those rare days," in which according to

Crimp, "writing seemed effortless. I was renting a room, and in the distance I had a

glimpse between the building opposite of the river, where boats were gliding by… The

following day the twin towers in New York were destroyed" (qtd. in Sierz 67). In several

ways, *Fewer Emergencies* predicts the state of emergency that will grip Western nations

throughout the War on Terror, and how the nature of national and international responses

(particularly through public platforms) goes in hand in hand with some of the central

anxieties facing suburban life at the turn of the century—violence directed towards

women and children, as well as the fear of undetectable and unknowable enemies.

In *Fewer Emergencies* (2001, 2005), the audience is presented with a handful of

nameless actors thrown into dialogue with one another at a time and a place that is

intentionally blank. Through this minimalistic staging, what is important is not what the

audience sees, nor necessarily what they hear as the narrators converse casually around a

dinner table, but the disparity between the two. In these short plays, the "action" takes

place in the minds of the spectators because the role of the voice is fully responsible for

moving the narrative forward. Moreover, each short play is full of self-corrections,

interjections, and alternative versions, suggesting that the events in question are being

created on the spot. Despite its productive capacity, the role of the voice also doubles as a

source of tension throughout the play, a carrier of menacing content that seems unaware of its own structural complicity in the perpetuation of terror. This technique, which builds upon a Pinter-esque technique of implicit fear, stands in contrast to the "In-Yer-Face"[10] theatre movement which dominated the British stage at the time. Instead, Crimp's triptych subjects the spectator's imagination to an onslaught of mental and psychological horrors unbridled by the physical limits of the theatre.

   Face to the Wall (2002: 25-36), the second 15-minute installment of Crimp's triptych, begins with four nameless characters discussing a school shooting in such a way that positions the spectator as a voyeur, peering into a screenwriting session. The narrators describe the movements of the killer as he shoots the school receptionist, walks straight into a classroom, kills the teacher, and then proceeds to the children, who instinctively back up against the wall against their pictures of "my house, my cat, me and my cat, me in a tree" (Crimp 26). The killer then moves on to what the narrators describe as child A, child B, and child C, the latter of which "tries to duck" (27) away, though the narrators have trouble determining how long the struggle continues before child C is "shot—good—in the head." The dialogue (or rather, polylogue) suddenly shifts when Narrator 2 asks, "So how's life treating him?" To this unexpected question, the audience then learns through the deliberations of the narrators that the killer's life is treating him just fine—his job, his wife, his children, his home, his neighborhood are all fine, in fact better than fine. The killer has the good fortune of living in a community where the

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[10] Coined by critic Aleks Sierz—"In-Yer-Face" derives from an Artaudian tradition that privileges the explicit and the abject. It makes use of graphic violence and shock tactics as a means of affecting and arousing the spectator into a state of political awareness (Sierz).

"shopping is excellent," where you can find not only the "big names" but "those kinds of smaller shops you thought had all but disappeared" (29).

The narrators in this opening scene construct a portrait of a killer that contradicts the typical narratives of mass killers as anomalous individuals.[11] *Face to the Wall*, instead, presents the audience with a gunman that goes on a killing spree, provoked as if by some freak glitch that causes him to short circuit from his otherwise enviable suburban life. In contrast to the typical "mass shooter" narrative presented by the media—the shooter as an individual at odds with society, as abused or mistreated by society in such a way as gives a degree of sense to the atrocity—cause and effect have no place in the "story" of Crimp's gunman. The killer is silent. To each school official encounter, to each "may I help you?" (25), he responds by shooting "straight through the mouth" or "through the heart" (25). Indeed, his actions seem to speak for themselves.

The narrators' creative decision to construct the gunman without a history, without anything that might possibly make him a "sympathetic character" (31), serves to keep the audience from coming to conclusions that might otherwise attenuate the trauma of such a violent event. There is no reason for the audience to "feel for him" (31), because he has never suffered, experienced war or poverty, been tortured, or abused as a child (Crimp 32). Narrators 2 and 3 continue making suggestions that might explain the gunman's madness in order of decreasing magnitude, ending finally on the question as to if his postman is ever late. To all the possibilities thus far, Narrator 1 bluntly declares

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[11] For instance, the gunman of the massacre of Dunblame Primary School in Scotland was accused of pederasty by community members, leading to the bankruptcy of his local business. Goth music and violent video games are often used as scapegoat explanations for the actions of the Columbine shooters. The Virginia Tech shooter of 2007 was diagnosed with severe mental illnesses and depression stemming from issues of class and race.

"No," but in this instance the audience is teased in by a potential explanation, however

unreasonable:

> 3: How does he feel when the postman is late?
> 1: Angry.
> 2: So now he's going to kill the postman.
> 3: Typical.
> 1: Of course he's not going to kill the postman. It's not the postman's fault—he knows it's not the postman's fault—sometimes there are problems sorting the letters—the machine for sorting the letters has broken down, for example, and the letters have to be sorted by hand—or perhaps there are lots of parcels and every parcel means a conversation on the doorstep. (35)

On one level, accepting that the postman is "sometimes" late serves as a sort of reality

effect,[12] or the inclusion of a gratuitous aspect that serves no other role than to remind the

audience that the story does not take place in some plastic fantasy-land, but is on the

contrary, concerned with showing a *real* possibility. The addition of a reality effect might

function to humanize the gunman—bring him down to earth ("everyone gets mad!"). The

assailant is ideologically constructed, as it were, to be an exemplary bourgeois citizen

with "feelings too," but also an individual capable of modulating these emotions through

reason. On another level, the gunman's reaction to the "inconvenience" suffered beats

down the possibility of characterizing him as some rebellious ticking time bomb, a man

sick and tired of his monotonous bourgeois bubble as with Lester Burnham of the Sam

Mendes film, *American Beauty* (1999). Despite the gunman's "anger," he proves capable

of performing as a rational agent by understanding the circumstances that might cause the

postman to be late. By this logic, the gunman cannot be said to be on the knifes-edge of

madness, waiting for just the slightest reason to explode and finally lash out against a

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[12] Barthes argues in the "The Reality Effect" that the use of superfluous descriptive detail in realist fiction is a narrative device used to convey reality. The insignificance of the detail is understood as a signifier without a signified whose only purpose is to remind that reader that it exists (Barthes).

society he presumably loathes. This final dismissal serves to erase the possibility of a

motivated action, an action capable of being explicated by psychological probing. There

is nothing wrong with him that science or social determinants can explain, leaving the

audience clueless with respect to his motivations and terrified with respect to his

psychological contradictions.

By allowing the absolutely abnormal and the absolutely normal to occupy, it

appears seamlessly, the same subject, the narrators articulate a perfect coexistence of two

seemingly opposed categories in a way that subverts a causal reading premised on the

exclusion of one binary opposite as a means of asserting the certainty and primacy of the

other. In our trust of causal explanations, we believe the normal or the Good to

correspond to a defeat of the abnormal or the Evil—that which occupies one category

cannot possibly occupy the other unless there is a secret, a hidden reason, a loose thread

that corrupts the seamlessness of the essential category. In *Face to the Wall* there is no

such loose thread, but rather, a categorical disparity between subject and action that

defies any relational understanding of the two. How then to explain Crimp's gunman? In

The Spirit of Terrorism, Baudrillard discusses our naïve belief that binary categories,

namely Good and Evil, vary inversely. The triumph of one category does not "produce

the erasure of the Other" (*ST* 14). On the contrary, Good and Evil rise simultaneously:

"they are both irreducible and inextricable from each other" (*ST* 13). By this logic, the

eruption of Evil can never be an accident or a deviation as such, but a proportional

response.

In his discussion of the birth of a new terrorism, referring namely to the terrorist

networks involved in such attacks as 9/11 or the London Bombings of July 7, Baudrillard

talks of "a new form of action that enters the game and appropriates its rules, the better to

confuse it" (*ST* 18). What he is referring to is the fact that terrorist networks are fighting

increasingly with means equal to those of the dominant power; they have access to

spectacular financial resources, information technologies, aeronautics, and media outlets:

"They have assimilated all of modernity and globalization, while maintaining their aim to

destroy it" (*ST* 19). The terrorist organization can have the same capacities as a national

government, but its efforts, its appropriation of the tentacles of power, are directed

towards destruction. Terrorism mobilizes the very forces it seeks to destroy in order to

destroy them. It is an implosion, as it were, that leads to precisely death— the death of

the terrorist, as in suicide bombing, and the death of the targets. This parallelism (the

death of "Evil" is also the death of the "Good") cuts across the supposed inverse

relationship between Good and Evil.

Yet terrorism does not just make use of the practical tools of the dominant

political order, it also disguises itself with the normative clothing of the order's

adherents, of everyday bourgeois citizens. Baudrillard writes:

> Cunningly, they have even used the banality of American everyday life as
> a mask and a double game. Sleeping in their suburbs, reading and studying
> within families before waking up suddenly like delayed explosive devices.
> The perfect mastery of this secrecy is almost as terrorist as the spectacular
> action of the 11 September. For it makes one suspect: any inoffensive
> individual can be a potential terrorist! If those terrorists could pass
> unnoticed, then any one of us is an unnoticed criminal (each plane is
> suspect too!), and ultimately, it might even be true. (*ST* 19-20)

This characterization of the terrorist implicates us all as potential criminals because the

threat of this terrorism rests in its disavowal of the motivated sign: the discontinuity

between signifier and signified, being and doing, cognition and performance. Indeed,

such a foundational rupture cuts across our understanding of what and who is on our

"side" by forcing us to question the very nature of meaning. Meaning is not predicated on the continuous relationship between signifier and signified, but appears as an internal division, a conflict that unsettles our understanding of truth and knowledge. The threat of the terrorist stems from the fact that she occupies two seemingly mutually exclusive categories—the side of the right, of the normative "good," as well as the side of evil, that which threatens the very system by which it disguises itself.

In her reading of Herman Melville's *Billy Budd, Sailor,* "Melville's Fist: The Execution of 'Billy Budd,'" Barbara Johnson defines the role of Captain Vere as a historical stamp of judgment. His ultimate decision to have Billy Budd executed demonstrates the imperative to "convert an ambiguous situation into a decidable one" (Johnson 596). Billy Budd poses a fundamentally ambiguous problem because his actions (namely, the murder of Claggart) are not continuous with his "being" (he is a character perpetually described as naïve and innocent). The historical necessity of judgment as a precondition for authority finds its roots int the need to create differences "between" out of subjects or situations that remain elusive due to differences "within" (596). A difference "within" a given subject suggests an incompatibility between, for instance, conscious and unconscious forces, problematizing the very idea of a knowable entity. In perceiving the co-existence of contradictory signifiers, of two self-contained meanings inhabiting the same entity, our efforts to make all-encompassing judgments (and Johnson refers specifically to the sorts of judgments grounded in institutions, in the naval legal systems) are frustrated.

Judgment is thus contingent on the reductive process of transforming ambiguity into binary oppositions, into differences "between" two separate entities. Ultimately, the

ability to iron out internal divisions and forge graspable and knowable entities

presupposes an act of repression or elimination that necessarily censors content that

would otherwise spoil the purity of the binary category. The legitimacy of political

authority is grounded in the need for pure categories as a precondition for its claims to

"truth," "justice," or "knowledge." Without some process of liquidation, authority would

be impotent in the face of countless contradictions and inconsistencies, thus: "the

imposition of a limit…[is] constitutive of authority as such" (Felman 168).

    Face to the Wall creates the same experience of terror that Baudrillard argues

distinguishes the fear of the 9/11 terrorist. While showing all the characteristics of

"being" one of us, the gunman—like the terrorist—"acts" contrarily. What terrorism

"feels like" can, based on these structural inconsistencies, be understood as the

experience, the desperation of being unable to forge differences "between" after an event,

namely an event characterized by the baffling eruption of violence. Obstructed from

arriving at the kind of knowledge that gives us mastery over the event, in turn allowing us

to attenuate our fears and traumas, we are left psychologically marooned in an

epistemological no-place. By this I mean that the referent of the violent act itself appears

to us as a cypher, indeterminable and unreadable by the sign it has to offer. By abstaining

from offering an explanation or giving a motive to the gunman, Crimp's narrators

maintain his differences "within" by emphasizing the disturbingly sharp disparity

between the gunman's identity and his actions, a difference further accentuated by abrupt

transitions from the massacre in action to questions about his home life—a satisfied,

reasonable, and healthy bourgeois with little to complain about is also the perpetrator of a

massacre, a murderer of children. Ultimately the gunman constructed by Crimp frustrates

our desires to close our eyes to internal differences. Such a desire is born out of fear, as well as an impulse to assert dominance over any given situation. *Face to the Wall* formally recreates the ego-damaging phenomenon of confronting an instance of "differences within" by interweaving the elements of an innocent bourgeois with the debauched actions of a school shooter. On the level of judgment, one could imagine the strained efforts of any media or legal "authority" in trying to muster a motive for Crimp's gunman in court.

In *Fewer Emergencies* (2001: 41-49), the third play in Crimp's collection, three narrators discuss the improving conditions of life: "Things are definitely looking up—brighter light—more frequent boating—more confident smile—things are improving day by day" (Crimp 43). The narrators go on to link these improvements to an unnamed family—a couple, presumably, who haven't "stopped being desirable" (44) despite their age and grey hair and who smile confidently "in spite of themselves" (42). The two of them, according to the narrators, set sail on their boat to "the edge of the world" (43), leaving their son, Bobby, behind at home in a neighborhood that is also improving, wiped clean of Mexicans, Serbs, and dog feces, and replaced with "nice families (…) Greeks, Italians, nice Chinese" (44). As Bobby is introduced into the conversation with more detail, the audience learns that he has been left equipped with a cupboard of "all the things [he] will need for pleasure and for emergencies" (45): candles, a shelf full of oak trees, chainsaws, the island of Manhattan, uranium, "good" universities, Beethoven quartets, fertility clinics, and finally a key to get out of the house. Bobby has been supplied with everything he could possibly need and has been locked indoors for his own safety— a safety that the audience soon learns is illusory.

Bobby's cupboard seems to express an illusion of fullness, a complete plenitude of desire in which nothing is presumed to be *lack*ing. Stretching across space and time, the cupboard is a holding cell of commodities, institutions, and bourgeois experiences: the "ingredients" for a meaningful life. Bobby has everything he needs to be an upstanding bourgeois with a "confident smile," which is why his parents have no scruples about leaving him behind. This is also the reason why Bobby is locked in "for his own protection" (45). To be contaminated by the elements outside this framework of experience—the carousel of the neoliberal "good life"—is dangerous, the very cause for emergency. While "rocks are being thrown" and "cars are being […] overturned and burnt" (46) outside, a shot comes through the window and catches Bobby in the hip: a transgression that cuts across the boundaries erected between the improving "nice" families and the savage Other. While at first this might suggest the singular guilt of the "enemy" as the origin of aggression, Bobby's own home is complicit in his suffering because the cupboard that holds the key to get out of the house is at the top of a spiral staircase, far away from the reach of an injured Bobby.

History is full of emergencies, full of ruptures that break open the skin of ideology. These intrusions of the Real, which often manifest themselves as acts of violence, are often attributed to the unknowable Other. The inexplicable subject produces equally inexplicable acts. Crimp's play, however, understands the violence of the Real as a symbolic violence upon an illusory sphere.[13] The bullet breaks through an ideology of progress much in the same way that the destruction of the Twin Towers (those

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[13] Slavoj Zizek argues that such an illusory sphere is precisely what constitutes our reality: "(i.e., the symbolic coordinates which determinate what we experience as reality)" ("Welcome to the Desert of the Real!" pgh. 7).

symbolically charged images of capitalism disconnected from the realities of its

discontents) represented a symbolic invasion of the Other, an infiltration of all those

ominous and destructive forces which we declare do not exist for us: "the Third World

horrors […] which are not effectively a part of our social reality […] entered and

shattered our reality" (Zizek, pgh. 9). Bobby's home stands as precisely that insulated and

artificial universe of Western reality, an illusory totality of "all the things Bobby will

need for pleasure and for emergency" (Crimp 45). The idea of a reality outside of the

neoliberal worldview is the material of fantasy and nightmare, a possibility that we cast

precisely as a cognitive impossibility. When the narrators discuss Bobby's parents

boating trip to the "world's rim" (43), such a limited perspective is elaborated, ultimately

demonstrating knowledge as a work of censorship:

> 2: What edge? There is no edge of the world.
> 1: Oh yes there is. Oh yes there is an edge of the world.
> 2: Well, we won't argue.
> 1: We won't argue because there is an edge of the world—it's as simple as that.
> There's a rim like the rim of a plate, and past the rim is—what?
> 3: We don't know.
> 1: We don't know—it's as simple as that—we don't know what's past the rim of
> the world. (43)

That which exists beyond the "rim" of an illusory world is declared as outright

unknowable, space-matter that is of no use for us except as fodder for speculative fiction.

To demarcate an "edge" of the world is thus to section off the knowable as all that which

belongs to us, all that which pertains to the realm of the conceivable.

Just as the narrators discuss the purification, the casting out of unwanted peoples

from Bobby's neighborhood, ("they've kicked out the Mexicans, they've kicked out the

Serbs" [44]), that which exists beyond the "rim" is precisely that which has been placed

there by virtue of its unfamiliar and alien nature. When Narrator 1 declares, "and what's

more they've identified the gene—no correction—they've identified the sequence—that's right—of genes that make people leave burnt mattresses outside their homes and strangle their babies" (44), Crimp seems to be poking fun at our attempts to fix knowledge of the Other by way of "sophisticated" intellectual methods, namely the "objectivity" of scientific regularity. Such a faulty employment of scientific tools is both a testament to our imperative to know, to master the ambiguous by way of systematic knowledge, as well as to the inherent human defects that make tenuous the foundations of such knowledge.

To return to the bullet as a symbolic intrusion originating from "outside" the rim of the world, the idea of the terrorist attack as an assault from "evil" foreigners might be reconsidered in terms of the psychoanalytic distinction between conscious and unconscious forces, in which the Real is experienced as a refractory element, a traumatic gap that dismantles the ego-preserving mechanisms of the normative order. The relative tranquility and peace that the West enjoys is gained at the cost of effectively "exporting" (Zizek, pgh. 13) violence and savagery into the Other. This Third World "enemy" finally lashes back, and we are unable to recognize the material from which such violence was produced. Zizek writes, "Whenever we encounter such a purely evil outside, we should gather the courage to endorse the Hegelian lesson: in this pure Outside, we should recognize the distilled version of our own essence" (pgh. 13). Ultimately Zizek attributes our disconcerting encounters with the Real to our estrangement from our own internal contradictions, namely our inability to locate within ourselves the evils we project onto others.

The disparity of Bobby's experience of emergency and the narrators' rather nonchalant, chillingly neutralizing (if not optimistic) description of his struggle up the stairs: "Things are definitely looking up—more efficient use of his arms—more understanding of the geometry of the stairs—improved/concentration" (48), demonstrates a reading process that strives to keep in line with an ideology of progress that is at the root of Western neoliberal discourse, while simultaneously mocking its efforts. Like the three condemned individuals of Sartre's *No Exit*, Crimp's narrators seem to have privileged access to the "real world" beyond their physical reach, but while Garcin, Inez, and Estelle remain powerless spectators to the reality on Earth that persists in spite of them, the three nameless speakers exact rhetorical violence on the horrifying experience of Bobby that serves to exalt an agenda of progress.

One of the prevailing reactions to the end of the Cold War was the (primarily conservative) view that the West's victory reinforced what the world knew all along: that "the Western domination of the world was historically necessary and morally justified" (*GW* 84). The idea that the "victory" of the West constituted a teleological necessity, an inevitable movement towards a better and more perfect world, does not simply manifest itself on the level of political governance or international order; it constitutes an entire system of norms and encourages certain ways of living that perpetuate a neoliberal ideology. *Whole Blue Sky* (2005: 7-20), the first play in the series, serves as a prequel or a history of Bobby and his family. On one level, this play suggests the impossibility of an alternative lifestyle by constructing a woman's (presumably Bobby's mother) desires for escape from the confines of the nuclear bourgeois family as a fantasy genre. On another level, the play's form reveals the subjectivity that underlies all ("correct" or

"reasonable") ways of life, ultimately undermining the teleological primacy of the good

bourgeois life.

Social wisdoms—"truths" reinforced by popular narratives and perpetuated as

common knowledge— guide the narrator's construction of the story in *Whole Blue Sky*.

In the opening lines of the play, the narrators begin gossiping about an unnamed woman

who "gets married very young" and then immediately realizes that "it's a mistake"

(Crimp 7). Her love makes it even worse, because while she can't deny her true feelings,

she can "see her whole life stretched out in front of her like a corpse" (7). While on one

level, this discussion feels like casual gossip about a common acquaintance, the audience

can immediately detect something strange about the relationship between the three

narrators in relation to the subject; while Narrator 1 dominates the dialogue, Narrators 2

and 3 insert crucial cues and ask specific questions that direct the main speaker,

suggesting that they are all, suspiciously, on the same page. While Narrator 1

demonstrates a stronger familiarity with the subject, her acquaintances prove equally

capable of inserting themselves, their imaginative power, into the narrative at hand

without disturbing its coherence. All three narrators are thus simultaneously all-knowing

and clueless, full presence and complete absence. The "narrative" that follows is in effect

a filling in of this absence with knowledge, an erection, as it were, of a family. This

beckons the question, however, of what exactly constitutes the material of this

bricolage— where are the narrators coming from? Who are the subjects and what is it

about them that make everyone seemingly capable of knowing them?

The process of storyboarding might illuminate one possibility, particularly if we

are to take the narrators as writers of sorts that work cohesively to develop a particular

kind of narrative whose objective we will address later. In storyboarding, sequences of

static visuals coupled with written descriptions are used to represent the structure or the

flow of the narrative. In part, what makes storyboarding useful is the interchangeability

of each frame, the ability to omit one frame and insert another that is more appropriate

for the goals of the narrative, more suitable to the desired genre.

   Turning back to the dialogue, the narrators deliberate as to their subject's course

of action now that they've established "her" mistake. At first they declare she must leave

him:

> 1: Well of course—yes—leave him—talk to him very tenderly next to—well for
> example the river—talk to him next to the river just where the water swirls round
> the piers of the stone bridge (…)
> 2: She'll touch his cheek
> 1: That's right—touch his cheek, ask him not to cry, explain it's for the best,
> touch his cheek, take his hand, comfort him—
> 3: As best she can
> 1: Comfort him—obviously as best she can—then get away. Pack and leave. Pick
> out just the few books she really values, because what else does she want?—All
> she wants is those few books and to be free—packs the books and leaves
> (8).

Despite the fact that the subject "doesn't know what to do," the narrators are able to

specifically describe a course of action with such detail that the image of the subject

talking to her husband by the river seems to plant the seeds for the beginning of a female

empowerment drama about a woman effectively seizing the wheel of her life, liberating

herself from the constraints of marriage. Such a narrative possibility seems to grow

naturally from the initial conflict (marriage v. independent life). Yet regardless of the

graphic clarity with which her escape from marriage is presented, it would seem that this

storyboard frame is swiftly discarded as Narrator 2 suggests she gets pregnant, to which

Narrator 1 confirms: "She packs nothing. She says nothing. Not by the river, not in fact

anywhere. She gets—and that's exactly what happens—gets pregnant." With one

narrative possibility discarded, another takes its place in the form of a realist domestic

drama about the discontents of family, or rather—the psychological costs of sustaining "a

picture of happiness." If these "frames" of possibility are already attached to pre-existing

narrative frameworks that already include an assortment, a toolkit of accompanying

details (the materials of the bricolage) then the narrators create the subject, craft her

destiny (as in *Attempts on Her Life*[14]) from a collective knowledge, a repository of

"truths" about the way life should and can be lived. Moreover, it is not truly a question of

what we know that creates narrative, but what we desire—the desire to cement the

mischievous flight of potentiality into a static storyboard and therefrom create structures

of knowledge that can be applied, perpetuated, and deployed. Indeed, the narrators'

construction of a family betrays the reality of social expectations imposed on the

individual from the outside, norms about how to live framed as "legitimate" and

autonomous desire.

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[14] Crimp's *Attempts On Her Life* (1997) has no *dramatis personae* and no characters, an artistic decision that finds its roots in the plays of Samuel Beckett and his alignment with the philosophical rejection of the idea of that an essentialist identity of the subject cannot be represented (Zimmerman 74). *Attempts* is ostensibly about an absent protagonist, Anne, who serves as the mental locus of the play despite the fact that its 'seventeen scenarios for the theatre' explore different aspects of Anne (also known as Anya, Annie, Anny, and Anushka) that appear contradictory, unrelated, and enigmatic. The spectators of this play are thus presented with disparate narratives of Anne that take the form of *images* that refer to her presence while premised on her physical absence. The absence of a physical Anne, of a single transcendent Anne that might otherwise reduce her identity to a single scene, extends the domain and play of signification infinitely so that Anne can be "the heroine of a film, a victim of civil war, a typical consumer, a megastar, a tourist guide, a make of car, a physicist, an international terrorist, an American survivalist, an artist, a refugee's dead child, a victim of aliens, the girl next door, the object of police investigation, and a porn star" (Sierz 49).

The woman, her husband, and their new child make a picture of happiness that according to Narrator 1, looks like "the three of them—yes—in their winter hats. It looks like the three of them in the pet shop selecting a pet. It looks just how they look in a toy shop selecting a toy" (10). The idea of happiness is a family engaged in the joys of consumerism, particularly the birthing of a consumerist pleasure within the child, a rite of passage as it were, initiated by the mother and father. Yet it is not just the pleasures of commodity acquisition (purchasing a toy, owning a pet) that make up this picture, but the idea of the united nuclear family cheerfully engaged in the activity of shopping, rendering the entire scenario a source of joy that is longed for. This literal framing of an idea conflates happiness with a single structure (i.e. the bourgeois family), making it so that the family in question does not experience happiness, but is what happiness looks like, a formidable representation.

The picture of happiness laid out in *Whole Blue Sky*, however, contains a stain of dread that is constantly being repressed or justified by the narrators. Even as the family stands in as the picture of happiness in the pet shop, "[the woman] knows he gets up to things—yes, under the hat—even in the toy shop selecting a toy his eyes still slide away" (11). This creeping detail indicates an internal contusion beneath the polished fabric of happiness; such opacity rests in opposition to the detailed image. Later, the narrators describe how the family enjoys all "the things that make life worth living":

> Look at the floors. Look at the walls. Look at the way the dining table extends and extends. On summer evenings it extends and extends right through the French doors and out under the Blue Atlas Cedar. Small lamps hang in the branches and everybody's laughing: the doctors and nurses, the butchers and the musicians who have become their friends: work friends, boating friends, friends from school—parents—traders and craftspeople with exceptionally rare skills—the very same people in fact who designed and built then polished with their own hands this

ever-lengthening table where everybody sits under the blue tree and laughs in a boisterous but good-natured way […] (14)

The image of a prosperous and tight-knit suburban community is illustrated in great detail as a social sphere whose membership is the object of envy. The summer dinner party is cast as an idyllic scene, in which friends can take part in their shared enjoyment of "money, property, and family" (14). When asked, however, as to why they are laughing so good-naturedly, Narrator 1 retorts, "Why shouldn't her guests laugh? [...] Haven't they struggled to extend this table? Haven't they screamed at each other in private?" (14). In order to "extend" their livelihoods, their claims to money, property, and family, the subjects of conversation have had to privately "use the word bitch," and "use the word pig," and use the phrase, "say that one more fucking time and I'll break your fucking neck" (14-15). In contrast to Pinter's employment of "cunt" and "prick" in *The New World Order* as illustrative of an enemy that resists stable definition, Crimp suggests that the use of "bitch" and "pig" functions in a sense like a Derridean trace. While such aggression is not acknowledged in the open—at dinner parties for instance—the subjects must necessarily engage with the undesirable in the *shadows* as a precondition for a meaningful and successful life in the *daylight*. If in fact, as Pinter has shown, engagement with such words proposes an engagement with the unconscious, with the non-simplicity of self-contradiction that violently produces meaning as opposed to sealing meaning off, then the significance—the outwards *presence*—of the subjects' illusory sphere is constituted by the absent aggression that defines it. And yet it is worth noting that Crimp redirects the "real" violence of such aggression by siphoning it into the molds of language. The use of "forbidden" language, which formally, constitutes a pathological engagement with what ought to be repressed, seems less an estrangement of violence as

in Pinter and more like an only alternative. For the Western bourgeois, curse words are essentially *what we get* instead as expressions of the unconscious. Ultimately, however, this repression is indebted to a narrative order (indeed, the narrators themselves) invested in the displacement of such real aggression in the realm of the unknown in order to preserve the purity of the dominant value system.

As a means of tying up the extended discussion about Bobby and his family, I will end my discussion of Crimp's triptych with the final scene of the last short play, the closing detail of this family drama. As *Fewer Emergencies* draws to a close with Bobby still dragging himself up the stairs, losing blood but supposedly "gaining confidence" (49), the narrators do not budge from their mantra that "things are improving" (49). At this point, the stage directions indicate that the scene has faded to black. With the visual element of the narrators on stage effaced, the audience is subjected solely to the voices of narration, which re-introduce the "key" as the distant object at the top of the spiral staircase that would release Bobby from his house:

> 1: Things are improving. He's further up the stairs. He's closer to the key. See
> how it spins—no—correction—swings—see how/ it swings.
> 2: See how the key swings.
> 3. That's right, Bobby-boy. Watch the key. Watch the key swinging.
> (49)

With the "swinging key" as the concluding image of the play, Crimp refuses the conventional resolutions offered by aesthetic strategies such as closure. This realist technique functions to manage anxieties (in this case, the anxiety of violence) through a final re-establishment of harmony, ultimately reassuring the reader that there exists a meaningful chain of events. The swinging key tips the audience back and forth from hope to terror, in interminable "play" as it were. Closure functions much in the same way as

Derrida's idea of "the Book,"[15] which draws upon the image of the "story," as meaning

fully contained and present within the bounds of the book (a "bound" book) to express

the desire and possibility of a transcendental signifier. Instead, the key acts like a promise

that can never be verified, disavowing the narrators' power to fix meaning in such a way

that might ultimately benefit their own ideological agenda of "progress." Nevertheless,

this infinite deferral of a conclusion leaves Bobby's fate (as in the "horizon" of torture in

The New World Order) clouded by an air of menace, one that implicates the spectator as

a passive bystander, only once removed from the optimistic indifference of the narrators.

VII. 9/11 and After: Terror as Sign

Following the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11th, 2001, former

President George W. Bush articulated the goals of the War on Terror: "It will not end

until every terrorist group has been found, stopped, and defeated" ("Address" 20 Sept.

2001) This so-called War on Terror has since received widespread criticism not limited to

the political and military decisions made by U.S. leaders and their allies abroad, but

(pertinent to this study), based on the very ambiguity, the very uncertainty of the phrase:

War on Terror. What is this terror? Where is this terror? Without being able to answer

these questions, how is it that our response to terror can be the nice and clean-cut act of

war, and not counter-terrorism itself? In an interview conducted a few weeks after the

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[15] Derrida writes, "The idea of the book is the idea of totality, finite or infinite, of the signifier; this totality of the signifier cannot be a totality, unless a totality constituted by the signified pre-exists it, supervises its inscriptions and its signs, and is independent of it in its ideality. The idea of the book, which always refers to a natural totality, is profoundly alien to the sense of writing" (*OG* 18).

9/11 attacks, Jacques Derrida was asked his impressions of this major event, to which he responded, "this very thing, the place and meaning of this "event" remains ineffable, like an intuition without a concept, like a unicity with no generality on the horizon or no horizon at all, out of range for a language that admits its powerlessness and so is reduced to pronouncing mechanically a date, repeating it endlessly, as a kind of ritual incantation, a conjuring poem, a journalistic litany or a rhetorical refrain that admits to not knowing what it's talking about" (*PT* 102). The events of 9/11 represent a high point of fears and anxieties that go hand-in-hand with an increasingly globalized world. The public discourse coming out of 9/11 and the War on Terror (or rather, "The Never-ending War on Everything," according to Stephen Colbert) thus indicates that the elusive nature of terrorism has reached spectacular dimensions.

If 9/11 represents an amplification of the feelings and discontents discussed throughout this study, then a persisting binary understanding of the dimensions of international terrorism has ultimately created an overwhelmingly obscure and seemingly infinite concept. The linguistic construction of terrorism as a threat of massive proportions, a danger that is ongoing, present, and immanent, stems from its semantic openness—it juts out from any framework that attempts to impose limits on its potential. For instance, Cofer Black, U.S. Spokesman Coordinator for Counterterrorism describes the danger as such: "The threat of international terrorism knows no boundaries" ("Annual Report" 30 April 2003). This is the logical conclusion of language: terrorism is an infinite threat, rhetorically constructed in such a way that suggests that we should not even try to grasp its dimensions or calculate its possibilities.

Terrorism is thus everywhere at all times, leaving us in a state of "supreme-super emergency" (Jackson 101) against a faceless enemy, a specter constituted uniquely and characterized solely by its diametrical opposition to its victims: the United States, the West, the free citizens of democratic nations, the virtuous, and the righteous. Terrorism, officials insist, poses a threat to everything "we" stand for, everything "we" cherish and live by. Colin Powel, for instance, holds that terrorism poses a "threat to civilization" and "the very essence of what you do" ("Remarks" 26 Oct. 2001). George Bush, furthermore, describes terrorism as a "threat to our way of life" ("Address" 20 September 2001), and a threat to "the peace of the world" ("State" 29 Jan. 2002). If the aims of terrorism go against what we stand for, our beliefs, and our very livelihood, not just as Westerners but as human beings that seek to live in harmony with other human beings, then the discursive construction of the "terrorist" must necessarily take the form of the extreme Other. The terrorist identity as the savage, evil, and inhuman Other serves to provoke a proportional response of fear, constantly reminding the public of the critical state of emergency. The ethical character (or lack thereof) of the terrorist and the threat of such an individual taking action on "the good people" takes on an even greater dimension when authorities remind the public of terrorism's advanced intellectual and material power: "Our enemies are resourceful, and they are incredibly ruthless" ("Remarks" 29 November 2001); "Our enemies operate by highly sophisticated methods and technologies, using the latest means of communication and the new weapons of bioterrorism" ("Radio Address" 24 Nov. 2001).

The discursive construction of September 11, 2011 as a day of national tragedy can be understood in the manner in which the date has assumed iconic dimensions and is

no longer fixed in time or geography. One need not add the year (2001) or the month

(September) to communicate the significance of the date; the numbers 9/11 have become

rhetorical shorthand for a day of American tragedy, an *exceptional* memory of

unprecedented grievance that provides the American people with a narrative that allows

them to make sense of their collective experience. The mythology of American

exceptionalism and the American people as a unique, special people is in this way tied to

the idea that America is an exceptional kind of victim (Jackson 33). And yet, however

certain the loss and however deplorable the violence committed towards the American

people on that day, the idea of 9/11's apparent exceptional victimhood undergirds the

import of the event when in reality the suffering undergone was far from exceptional:

> More than double the number of people killed by al Qaeda were killed every day
> for a hundred days in Rwanda in 1994; more than three million people have died
> in the ongoing war in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 1998; terrorists
> have killed tens of thousands of civilians in the last few years in Algeria, Sri
> Lanka, Israel, and Chechnya; and on September 11, 2011 itself, an estimated
> 30,000 children died of hunger and preventable diseases across the developing
> world—as they do every day. (Jackson 37)

On the one hand, this myth of exceptional American victimhood is a testament to the

"culture of contentment" that characterizes the Suburban middle class of Western nations,

leaving them indifferent if not blind to the suffering of those who occupy fundamentally

different lived experiences—those living in foreign lands as well as the poor of their own

countries. On the other hand, if 9/11 stands in as a telegram for the event itself, as well as

the fear it inspires, then the feeling cannot be said to be spontaneous—emanating from

the iteration itself—but instead conditioned, constituted, and circulated: "The telegram of

this metonymy—a name, a number—points out the un-qualifiable by recognizing that we

do not recognize or even cognize, that we do not yet know how to qualify, that we do not

know what we are talking about" (*PT* 86). Ultimately, 9/11 marks a date in history that must not be forgotten—"something" took place—but we have no singular concept or meaning that could allow us to come to terms, to master the event.

Precisely because we have no clue what we're talking about, we feel we must repeat it so that in Derrida's words we can "conjure away the fear it inspires" and "deny our powerlessness to name in an appropriate fashion the thing in question [that goes] beyond the mere deictic of the date: something terrible took place on Sept 11, and in the end we don't know what" (*PT* 87). In psychoanalysis, a repetition compulsion protects the ego by neutralization, by retroactively mastering a traumatic event or the circumstances that surround it through repetition, therefore distancing and dulling its painful psychic effects. Following 9/11, the world was effectively submerged in a repetition of this sort with the onslaught of repeated televised images reminding, if not pressing upon the world the significance of the fall of the twin towers. An "event" in the Heideggarian sense, however, signifies something more than its daily usage in journalistic jargon. An event does not conform to an essence, law, or truth; it is precisely that which is so unforeseeable and irruptive that it disturbs the horizon of the way we understand the concept of "event" as such: "The event is what comes and, in coming, comes to surprise me, to surprise and to suspend comprehension: the event is first of all *that which* I do not comprehend" (*PT* 90). The compulsion to repeat that which we do not comprehend signifies, translates, and betrays what is taking place beyond language. If 9/11 is a singularity not matched by any generalization, an incomparable "event," then language cannot be used for its obvious referring function, but is instead employed to access the unspeakable: terror, trauma, the effects of an experience whose intensity

cannot be matched by a subject's usual response mechanism. The repetition of the event in conversation and through media outlets—and, in displaced fashion, on stages— can therefore be understood as a retrospective attempt to dominate the unknowable.

Conclusion

Journalism approaches terror as fact, art approaches terror as a structure of feeling. Both aspire to a kind of knowledge, and both have been obliged to concede the basically un-nameable quality of the signified of "terrorism," a term that seems to have unsettled our understanding of what truth and clarity mean. In light of the current "scene" of terrorism, namely the declarations of war and the violent threats of destruction originating from the Islamic State, also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), how might the experience of "terrorism" in 2015 be different from the experience of terrorism in 2001, and how might these phenomena be exactly the same?

The images of the graphic executions conducted by the Islamic State, are, indeed, jarring referents of terror that are all-too-real. To whom do we owe this brutal assertion of bodily reality but the very elusive Other—those masked, nameless, and savage foreigners already entrenched deep in the psychic material of our nightmares long before we were even aware that ISIS existed. The recent jihadist propaganda videos released by the Islamic State that depict live executions intercut with footage of the organization's other violent campaigns and dubbed over by narrated excerpts from the Quran are, indeed, grisly renderings of political drama of "real" violence, barbarism etching itself back into our cushy reality through the spectacular production of corpses. Shocking friend and enemy alike, one such video depicts an ISIS member with the severed head of an

American hostage, Peter Kassig, at his feet. As the camera pans up, the masked figure addresses Obama in English, and delivers a jarring declaration of war: "Here we are, burying the first American crusader in dirt, eagerly awaiting for the remainder of your armies to arrive" (Abdallah, *IraqiNews*).

Admittedly, this study limits itself to the artistic and political responses surrounding the "terrorism" of 9/11; therefore, a brief explanation of how ISIS poses a fundamentally different political challenge is warranted. This radical group's "terrorism" must be understood on its own terms, and not, as Graeme Wood argues, as an offshoot of Bin Laden's modern secular terrorist organization ("What ISIS really wants"). While the terrorism of ISIS is, like other "terrorisms," concerned with evoking fear, the vanguard group is ideologically tethered to the medieval religious belief that it will be a key player in the apocalypse. ISIS partisans find pleasure knowing that they are on the side of the right and they are eager to enact the realization of a "dystopian alternative reality" ("What ISIS really wants" Wood) by purifying the world through violence, namely through continual mass executions. The Islamic State's appeal, as well as the source of their dogmatic claims, draws on an imaginary prophetic model that holds that practitioners of early Islam were ideologically and spiritually pure by virtue of the fact that they worshipped nearer the time of revelation ("Isis Theatre of Cruelty" Ibish). In short, ISIS holds an ancient model as its standard and as its alternative to the Western modern world, as well as the established order in the Middle East. To even consider the laws, norms, and customs that pertain to the modern international system is, for the Islamic State—"ideological suicide" ("What ISIS really wants" Wood).

Despite such exhaustive journalistic reports geared towards understanding and mastering the threat that ISIS poses, officials still cannot answer the question, "what does ISIS want?" U.S. Major General Michael K. Nagata is quoted admitting to still not knowing the appeal of the Islamic State: "We have not defeated the idea. We do not even understand the idea" (qtd. by Wood). As has been established, this study addresses the aesthetic and political responses to an indistinguishable enemy, an opponent that resists any facile binary understanding. Nagata's unsettling confession betrays a similar shaky understanding of terrorism that undergirds the very terror we experience when witnessing footage of ISIS members being played over and over again on CNN.

While certainly, the palpability of ISIS stands in contrast to the elusiveness of the 9/11 terrorist as a wolf in sheep's clothing, the effect of such terrible violence does not differ from the unbelievable image of the rogue planes crashing into the World Trade Center. We have seen it all before on the screen: the destruction of the White House in *Independence Day* (1996), the countless Hollywood horror films depicting heinous acts just as, if not more graphic than the violent crimes of ISIS. As Zizek notes, the events of 9/11 proved to be a "climactic conclusion of 20th century art's 'passion for the real,' the terrorists themselves did not do it primarily to provoke the real material damage, but for the SPECTACULAR EFFECT OF IT" (pgh. 4). If indeed, the images have always existed for us as objects of fantasy etched into cultural productions (but felt as a lived reality in non-Western nations), the "real" events of 9/11 and the "real" beheadings of ISIS crack open our illusions about the quarantined Western reality we inhabit. The trauma of confronting such violent reality is experienced and felt as a struggle to find meaning, order, and comfort in a world predicated on difference. Often, in our efforts to

fix reality, to grab it by the neck and subjugate it, we, too, perpetuate barbarism by

limiting the production of meaning to the grammar rules of a dominant political order.

Charged with the responsibility to forestall and resist a violent reality, political art

manages terror and the violent realities it contains by probing the conditions of ideology

and power that we oftentimes take for granted.

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