

**Capturing the Void: The Importance of Collective Visual Memories in the
Representations in Documentary Films on September 11, 2001**

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Abstract:

Documentary films have long occupied a privileged role among audiences as the purveyors of truth, offering viewers accurate reproductions of reality. While this classification is debatable, the role of documentaries as vehicles for collective memory is vital to the societal reconstructions of historical events, a connection that must be understood in order to properly assign meaning to the them. This thesis examines this relationship, focusing specifically on the documentaries produced related to trauma (in this case the September 11 attacks on the United States) as a means to enhance understanding of the role these films play in the lives and memories of their collective audiences.

Of the massive collection of 9/11 documentaries produced since 2001, twenty-three were chosen for analysis based on national significance, role as a representative of a category (e.g. conspiracy films), and/or unique contributions to the repertoire. The films were then analyzed for their use of and contributions to the collective memories of the event, looking specifically at how they used (or purposely omitted) footage of the tragedy and how they employed this footage in the creation of meaning. The results of the analysis showed the emergence of four categories of meaning: (1) films that serve as historical records of 9/11, (2) films that aim to criticize or question, (3) films that seek to memorialize or commemorate the event, and (4) films that portray and encourage recovery and healing. This categories, though often borrowing from each other, demonstrate not only that documentary as a medium possesses a multiplicity of uses far beyond simply recording reality, but also illuminates the way traumatic collective memory was used to fulfill a variety of purposes in the process of historicizing.

Introduction

Mass or popular history will be based on the images preserved on film, video, or new technologies. [...] How we see ourselves will depend not on what we are formally taught or made to read, but on what we see or what we can be shown.

- Richard Reeves, author (Edwards 193)

Cinema is an inherently public medium; it is created, consumed, and understood on a collective scale that is based on its purpose of being *seen*. Since its invention at the dawn of the 20th century, its public nature, combined with the emotional power long associated with art, has awarded it a strong potential for impact on the masses, an impact that could be both positive and negative. In Plato's *Republic*, the philosopher advocated for a banning of poets, painters, and the like from proper society as their "perceived impact on people's moods and attitudes, as well as their ability to create false versions of reality" was so strong in fact that it was seen as a threat (Domke 131). While Plato was not speaking of film of course, his theory long predating its invention, his request nonetheless underlines the ways in which the creative arts are seen as influential over society at large.

Documentary film, with its theoretical ties to reality, carries particularly heavy weight in this potential for influence. As a "cinema of memory, documentary claims the past," grasping glimpses of history to be preserved for future generations to experience (Renov 31). This preservation allows historical moments not only to be seen by a wide audience, but also to be seen across generations, expanding their range of influence beyond the limitations of time and space. With the invention of the internet and the plunged into a digital age, these films are easily distributable and thus become even more a part of a broad, collective memory that enhances the mass understanding of historical events.

The ability to learn about history has long been a part of human culture, but the ability to *see* history has only existed since the advent of film at the turn of the 20th century. While the written record provides useful insights into the past, it is far surpassed by the power of the visual image. First, as humans experience the world around them visually rather than linguistically, representing history this through images makes it more natural and accessible; audiences become familiar with the situation as if they were there rather than having to imagine it themselves. Second, the amount of information held in an image is far more extensive than that held in writing, the former providing audiences with non-verbal information (body language, dimensions of a scene, visceral reactions to certain events, etc.) that would be too exhaustive to present in written form. In other words, if one were to describe an image to the last detail, including the emotions expressed and the nature of the natural reaction to the image, it would occupy far more space than the image itself and would thus take much longer to process. This fact is underlined by a group of researchers studying the impact of war footage on audience. Their results concluded that “visual images are processed differently, more quickly and holistically, than the same content communicated by words” (Pfau 317). Visuals command better attention, are recalled better, and are typically regarded by viewers as more credible than written content.

Because of this power of the visual record over the written one, film (in particular documentary) occupies an important role in the preservation of the past that extends beyond mere descriptions and into the realm of experience. Rosenstone argues that film’s role in record-keeping is unique as “only film can provide an adequate ‘empathetic reconstruction to convey how historical people witnessed, understood, and lived their lives.’ Only film can ‘recover all the past’s liveliness’ ” (Rosenstone 1176). What is preserved on film is not merely facts, but life itself, a life that documentaries maintain by “freezing the images within their frames for later instructional use”

(Rabinowitz 120). Committing this life to film allows viewers to share in its experiences and participate in the living memories the films create.

While Plato viewed the influence of art and its participation as negative, the effect of documentaries is often positive, enhancing overall understanding of situations and events, attributing higher importance to the issues they discuss, and increasing audience's willingness to help distribute the information further to promote enlightenment (Fitzsimmons 385). For events of particular historical importance, documentary's ability to preserve the events themselves as well as the atmosphere surrounding them helps to situate the events in what sociologist Maurice Halbwachs calls the cultural frameworks of collective memory. In other words, the ability of documentaries to visually recreate historical moments and transmit them to audiences across the globe in ways they can be broadly understood (i.e. through the power of sight) helps to create and reinforce social patterns and values that inform the reception of events. The films help provide a structure in which society is able to understand the world around it while simultaneously offering up their own explanations to be added to the collective memory itself.

One such event in which documentaries played a key role in the communal response was the terrorist attack on the United States on September 11, 2001, alternatively referred to as 9/11. The attack was immediately associated with visual language as it was recorded not only by the media, but by hundreds of civilians who happened to have their cameras with them that morning, earning itself the label of the most documented event in human history (Ellis 335). The event was seen live by audiences across the globe who experienced it vicariously through the media's instantaneous coverage, creating an immediate sense of global community and connectedness that characterized the event as a national (and in many ways international) trauma in which everyone was a part. The traumatic nature of the attacks is particularly important to its screen representation as it informed how the media handled it that day as well as how its reception was classified in the collective.

Not long after the event, documentary films looking to re-present it began appearing, attempting to create more permanent records than the media that would preserve not only the history of that morning, but also of the collective experienced and memories that emerged. Instead of reacting to the attack violently, these documentaries reacted visually, creating a lasting record that would help audiences enhance their understanding before or in lieu of seeking vengeance. This follows ethnographic filmmaker David MacDougall's theory that "The viewfinder of the camera has the opposite function of the gunsight of a soldier at his enemy. The latter frames an image for annihilation, the former frames an image for preservation" (MacDougall 123). This preservation took a variety of forms surrounding September 11 ranging from a desire to directly honor the event itself in its raw, emotional form to a desire to preserve it as a warning to approach the official story with suspicion and wariness.

This thesis explores that range, using the theories of collective memories to explain the role of documentary in the aftermath and reconstruction of the tragedy of September 11. I will argue that the creation of collective visual memories surrounding traumatic events (in this case September 11) is essential to its ability to be historicized in a public forum. The first section presents a short survey of the history of documentary films, explaining the progression of their association with truth as a means to explain why the documentaries discussed later matter in terms of the production of a seemingly accurate and recognizable history. The second section details the events of September 11, from the moment the first plane hit the World Trade Center through to the aftermath, and explains its definition as a traumatic event. The third section explains the immediate role the media played in the memory production of the event, looking at the ways in which the attacks were represented and the impact those representations had on audiences. The fourth section examines the theories of collective memories and, in particular, how the media aided in the production of said memories surrounding September 11. The fifth section, composing the bulk of the material,

analyses the use and production of collective memories in the documentaries produced on 9/11, surveying the contribution of individual films and dividing them into four categories based on their aforementioned intent: films that (1) aim to provide a historical record, (2) advocate for an alternative history, (3) attempt to memorialize the fallen, and (4) represent and guide audiences through the process of healing. The essay concludes by summarizing how these films operate, why the visual memory they create is significant in the process of historicizing traumatic events, and why documentary's capacity for preservation is important to the progression of society.

Part I: The Progression of Documentary Film Production

Documentaries have been around since the birth of filmmaking itself: early films by the Lumière Brothers often simply showed depictions of reality as it happened on any ordinary day (a bustling street corner, a train entering a station, etc.); travelogues, interest films, newsreels, and lecture films demonstrated the spectacle reality was capable of creating; and even the name of one of the early cinematic technologies, the Veriscope (created in 1897), is taken from the Latin meaning “truth viewer” (Bernstein 168). However, the term “documentary” as it applies to film did not emerge until 1926 in a review of Robert Flaherty’s *Moana* (released the same year) in which Scottish filmmaker John Grierson labeled the film as one possessing “documentary value” (Winston 11). In the 1930s, Grierson offered up what would become the early definition for documentary, calling it “the creative treatment of actuality,” a definition which theorist Paul Rotha has called England’s “most important contribution to cinema as a whole” (Aufderheide 36). Grierson’s definition acknowledged the director’s role in the production of documentaries, realizing that it is their role to observe life and then interpret it for their viewers, therefore utilizing the films as tools for education and social integration (Aufderheide 35). He recognized the potential these films held for persuasion and helped catalyze the process of governmental sponsorship, a process that began earlier with the Soviet Union, but truly gained footing in the documentary world in the 1930s.

Since their creation, documentaries have taken on a variety of forms, from Flaherty’s early ethnographic films to the recent trend of blockbuster and television documentaries that dominate the scene today. Throughout this history, the relationship between these films and notions of truth has taken on a variety of forms. Initially, with *Nanook of the North* (Flaherty 1922), the reality represented was one of obvious interpretation as its construction was made not of scenes recorded naturally, but from reconstructions of what Flaherty observed in his time living with his subjects. At the same time, Dziga Vertov, an early Soviet filmmaker, was creating a different type of

documentary, one that relied on the camera's pure observational ability Flaherty's films overlooked. These films looked to document a "life caught unawares," moments that were represented unrehearsed, "real" moments void of "plastic art of representation" (Aufderheide 38). The camera was to be used as an instrument for observation, the "mechanical I/eye" capable of showing the world as it is and thus acting as a "cybernetic extension" of the inferior powers of human sight (Aufderheide 38-39).

As the world entered a time of war, the truth behind documentary films was manipulated to suit the needs of the state powers (i.e. propaganda films). As troops were deployed to Europe, the U.S. government in particular began making propaganda films to gain the support of the general population, placing their value as persuasive tools over the accurate portrayal of their content. While this resulted in a separation of documentaries from definite truth, the governmental funding for these projects helped to boost their popularity with audiences and was soon supplemented by support from foundations and corporations. In the 1950s, this popularity was further increased with the creation of new channels and departments aimed specifically at documentary. This development placed documentaries in the homes of audiences across the world, increasing their importance as vehicles for communication. Three major types of documentaries emerged from this period: those relating to contemporary news, those reflecting a historical nostalgia, and those focusing on human-interest topics (Ellis 190). These three categories, in addition to the social-problem film developed later, are still largely at play in contemporary production.

Throughout the 20th century, film technology improved with the development of more portable cameras, sound recording, and faster film stock and documentary filmmakers were able to get closer and closer to representing life unobstructed. The 1960s saw the emergence of two theories vital to the development of this idea: *cinéma vérité* in France and direct cinema in the United States. Both theories were tied to attempts at creating a cinema focused on pure truth

through the idea that “culture is objectively observable” and that the transparency of film technology allows reality to be accurately captured for the world to see (Jay 1345). Despite this similarity, the two theories presenting notably contradictory views, though the former acknowledged the camera’s role in the creations of situations, acting as a “fly in the soup...visible for all to notice” while the latter believed a state of true objectivity was attainable, acting more as a “fly on the wall” (Winston 188). Regardless of their differences, these two movements both worked to establish what they saw as cinematic truth, claiming the observational powers of the camera in the name of the veracity of the resulting image.

As the ‘60s dissolved into the ‘70s, documentaries became less about their form and more about their content and context. Stemming from the social movements that emerged at the time, the 1970s saw a new emphasis on socially focused documentaries centered on contemporary issues (feminism, activism, Vietnam, etc.). It is this vein of documentaries that carries through to the most prominent documentaries being made since the turn of the 21st century, films like *The Cove* (Psihoyos, 2009), *Supersize Me* (Spurlock, 2004), and *Sicko* (Moore, 2007) that focus on domestic, social, and environmental issues plaguing society. These three films are part of a renaissance of documentaries that began in the early 1990s following the arrival of video in the 1980s and the development of digital technologies that made documentaries an accessible medium of production for filmmakers working outside of Hollywood and the government. Not only did they become cheaper to make, but they also became cheaper to distribute and thus began showing up not only on TV (PBS and HBO playing a central role), but also on the independent circuit and in some theatrical releases.

This swell in production created a surge in popularity aided in part by the increasing degree to which films in general came to influence everyday life. According to Rotha, film became “so omnipresent [...] that it must be regarded as one of the most influential factors in the guidance of

public thought, for there is scarcely a sphere of social life today in which its influence is absent” (54). Documentaries took on a particularly important position in this sphere, helping audiences to understand the world around them and increasing their involvement in it. They were “no longer conventionally perceived as a passive experience intended solely for informal learning and entertainment” (a la the conservative post-war documentaries) but were expanding their role, becoming a part of “a larger effort to spark debate, mold public opinion, shape policy, and build activist networks” (Nisbet 450). This surge in popularity has been largely attributed to the contrast between the increasing desire for truth, partially due to the development of the internet and the “just Google it” craze and the growing popularity of reality television, and the degradation of the news following the corporatization of the media and turn towards what McEnteer calls “info-tainment” (the recreation of the news to suit entertainment needs) (McEnteer xii). This garnered a higher degree of trust in documentary films that became vital to the role they have occupied in contemporary society as vehicles for truth.

In addition to their perception as being more trustworthy than the news, documentaries are also seen as more impactful on knowledge and connectivity than their narrative counterpart. Bill Nichols, a prominent documentary historian, argues that “fiction films often give the impression that we look in on a private or unusual world from outside, from our vantage point in the historical world, whereas documentary images often give the impression that we look out from our corner of the world onto some other part of the same world” (Nichols 122). In this way, documentaries serve to offer audiences a window into a world they are not themselves privy to, yet one that is just as real as their own, constructed not by sets and lights and scripts but by life itself. These “windows” provided audiences a chance observe, question, and internalize the world around them with a higher degree of vigilance than needed for fiction films. It is through documentary films that people

become witnesses rather than merely audiences, a role that plays a crucial part in the portrayal of September 11.

The communicative abilities documentary films afford have been found to have a greater affect over public knowledge an opinion than fiction films on the same topic, particularly with regard to films depicting horror or trauma. Researchers Heather LaMarre and Kristen Landreville looked at this idea specifically in a study that showed participants two films about the recent Rwandan genocide (the narrative film *Hotel Rwanda* [George, 2004] and the documentary *Triumph of Evil* [Frontline, 1999]) and measured the resulting changes in understanding. Their study found that viewing the documentary resulted in higher gains in knowledge and a greater degree of emotional engagement than the narrative fiction (Nisbet 453). This demonstrates that, despite the fact that documentaries often follow narrative structures similar to fiction films (evoking ethos, pathos, and logos to make their point), the sense of realism and truth surrounding documentaries makes them more reliable, trustworthy representations of events that hold more historical value in audiences' minds than do fiction films.

Additionally, documentaries are seen as having a more honest, morally acceptable edge in the treatment of atrocities than do fiction films, as, according to Susan Sontag "people want the weight of witnessing without the taint of artistry, which is equated with insincerity or mere contrivance. Pictures of hellish events seem more authentic when they don't have the look that comes from being 'properly' lighted and composed" (Engle 45). This distinction adds to the notion of documentary audiences as spectators because, in situations like these, audiences are able to justify their spectatorship through the realism of documentary, placing them in the role of historian and witness rather than mere moviegoer. Furthermore, the process of witnessing brings audiences together in a communal sense of "we were there" understanding, igniting feelings of unity that

spread across the globe and resulting in the creation of a collective memory, a notion that is exemplified in the development and treatment of discourses surrounding September 11.

The connective, truth-seeking ability of documentary, as demonstrated by its historical progression, is vital to its use in the recreations of the September 11 attacks. Because the event was so traumatic, many people were left looking for answers afterwards and documentary films took the visual memories created by the media and attempted to fill the void with answers. Unlike their fictive counterparts, however, these documentaries were recognized by the public as offering an accurate and truthful depiction of history and, as such, became an easy way for the filmmakers to use imagery to historicize the event in a publicly accessible and trusted forum.

Part II: September 11, 2001

There are certain moments in history that take on a life of their own, turning points that simultaneously obliterate all past notions of safety, unity, and identity, and create the circumstances that define the future. For the modern world, September 11, 2001 was that moment. The events began at 8:46 AM, when American Airlines Flight 11 crashed into the north tower of the World Trade center in Lower Manhattan. At first, everyone thought it was an accident, that a small plane had made a horrific mistake and hit the building unintentionally. But when the second plane hit the south tower 17 minutes later, it seemed as if everyone knew immediately that this was no accident; New York City was under attack (Strozier 2). Within an hour, American Airlines 77 had hit the Pentagon and United 93, a plane believed to be headed for Washington D.C., was grounded in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. The country entered a state of panic, audiences across the world glued to their televisions waiting for the next strike and hoping it wouldn't come. By 10:30 AM, both of the towers lay in crumpled piles on the foundations which once held them up and the national sense of panic was supplemented by an overwhelming feeling of loss – loss of life, loss of safety, and, most abstractly, loss of the national identity tied up in the power of the towers themselves.

The events of that day, in all their horror and devastation, instantly became a type of traumatic spectacle, aligned not only with a sense of awe and rapture, but with the movies themselves. Witnesses, survivors, and distant audiences all described the attacks as something out of Hollywood. For example, Henry, a man caught in Lower Manhattan that morning, describes the scene as something “like a movie. Like we were being chased by this amorous black cloud of like stuff [sic]. And you could see – I mean I kept turning back to look and you could see it was gaining. I couldn't run fast enough” (Strozier 9). The movies that day, as Norman Mailer so aptly put it, “came off the screen and chased us down the canyons of our city” (Strozier 126). The death and devastation was so horrific that people were unable to reconcile the reality before them with

their sense of reality and thus resorted to framing them within the movies, the one place they had seen disasters of this magnitude unfold. Watching the towers burn was aesthetically and emotionally enticing, as movies are, and people could not take their eyes off of them despite how horrific it was. As a result, the images of that day have remained burned in the minds of the witnesses, creating a lasting impression of the trauma that still impacts them today, over ten years later.

The classification of September 11 as a traumatic event is essential to its representation in the media and, later, in documentaries. From the German meaning “wound” and initially associated solely with physical destruction, trauma is defined as “the breakdown of the self, typically along a temporal axis which, as a result of experience that cannot be sufficiently processed or contained, generates a distorted sense of time and a discontinuous sense of self” (Prager 409). Yale sociologist Jeffrey Alexander expands on this definition, arguing that “[t]raumas occur [...] when individuals and groups *feel* they have been subjugated to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their consciousness, will mark their memories forever, and will change their culture in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (Bell 7). As Prager and Alexander explain, traumas revolve around the feeling of being violated wherein a piece of individual and cultural identity is forever tarnished by a particular occurrence. In the case of September 11, characterized by sociologist Neil Smelser as the “quintessential cultural trauma,” the incomprehensibility of the attacks, largely due to their sudden onset and massive scale, left the country doubting its safety, strength, and vulnerability, losses all associated with the definitions of trauma provided above (Bell 8). Furthermore, the very nature of the September 11 attacks categorize them as traumatic as the hijackings left physical wounds on American soil (the damage to the buildings), aligning them with even the most basic definition of trauma as a form of physical destruction.

What made September 11 different than previous traumas is that the whole world watched it happen in real time by virtue of television and the proliferation of media technology. Hundreds of cameras were trained on the World Trade Center that day, from media photographers recording images to be broadcast to the world to witnesses grabbing cameras from abandoned sidewalk shops in attempts to preserve that day, attempts largely driven by a helpless urge to do *something*. Ironically, it is through the prevalence of images created that day that the terrorist attack garnered its true traumatic impact. In a controversial statement about the towers, artist Damien Hirst argued that the attack was in fact devised visually, that it was “a kind of artwork in its own right,” the site of the New York skyline ensconced in smoke producing a twisted, enthralling feeling of aesthetic “beauty” (Engle 3). Though highly criticized as insensitive and deranged, this statement accurately encompasses the important role the visual media held in expanding the trauma of that day and ensuring that it would, as Alexander described in his aforementioned definition of trauma, “mark [the audience’s] memories forever” (Bell 7). This was not an attack on a few buildings in an isolated region of the United States; it was an attack on America as a whole that created an “instant national consensus that this was a trauma for everybody, for the nation” (Whitehead 234). As psychologist Elizabeth Carll says, terrorist disasters are a form of psychological warfare aimed specifically at creating this feeling of social trauma through a wide sense of unrest developed in audiences even without direct exposure to the event itself (Carll 2-3). In this way, September 11 was a trauma that was socially and technologically produced, largely through the media, and the collective memories that emerged from that day forward were primarily a result of the symbolization of its imagery, both in its initial media manifestations as well as its later re-workings by documentary filmmakers. It is to these representations that I turn now.

Part III: The Immediate Role of the Media

For most of the country, the attacks of September 11 “took place on TV” (Quay 131). It was the one of the first traumas of national significance to be recorded and viewed live, void of the clean camerawork and planned narration of a typical news broadcast. This is reflected in the less refined nature of the broadcasts early that morning that demonstrated an urgency and honesty that helped audiences feel as if they were truly there. Cameras were shaky, broadcasting was rushed (some stations left up football scores and stock market information initially due to the more pressing need to get the towers on screen), and commentary was genuine and unscripted. Perhaps the most notable example of the latter comes from ABC’s Peter Jennings, the anchor in charge of covering the events of that morning. Jennings, though a practiced and authoritative anchor, temporarily lost his confident presence, overwhelmed by the disaster, and became “the terrified observer unable to report what is right before his eyes” (Strozier 57). This is evident in his loss of words, his shaky voice, and, most prominently, his simple reaction of “Oh my God” to the collapse of the second tower (Strozier 59). The news anchors were just as shocked as their viewers; they, like the rest of the country, were witnessing a horror they could not comprehend, yet they were charged with delivering the information to their viewers and helping them to witness it too. Journalists, particularly in these situations, are often credited with creating the “first drafts of history,” a role that imbues them with the power to script the emerging narrative (Hoskins “Constructing” 305). This role is particularly important in an event like September 11 where there was no pre-existing frame for understanding, no reference for journalists to use to help them tell the story. As such it fell to those reporting that morning to create this “script” not only for that morning, but also for future incidents, a script that would develop significantly as the day progressed.

While the commentary of the news reporters and anchors was vital to the national understanding of the event, it was the live footage of the attacks that had a greater impact on the

audiences. This is evidenced by a research study conducted by David Domke, David Perlmutter and Meg Spratt that compared the reactions of audiences to news broadcasts with and without field footage. While both participants were consuming information visually, those who saw the direct footage were able to emotionally process them earlier than those who only heard about it through the verbal descriptions of the reporters (Domke 148). The researchers explained this result by saying that because humans respond to situations emotionally before mentally processing them, the immediacy of information offered by the image shortened the reaction time and allowed viewers to attain a more rapid understanding of the situation and thus create a stronger initial memory (Domke 148). Thus access to the images in the live footage, in addition to producing iconic symbols of the modern era, helped audiences to understand the event by understanding it visually rather than simply being told what happened.

Additionally, the immediacy of the imagery, in addition to creating the sudden shock that resulted in its consideration as a trauma, became a vital part of the development of strong memories of the day. In a study conducted by Evelyn Schaefer, researchers spoke with 38 participants 28 hours after the attacks and again, six months later. Their results found that those participants who viewed images of the attacks immediately (within an hour of its occurrence) had more elaborate memories and a stronger sense of connectedness to the attacks than those who were unable to see images until at least an hour after the first plane hit (Schaefer). Not only does this demonstrate that the television depictions had an impact on audiences, but it shows how important it was that the media *immediately* responded because these initial broadcasts were largely responsible creating stronger, more memorable impressions. They thus served an important social and historical role in the construction of the attacks as their immediacy resulted in a permanent mark on the American consciousness and created a sense of “being there” that offered comfort through information (Hoskins “Constructing” 299). One New York Times reporter comments on this significance,

saying that the images were terrifying to watch, yet the coverage was strangely reassuring because it existed with such immediacy, even when detailed information was scarce. Imagine how much worse the nightmare would have been if broadcasting had been destroyed. On a day of death, television was a lifeline to what was happening” (Zelizer, “Journalism” 5)

This comfort may largely be due to the repetitive nature of the information provided early broadcasts. As mentioned earlier, the initial reporting on the morning of September 11 was shaky, unsure, and reflected a sense of urgency. The anchors had very little knowledge of what had happened and, as a result, ended up repeating the few facts they did have as a way to reassure audiences that they were getting information, albeit notably redundant. Because of this void of knowledge, “photography...rose to fill the space of chaos and confusion that journalism was expected to render orderly” (Zelizer “Photography” 48). Images thus came to stand in for knowledge, a substitution that caused them to *become* the knowledge, underlying the fact that September 11 was visually constructed. The initial images of the Twin Towers burning became what Hoskins calls “flashframes of history,” key moments in history that are remembered via their visual representation. Because the Twin Towers were so familiar to people across America because of their already iconic status as symbols of American strength and commerce, the sight of them on fire with plumes of smoke billowing from their tops was disturbing to witnesses (both present and virtual). It is this image that is largely responsible for the visual trauma of the attacks as it took something so familiar and strong and made it something horrific and almost unrecognizable. This process, which defines the sensation of the uncanny, at least momentarily destroyed the part of American national identity wrapped up in the towers themselves and, thus, became traumatic viewing experiences for the audiences that scarred the collective visual memory. Additionally, the violence depicted by the hole in the towers, despite the lack of images of individual deaths, caused the viewers to react emotionally (a la the study by Domke, Perlmutter, and Spratt) and thus create a

memory that was not only cognitive, but emotional as well. Indeed one can hardly think back to September 11 without seeing these images as they have become so strongly associated with the memory of that day.

Other early images, such as the reactions of witnesses, the panic in the streets as people ran from the cloud of debris, and the self-reflexive images of witnesses photographing or filming the event helped, in these early moments, to connect audiences to the event as by humanizing (seeing people's emotions rather than simply burning architecture) and allowing viewers to imagine themselves in the shoes of their on-the-spot counterparts who were witnessing the event for them. Despite being seemingly aligned as witnesses, the difference between audiences and those who were there that day is worth noting. While audiences at home were "watching the movie...New Yorkers were in the play" (Strozier 53). The media's depiction of the events, though creating a sense of reality and presence, was not the same as being there. Although they did manage to carry over some of the emotional impact, television, in its nature, represents a controlled form of witnessing -- one that the viewer can walk away from at will, one that is narrated by a typically reassuring figure helping us to comprehend what we are seeing, and, most importantly, one that screens off death, keeping the horror isolated to the realm beyond the screen (Strozier 53). For audiences across the world, September 11 could be turned off, but for those who were in New York or Washington on that day, it was impossible to avoid.

As the day progressed, the television coverage of the attacks became more and more mediated, moving from the "mere sequence and the senseless progression of one thing after another" (a noted reaction to times of disconnection and chaos) to a calmer representation that explained the events more fully and attempted to make sense of them by framing them in broader historical contexts. Many images initially broadcast, particularly those of "jumpers" falling from the towers, were quickly labeled as disturbing, indecent, and likely to induce further visual trauma

and were thus pulled from the air (Engle 30). This process began rather quickly after the broadcasts first aired as ABC's network policy to never show people at the moment of their death came to dominate the media's treatments, especially since the networks were pooling their videos at the time (Strozier 54-55). Additionally, news anchors began to narrativize the events of the day, straying from mere repetition of facts into the realm of the creation of meaning. According to A. Broyard, "in emergencies we invent narratives we describe what is happening as if to confine the catastrophe" (Crossley 45). In the case of 9/11, these narratives were invented by the popular news media and would come to largely define contemporary understanding of what went on that day. Despite the switch from the mere presentation of information to its narrativization and the elimination of the more traumatic imagery, the initial footage of the World Trade Centers on fire remained an integral part of the media depictions, their constant repetition throughout the day becoming an important factor in the creation of broad collective memories.

Termed the "CNN Effect" by Hoskins, the repetition of images creates a sense of complete saturation wherein "vast numbers of people attend the same 'breaking story'" (Hoskins, "Constructing" 300). This repetition helps create a sense of societal importance by increasing not only the number of people who see the images, but the number of times each individual sees them, underlining their importance through the basic rhetorical premise that repetition creates emphasis. The more images audiences saw that day, the more they believed they understood what happened and that they were and continued to be a part of what was going on. As Ray Bradbury wrote in *Fahrenheit 451*, "Cram [the people] full of noncombustible data, choc them so damn full of 'facts' they feel stuffed, but absolutely brilliant with information. Then they'll feel they're thinking, they'll get a sense of motion without moving. And they'll be happy" (210). While derived from a work of fiction, this quote accurately encompasses the impact repetition had on audiences on September 11 -- the overwhelming presence and saturation of images provided people with apparent

gains in knowledge, causing the images to lose their concrete meaning and become abstract icons that stood in for the event itself (Dixon 24).

Stella Bruzzi, author of *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction*, has aligned the images from 9/11 with those of the Zapruder Film, Abraham Zapruder's home movie that unintentionally captured the equally traumatic assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Like the images of the towers, the Zapruder film was repeatedly fetishized and manipulated. It was raw, amateur footage, like that of many witnesses to 9/11, that came to represent a crucial moment in history, capturing it in ways words cannot and transporting audiences from across the country to that grassy knoll in Texas. "Zapruder," Bruzzi claims, "captures a public death and presents us with a personal viewing experience (a home movie) – as Errol Morris comments, 'We're there...it's happening before our eyes' " (17). Even the language of this description is significantly similar to that of the images of the World Trade Center; indeed one could easily imagine these words being spoken of 9/11 directly. Like the footage of September 11, the Zapruder film was repeated over and over, each time adding to the trauma of the event by making audiences relive it ad nauseum. The problem with images with this high level of iconicity, as Bruzzi point out, is their impact on the way audiences receive them after having seen them so many times before: "at issue is how we look at any image that is so familiar that we already know it intimately before we begin the process of re-viewing" (17). Because of their overwhelming repetition and prevalence in the creation of meaning surrounding their corresponding events, the images of JFK's assassination and the World Trade Center attack have become so present that they almost negate any new interpretations and understandings. The collective sense of familiarity with these images does, in this sense, render them useless as anything more than mere photographic icons, seemingly harmless substitutions for the horrific, incomprehensible memory of the event itself that nonetheless continue to produce the same traumatized reactions as original footage.

Part IV: Collective Memory and the Media

What became apparent almost immediately on September 11 is that it was a day that would never be forgotten. In addition to its permanent place in the minds of individuals, whether they were direct witnesses or television audiences, the events of 9/11 have been committed to a more permanent, omnipresent form of memory: video, a form that will last for many generations to come. In this section, I will discuss the formation of memories from the immediate and individual (flashbulb memories) to the more elaborate and communal (collective memories) and look specifically at how the media created said memories on and after September 11.

The most immediate type of memory created is the flashbulb memory, defined as “human memory that can be recalled very vividly and in great detail, as though reproduced directly from the original experience” (Hoskins “Flashbulb” 147). Deriving their name from the burning flashbulbs of early photography, these memories represent a sort of photographic image, a moment so immediately recognized as significant that its circumstances (from where a person was to what they were wearing to how they heard key pieces of news, etc.) were seemingly frozen in time (Hoskins, “Collective” 3). Numerous theorists have argued that, in order for flashbulb memories to be created, there must exist elements of both surprise and threat, resulting in what Brown and Kulik have termed the “Now Print” effect in which a person takes a “mental photograph” of the event, spurred by feelings of shock and misalignment that make an event stand out as abnormal (Brown 63). While the importance of these factors is often contested, the existence of flashbulb memories is not. Ulric Neisser, a critic of Brown and Kulik’s “Now Print” theory, argues that the creation of flashbulb memories is more dependent on a collision of narratives: “flashbulbs recall an occasion when two narratives that we ordinarily keep separate – the course of history and the course of our own life – were momentarily put into alignment” (72). It is this sense that moments are not only historically significant, but also individually life-changing that causes them to be permanently

branded in our minds. In the case of September 11, both Brown and Kulik and Neisser's theories can be used to explain the proliferation of flashbulb memories: it was sudden (surprise element), violent (threat to safety), and nationally significant (historical alignment) and, therefore, it is not surprising that nearly everyone who witnessed the event, be it in person or on TV, had some form of lasting impression of it. The process and characteristics of flashbulb memories are not unlike that of the recognition of an event as traumatic. As described in Section II, trauma exists when an event is unexpected, disturbing, and distressing, all qualities described above as pertaining to flashbulb memories. This parallel is key as it shows how, in the exact moment that the attacks were being recognized as traumatic, they were being permanently etched into memory and, thus, the result of this process of remembrance is indistinguishably linked to 9/11's classification as a trauma.

This association was not created solely on an individual level, but rather existed on the same cultural level as the media representations of it. Despite the seemingly individual nature of flashbulb memories, the fact that the images of the attacks were broadcast to such large audiences meant that these memories were created across wide ranges of people, helping to form what Hoskins calls a "global memory place" by forging a mass audience of people who, though sitting alone with their eyes glued to the television, were all aware of the fact that the rest of the country was watching along with them ("Flashbulb" 148-149). In addition to the media imagery, the almost immediate emergence of digital archives made trauma accessible to a broad audience, creating what Neiger, Meyers and Zandberg term "joint memories," or aggregations of memories accessible to people who were not there to witness it themselves (106). Because of the existence of the internet, "stories [could] now become part of an evolving patchwork of public memory" in which both still and moving images were publically displayed, able to be viewed and replayed on demand by anyone with an internet connection (Jarvis 798). Numerous websites almost instantaneously emerged asking people to post their memories of the event in an online "public diary."

WhereWereYou.org provides a perfect example of this. Described as a “memory project,” this site aimed to provide a “resource for subsequent historical reflection – a resource facilitated by technological capabilities unavailable at the occurrence of earlier magnitudinous events” (Jarvis 795). The site provided an opportunity for “ordinary people” to give their input, to describe where they were and what they were doing on the day of 9/11 all in the name of creating a communal sense of belonging and a truly collective vision of the past. PBS later created a video equivalent called “9/11 Video Quilt” in which it asked people to record videos of themselves looking back on September 11 and answering questions about its impact on the world (“America”). Sifting through “the many 9/11’s preserved in [these] archive[s], any illusion of the event’s possession of a pure, singular, essence is thereby punctured” (Jarvis 808). September 11 was not an isolated event experienced by a small number of people, but rather a highly integrated event that involved participants from across the globe and it was through these online archives, in addition to the relentless media coverage, that the individual memories turned into social, communal discourses: collective memories.

The term collective memory was first coined in 1802 by Austrian writer Hugo Van Hofmannsthal, but it wasn’t until the middle of the 20th century that it began gaining precedence in the field of memory studies (Neiger 2). In 1950, Maurice Halbwachs, the French sociologist now considered the father of collective memory, published *La mémoire collective (On Collective Memory)*, a book that outlined the ways in which humans remember on a societal level. “It is in society,” Halbwachs argues, “that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories” (38). He suggests that memories do not exist solely in the minds of individuals, but rather that these memories are ordered, understood, and represented by collective societal frameworks, representations that become closely tied to notions of national identity and mass culture (Halbwachs 40). Recent memories, Halbwachs argues, are then

stronger because the social frameworks in which they were created are still dominant and thus their re-presentation occurs naturally and without transformation (52). As history progresses farther and farther from an original event, said event does not fade from memory, but rather is reconstructed in the social frameworks of the present, altering its meaning and representation so as to suit more contemporary notions of culture.

In this way, memory, and indeed history itself, is constructed according to collective social lines, reflecting the choices of the instigators of cultural creation. In the case of modern society, the image – particularly the moving image – serves as both an instigator of remembrance as well as a memory in and of itself. The photographic image, be it still or moving, possesses a seemingly immovable power to transcend generations, providing an everlasting visual glimpse into history. As Kennedy argues, however, the photographic image is not as reliable as it may seem as, like its written or spoken counterpart, “it does not function, simply, as a mirror of the real or a repository of memory, but shifts meaning in different contexts and in relation to different image banks of association” (325). When transmitted from context to context, the meaning of images can be drastically altered, rendering its capacity as memory relatively impotent if given inadequate context. The image’s potential as an instigator of cultural and historical creation (and, thus, collective memory) is to be the focus of the remainder of this essay.

Few events have made the provocative nature of the image more apparent than September 11. The aforementioned media coverage of the event demonstrated exactly how Halbwachs's collective memories are created; not only did it make an image of, and thus access to, 9/11 readily available for a mass audience, imbuing each and every viewer with a sense of communal witnessing, but it determined in the moment how that day was to be remembered through its specific and selective creation of a narrative memory. Susan Sontag points to the misleading nature of the idea of collective memory in saying that it “is not a remembering but a stipulating: that *this* is

important, and this is the story about how it happened, with the picture that locks every story in our mind” (Hoskins “Collective” 1). This statement directly reflects the media treatment of 9/11: the reporters, anchors, and studio heads chose *what* they filmed, showed, and discussed, creating a *particular* version of history as stipulated by the collective frameworks in which they operated. For example, following ABC’s policy against showing death, the events of 9/11 were primarily seen by the general public as a destruction of property, with the human stories only emerging later, an angle specifically demarcated by the cultural values and perceptions of early 21st Century America that wants to avoid death. Had it occurred in a different time or place, its portrayal may have been different and thus the emerging collective memory would be composed of different images. This concept has been described by Neiger, Meyers, and Zandberg as “media memory,” a specific formation of memory outlined and defined media selection. This media memory relies on four basic premises: (1) collective memory is a socio-political construct (following Halbwachs’s concept of social frameworks), (2) the construction of memory is continuous, (3) memories are functional, and (4) memories are based in a concretized narration (Neiger 4-5). When combined, these traits attribute media memory with a broad cultural importance as a continuous creator of functional narration as defined by societal rules, taking the construction of memory out of the hands of the academic and political elites and placing it in the hands of the rising “mass culture and mass politics, and the development of new communication technologies” (Neiger 10). Andrew Hoskins echoes Neiger, Meyers, and Zandberg’s theories, claiming a recent shift from the broader category of collective memory to the specific construction of a mediated memory that is “seen as artificial and manipulated, but paradoxically more reliable” (“Constructing” 299). The image, thus, through its mediation and manipulation by news media sources, creates the circumstances of collective memory by outlining the narrative with which particular events, in this case 9/11, are to be remembered and told to the future.

In addition to the initial creation of collective memory images, the media plays a crucial role in the continuous reconstruction of 9/11. Hoskins argues that collective memory lies in “the ongoing collaborative re-casting of ‘the past’ [...] in the present,” thus expanding the process of memorialization from its origin to its updated adaptations (Schwalbe 2). September 11 is continuously evoked in the terms of the ever-changing present as the media replays, reenacts, and reconstructs the events and footage of that day as a means to create and supplement changing collective identities. For example, in 2011, the 10th anniversary of the attacks, most news stations aired tributes to 9/11, many featuring not only what had happened (i.e. the treatment immediately after the attack), but how it had impacted the both individuals and the country as a whole in the time since 2001. These new renditions offered a view of “the world after September 11,” a glimpse at how much that day had truly changed the country. In doing so, they took the tragedy and used it as a benchmark in the progression of our current state as a specific moment in time from which improvements and fallbacks are weighed (i.e. “This is the worst tragedy since 9/11” or “This is the most unity we’ve seen since 9/11”). Furthermore, the status of 9/11 as an archetype has established its role as a yardstick against which emerging events are measured, the “script” for how to handle events of this nature both in the United States and abroad. It has become the guidelines that were absent in 2001, the “how to” guide for both the media and the public in the event of another similar trauma.

These reconstructions are not only important because of their use in the development of a continuous collective memory, but because they are indicators of where the power lies at any given time. Michel Foucault, French philosopher and social theorist, argues that the perspective created around a particular historical event is characterized by what he calls “episteme” or intellectual rules that decide what constitutes “valid” knowledge in a given time (*Power* 197). Meaning, in this way, is constructed through historically specific discourses of truth as determined by who, at the time,

holds socio-cultural power. Those with the power, he argues, have the right to control the truth, thus creating a triangular, self-feeding cycle between the three ideas (power, right, and truth) (Foucault, “Two” 91). In other words, those in power determine what is considered truth and, in doing so, construct this truth to reinforce their power. The media operate under similar ideas, categorizing events of the past in the discourse of the present power, especially as corporatization of major media networks increases.

Foucault’s ideas matter in terms of September 11 because of the event’s global political significance. When the media reproduces the trauma, it does so not only in an effort to memorialize (to be discussed in detail in Section V), but to reproduce and stabilize the right of the current power. For example, when Osama Bin Laden was killed in 2011, the media treated the event in such a way so as to reinforce the strength of the United States and instill confidence in President Obama’s leadership, portraying it as a true victory that in some ways provided a sense of closure to the September 11 attacks. These recreations are an important part of the collective recovery from trauma. By re-classifying the past within the current social frameworks, the media places a distance between 9/11 and the present, creating a “that was then, this is now” mentality that aids in recovery.

The media treatment of 9/11 almost directly coordinates to the six stages of what Jenny Edkins outlines in her essay “Remembering Rationality: Trauma Time and Politics” as “trauma time,” the series of stages an individual goes through on the path to recovery from a traumatic event (107). Initially, Edkins says, the traumatic event is all consuming, taking over day-to-day life and altering personal habits. This is readily apparent in the media as images of the 9/11 attacks dominated the news for the first 24-48 hours after the first plane hit, with little else being shown or discussed besides the what, when, where, who, why, and hows of the attacks. The next stage is a move to offering help, as seen in the media by calls for donations to aid the victims and their families. After that come expressions of grief, shock, and often numbness. In the media, this stage

manifested itself in the sadness of the anchors' voices, the near-immediate memorialization of victims, and the change in the treatment of the disaster from an attack on buildings to an attack on people, underlined by the constantly updated loss-of-life totals. After these initial expressions, people begin coming together in public gatherings, gatherings that not only was the media present at, but that they presented on their networks as a way for not only those in New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania to participate in, but for the entire country and, in some cases, world to become a part of. In this way, the media facilitated virtual public gatherings that fulfilled this stage of Bell's trauma time. After the gatherings, shrines are produced to start commemorating the trauma. While these shrines appeared all over the country, particularly in the area around Ground Zero, the media produced a different kind of shrine -- virtual shrines -- composed of photographs, videos, and statements from witnesses both on the scenes and across the country (e.g. WhereWereYou.org and PBS's Video Quilt Project).

The final stage of Edkins's trauma time is an openness to discuss, as represented by the media's reconstructions of the event in new and different light. While the 9/11 media certainly played a significant role in this last portion, the true discussion started with the emergence of numerous documentary films focused on the event, some produced by news networks themselves as commemorative pieces aired on anniversaries, others produced by independent filmmakers looking for the truth or seeking to honor the event in their own way. Over the decade after 9/11, these documentaries came to serve an important role in contemporary constructions of that day, both by situating it within a long tradition of "truth production" associated with documentary films and by creating more complex treatments that represented a second, more complete version of the history the news networks initially drafted. It is to these documentaries that I now turn my attention, looking at where they fit in the development of the medium, what they sought to accomplish, and,

most importantly, how they used the media-produced collective memories of the trauma of September 11 to historicize the event, be it in a variety of ways.

Part V: The Turn Towards Documentary

Nearly all of the documentaries about September 11 have one important thing in common: they all took the traumatic images recorded and presented by the media, online archives, and other sources of preservation (e.g. individual collections) and used them to create their own version of history on screen. In this way, these documentaries act as “transitional medium[s]: [they] carry fragments of social reality from one place or one group or one time to another and, in transporting them, translate them from a local dialect to a lingua franca,” or vernacular language (Kahana). Documentaries, in other words, take the events of 9/11 and place them in a variety of contexts so as to extract a variety of uses from them, using the vernacular of a given place or time (i.e. Halbwachs’s cultural frameworks) to construct their meaning. These films then come to stand in for our memories, “blending vivid visual images with sounds, words and feelings” into unified productions taken as records of reality, composed of fragments that permit them to “move to and fro” creating collective flashbacks that operate within the context of the overall purpose of the film (Waterson 53). The imagery of 9/11 is thus reconstructed within the documentary frame.

In her book *How Social Trauma Affects How We Write: Post 9/11 Rhetorical Theory and Composition Pedagogy*, Robin Murphy describes five ways in which September 11 impacted the rhetoric. While she was speaking specifically of writing, I believe her classifications can easily be used to describe the documentary form as well. Murphy says that, in response to 9/11, five categories of rhetoric emerged: (1) the rhetoric of anger, (2) the rhetoric of patriotism, (3) the rhetoric of dissent, (4) the rhetoric of memorial, and (5) the rhetoric of myth (Murphy 74-75). Anger manifested itself in displays of patriotism aimed at the other or outsider (typically Muslims in this case) for daring to try to destroy America (Murphy 82). With regard to patriotism, not only did the displays of the American flag increase, but the meaning of the word “hero” changed to include the common man (firefighters, office workers, etc. who helped save lives on that day) (Murphy 83).

Dissent, a category Murphy specifically associates with documentary films like *Fahrenheit 9/11* (Moore, 2004) and *9/11 Press for Truth* (Nowosielski, 2006), included differing opinions, civil disobedience, nonviolent protest or resistance, as well as the encouragement of social activism (75). The rhetoric of memorial was, because of their role “as places for examining and producing individual and collective narratives,” became important to the re-development of collective identity and memory (Murphy 76). Finally, the rhetoric of myth (a concept identified as a misguided collective belief) is largely tied up in the iconicity of the Twin Towers themselves that has, as Murphy explains, “changed from one of power and commerce to one of patriotism and memorial” (89). Each of these rhetorical representations of 9/11 contributes to the overall collective memory established surrounding it as they demonstrate the various ways that society was able to compartmentalize the trauma so as to make sense of it in an understandable context.

The rhetorical variations Murphy describes inform the various documentary treatments that emerged in the years following September 11. Though the division is slightly different, most of the variations Murphy describes can be seen in four categories that the documentary films can broadly be divided into: (1) films seeking to historicize to the event by producing a historically accurate record to be preserved for future generations (myth), (2) films looking to criticize or question the official version of the story (mainly conspiracy films) and challenge the government and media treatment of it (dissent), (3) films acting as memorials to the tragedy, its victims, and those whose lives were forever changed on that day (memorial and patriotism), and (4) films aimed at documenting and facilitating individual and collective healing.¹ Though films exist that fall outside of these four categorizations, or some that overlap more than one of them, breaking them down this way makes their contributions to the historical record more readily apparent and helps to identify

¹ I chose to discuss the representations of healing rather than anger as the latter tended to appear more in the media and government’s justifications of the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars than in documentary film while the former was readily apparent in said film.

the different treatments of imagery as it applies to these films. Within each category, key films have been identified and described so as to provide examples of how the imagery of the trauma has been used to fulfill each categorical goal as well as to produce an overall sense of how the event has been represented in documentary films.

(1) Providing a Historical Record

Hans Richer once said that “[t]he camera created a reservoir of human observation in the simplest possible way” (Renov 22). As film technology has improved over the last century, this statement has become more and more true. Cameras, as theorists from Vertov to Bazin all concede, have a technologically unmatched power for observation, whether these observations are informed by the decisions of the filmmaker or are actually true replications of reality. When significant traumatic events like September 11 occur, this power for observation turns into an urge for filmmakers, both professional and amateur, to use said power to produce a visual record of history, one attainable by future generations as a historical document with the same veracity as a classroom textbook. In the case of 9/11, this record is one of the most extensive in history because video technology had reached a point where hundreds of people in New York had access to video cameras that day that were immediately aimed them at the World Trade Center, creating a virtual mosaic of visual images that recorded the trauma from nearly every angle possible. This footage has been assembled into a variety of documentaries that emerged soon after the attack, documentaries that serve as a visual record of the events that took place that day, particularly in Lower Manhattan (the main location focused on in this analysis), and use the media-produced images to help create a sense of a collective, documented history.

Four movies in particular stand out, three of which were released within the first year after the attack: *9/11* (Hanlon et. al, 2002), *11'09"11* (Cahine, et. al. 2002), *7 Days in September*

(Rosenbaum, 2002), and *102 Minutes that Changed America* (Skundrick and Rittenmeyer, 2008).

While all four of these films serve as a form of documentary record, each offers a unique perspective. The first, *9/11*, follows French filmmakers Jules and Gédéon Naudet as, by chance, they fall into the center of the events. The second, *11'09''01*, also released as *September 11*, is a compilation of 11 different films produced by directors from countries around the world documenting what September 11 was like in their countries. While some of these pieces are fictional narratives, this film can nonetheless be broadly classified as documentary because, in addition to three pieces being produced in true documentary form, it documents the perspectives of people around the world, offering a similar type of historical record despite its dramatization. The third film, *7 Days in September*, takes on the format of many of the later memorialization films, compiling footage from over 100 different cameras along with interviews with survivors and witnesses as a way to create a visual map of the events of 9/11 as it was experienced across the city. The final film to be discussed here, *102 Minutes that Changed America*, is the most basic and unmediated version of the historical record. Void of any interviews or commentary, *102 Minutes* traces that day using only eyewitness footage edited in chronological order, creating a version of the story narrated only by the images we see on screen and the in-the-moment comments of the witnesses recording them. It is the images seen in these films that created and reinforced the immediate collective memories of the event as they are the ones that are the most aligned with those produced by the media – images of the towers burning, of people running down the streets, of a dust cloud consuming Lower Manhattan. The two films that provided a different perspective, *9/11* and *11'09''01*, were received more cautiously by audiences due to their controversial content (the first providing images seen as “too close” to the actual event and the second offering perspectives that were often critical of the U.S. rather than simply empathetic), but nonetheless provide vital information to the complete historical record.

Just six months after September 11, in March of 2002, the first major documentary was released on TV that provided a true, start-to-finish record of the events of that day. This film will be the one most focused on as it provides some of the most traumatic images of September 11 captured that day that provide an alternative, more thorough version of its history. This film was *9/11*, a joint effort of James Hanlon, Rob Klug, and Gédéon and Jules Naudet, a film that offered a perspective few were privy to that day – the view from inside the towers. The content is composed of footage recorded by two French filmmakers, Gédéon and Jules Naudet, who were in New York City prior to September 11 making a documentary following rookie fireman Tony Benetato as he matured from a new recruit to a full-fledged fireman of Engine 7 Ladder 1 in Lower Manhattan. The point of the original film was to show not only what it was like being a fireman in New York, but to portray one man's journey from a boy to a man. What the filmmakers ended up with, however, was the most unique, and in many ways most chilling footage of September 11 ever recorded, a combination of the in-the-moment footage and later interviews with its subjects as they explain their perceptions of the day.

The film begins with Jules and Gédéon explaining the intention and production of their original film. It shows the footage they had recorded in the summer of 2001 of firemen cooking each other dinner, eating together as a family, harassing each other, and being called out on the occasional job. These were the shots that were intended to compose their final film, shots disappointingly lacking in any kind of fires. As Jules said at the end of this segment in *9/11*, by the beginning of September, all they really had footage for was a firehouse cooking show as no major fires, or at least those that would make a compelling film, had happened that summer. One important thing did happen though: the Naudet brothers themselves, despite a complete lack of official training, became a part of the firehouse, a position that was vital to what was to happen next and the footage the brothers were able to record.

The film's segment on the September 11 attacks begins as nearly all others do: scenes of a calm, content New York narrated by the morning news reports describing the beautiful weather and the rather uneventful happenings (a mayoral primary was the most exciting event of the day). The film then shifts to the footage from Jules's camera following Ladder 1 as it was called away on a gas leak call. As the men are investigating a grate in the street, the sound of a low-flying plane is heard and Jules, with the filmmaker's instinct to follow the action, turned his camera up, capturing the only footage recorded of the first plane hitting the north tower of the World Trade Center. The firemen are heard in the background screaming "Holy shit!" over and over and then, out of nowhere, the relatively mundane gas leak footage turns into a live action film as the firemen immediately head to the scene.

Jules's shot of the first plane hitting the towers is one of those that have achieved the iconic status of the traumatic images of that day. Unlike the rest of the attack on the towers, Jules's camera was the only one to capture that first moment and thus any and all repetition of it can be traced back to this single source. This shot becomes essential, not only as a turning point in the film, but as a turning point in real life for the firemen, the city, and, in many ways, the rest of the world. In interview footage from *9/11*, one firefighter says "right then and there I knew that this was going to be the worst day as a firefighter." As the rest of the film unfolds, we are able to see first hand how true this statement really was.

The remainder of the film cycles between three main sources of footage: (1) Jules's camera which he took with him to the World Trade Center (a position only allowed to him because of the close relationship he had developed with the Ladder and, in particular, Chief Joseph Pfeifer), (2) Gédéon's camera which, as he had stayed back at the firehouse that morning, follows the rookie Tony as he is left to operate phones and eventually includes many of the archetypal street scenes as the filmmaker wandered out into the city, and (3) interview footage with the Naudet brothers and

the firemen as they look back on the events of that day. This is fairly typical for the structure of September 11 documentaries, which generally use a combination of archive footage from the day-of and interviews with witnesses and survivors after the fact to classify the event with the standard History Channel *modus operandi*. What makes *9/11* stand out, however, is the unique and scarring view it offers from Jules's camera inside the tower itself. While this position offers a perspective that fills out the memory of the event, there was a high level of concern over the images being "too close" to the trauma. William Schmidt, a public prosecutor in Bergen County, NJ, outlines this concern in a statement saying that there are "potentially negative psychological effects that graphic details of death and destruction [...] on the thousands of individuals who have been traumatized by the events of 11 September," specifically citing a fear among audiences of seeing a loved one "exploding" on camera or falling dead on screen (Dixon 10-11). While these effects have the potential to extend the trauma itself, the footage captured by the French filmmakers is nonetheless compelling, drawing audiences into Lower Manhattan more so than any of the other records created and fills in gaps in the collective memories.

The Naudet brother's film, above all others, gives audiences this true sense of being there, of experiencing the events as if they were happening directly to them. Jules's camera follows Ladder 1, the first to arrive on the scene, into the lobby of the north tower where Chief Pfeifer sets up a command center. Immediately upon walking into the room, Jules's (in his later interview) says he saw people running through the lobby burning, a sight that, though the description is scarring enough, is never shown as Jules refused to film it, believing it was something "no one should see," helping prevent the manifestation of William Schmidt's fears. The combination, however, of the footage showing him turning the camera to face a wall and the simultaneous description of the burn victims manages, nonetheless, to create the picture for us, as if the absence of the image itself

allows the narration to spur our imagination and fill in the gaps for us. In this way, *9/11* spares us no detail, creating a true sense of being there, footage or not.

The film then alternates between Jules's lobby footage and that from Gédéon's camera back at the firehouse. Here we see Tony, in complete shock and disbelief, angrily cursing at the images he is seeing on TV, images he was looking at again and again, as Gédéon says, "making sure it was real." By showing Tony watching the same footage viewers across the country were watching that morning and classifying it as seemingly unreal, *9/11* visually aligns his character with the viewers as a common audience, not only adding to the sense of being a part of what was happening but also enhancing the sense that these memories were truly collective memories, shared by those who were there as well as those who were not. This point is reinforced again as Gédéon, having left the firehouse to head towards the towers to get a better view, comments that within two blocks of leaving, he encountered people from all over the world all staring in awe: "the whole world was there...and they were all looking at the same thing...and reacting the same way." While he is talking specifically about people within lower Manhattan, the point rings true of audiences across the globe. Because of the ability for people worldwide to "tune in" live to the attack, the whole world *was* there, be it vicariously, and thus was able to participate at least emotionally.

As the footage returns time and again to Jules's camera inside the tower, audiences are let in on parts of history they would not have been witness to otherwise -- the confusion within the tower as the firemen tried to imagine what it looked like upstairs, many underestimating the level of horror; the fear in the firemen's eyes as the second tower was hit, inducing a new level of panic and terror; the recorded sounds of bodies hitting the pavement as so-called "jumpers" made their final descent; the writing of "Tower 1" on the lobby desk to help firemen who, after having to report to command centers in both towers, were becoming confused as to which one they were in; and, perhaps most lasting, images of what it looked like inside the lobby as the south tower collapsed

into itself. These were images not recorded by anyone else but Jules, moments typically represented by their external counterpart (in this case Gédéon's camera) of shots of the towers destruction accompanied by endless screams and the sounds of radio reports explaining what was happening. For Jules and the firemen inside, all they knew was what they could see (as opposed to looking on from the outside) and, after the south tower fell, audiences are able to witness how truly little this was.

The collapse of the south tower serves as the second major turning point in *9/11*, as it does in the general narrative of the day. At this point, the tone and manner of the shots visually change. Gédéon's street footage shifts from witnesses looking up in shock and horror, mouths agape, to mass panic with people literally running for their lives to escape the quickly approaching cloud of dust and debris. Jules's footage shifts to utter darkness and silence, punctured only by the coughs of firemen and the shouts to verify that everyone was okay. In this segment, Jules's presence turns from a passive witness of history to an active part of the rescue mission as his camera takes on the *actual* responsibility of sight, providing the only light in the lobby to help the firemen regain their bearings. At this point, Jules stops "filming" and begins simply carrying his camera at his side, pointing in towards any fireman that asks for light. Despite a lack of intentionality, his camera is still rolling and is thus still able to capture the images from inside that fill in the media story.

Gédéon, at this point realizing his brother was likely still in the tower, heads towards Ground Zero to look for him. As he approached and was refused access to the scene, however, he realized there was nothing he could really do, being neither a fireman nor rescue worker, and his instinct turned from attempted rescuer back to filmmaker (a reversal of Jules's transformation). As he was moving towards the towers, nearly everyone else was frantically trying to escape them, Chief Pfeifer and Jules having found an accessible route out of the lobby that allowed a flood of trapped firefighters and civilians to escape. As this group reached the streets, the north tower began

its collapse and the footage recorded by Jules and Gédéon began to take on a similar look: frantic running followed by a collapse on the ground, camera resting on its side recording the onslaught of the debris cloud, its lens becoming more and more impeded by pieces of the tower. This moment of the two cameras in alignment on the ground represents the third major turning point in the film, the moment after which silence falls, “dead silence” as one of them ironically terms it, and the panic turns into desperation. Gédéon outlines these turning points perfectly, recalling how he walked the same street three times that day (from the towers to the firehouse): the first time, after the towers were hit, they were full of people, all with their necks craned looking at the plumes of smoke; the second time, after the collapse of the first tower, they were full of panic as people ran away as fast as they could, often screaming and colliding into each other; and the third time, after the collapse of the second tower, they were virtually empty, covered in a chilling white dust that echoed the utter silence.

The scenes of the empty, debris-covered streets continues for a few minutes until the filmmakers returned to the firehouse, at which point we are able to see the relief on the firemen’s faces as every member of their brigade walked through the door. We are also shown scenes of Gédéon and Jules’s reunion, a moment filled with emotions as the two brothers confirm, for the first time, that the other one was still alive. Showing this footage, in addition to it being a necessary part of the film’s commitment to trace the entire day, serves a specific rhetorical purpose as it emotionally draws the audience into the relief of knowing the victim’s friends and family survived. Even Tony, whose was long unaccounted for (the only one in Ladder 1 who didn’t immediately show up) wanders in some ten hours later, making their brigade one of the few who didn’t lose a single man that day. The filmmakers make his arrival particularly powerful as, until he shows back up in the firehouse that evening, no post-9/11 interview footage of Tony is used, leaving the audiences to question whether or not the rookie truly did survive. This tactic, though emotionally

manipulative, further adds to the sensation of being there as the audience is forced to wonder, fear, and begin to mourn Tony's absence alongside the firemen, enhancing the connection to the characters on screen and transforming the film from a factual historical record into an emotional one.

The last segment of the film looks at the aftermath of the attacks as the firemen return to Ground Zero to begin searching for survivors, start to come to terms with the massive losses (particularly of their friends within the department) and begin attending funerals for the many who fell that day. This section demonstrates the continuous nature of September 11, the ways in which it will never truly be over, and begins to show the process of memorializing. As the department attempts to move on, one fireman describes the arrival of a new set of rookies, saying that they would "never know what it was like to be a fireman before 9/11. They'll never really know what we lost that day. All we can do is tell stories and show them the tape." While the fireman who said this was speaking specifically about Engine 7 Ladder 1 and the impact 9/11 had on them as individuals and a unit, his statement in many ways encompasses two of the main ideas in the collective memories established around that day: the first, that September 11 was a day that changed everything and the second, that the only way to try to help others understand what happened is to "tell stories and show them the tape," to reenact and reconstruct that day time and time again as a way to impart its true meaning. This is the very function that documentary records fulfill -- to take the past and make it available to the future so as to help others understand. This notion is echoed by the closing text, appearing just after the dedication of the film to the victims of 9/11, in which the filmmakers leave audiences with a call to action that gives their film a specific purpose: "Let us never forget." As the most intimate visual record of that day, *9/11* assures that, as long as it exists, this will not happen. The unique perspective *9/11* provides its audiences is important to the construction of the collective memories as it completes the story, making the event not only

something that was observed, experienced from the outside, or recounted after-the-fact, but something that was truly lived and can, because of this film, be re-experienced as a means of providing proof.

While *9/11* functioned as a near-direct historical record composed in standard documentary form (archive/witness footage intermixed with interviews), the next major documentary released about September 11 followed a very different pattern more similar to the “creative treatment of actuality” Grierson originally attributed to films like *Nanook of the North*. Released in September of 2002, one year after the attacks, *11'09''01* is a compilation of eleven very unique films each offering the filmmakers’ perspectives on the event from their own countries, demonstrating the fact that while “the memory of trauma is on the one hand a shared memory, when it connects a traumatized community,” it is, on the other hand, “a divided memory {...} not only the divided memory of perpetrators and victims, but also [of] the differences, divisions, and stratifications of the memory of trauma in a local and global scale” (Halas 319). Described by producer Alain Brigand as a “mosaic” of memories, this format followed that of the 1967 film *Far From Vietnam* in which numerous filmmakers, largely French, were asked to offer their perspective on the Vietnam War. In the case of *11'09''01*, the filmmakers were given a specific budget and “complete freedom of expression” and were asked to make a film exactly eleven minutes, nine seconds, and one frame in length, a designation corresponding to the European notation of the date of the attacks. The finished pieces were then compiled into one unified film that is, as was said of its 1967 counterpart, an “odd mix of solipsism, pretentiousness, belligerence, and attempts at real honesty” (French). Eight of the eleven pieces are narrativized reconstructions of the day, while the remaining three take on structures more typically associated with documentary. While the narrative pieces can stand as representations of the memories of 9/11, they will not be discussed here as they are not explicitly documentary in form.

The most critical of these pieces is India's Mira Nair's quasi-documentary looking at the plight of an Indian woman in New York whose son, missing after 9/11, was immediately wanted in connection with the attacks, despite not only his innocence, but his heroism and dedication that cost him his life. Though not as outwardly critical as some of the narrative segments, Nair uses interviews with family members and low-budget recreations to paint a picture of the post-9/11 investigations as faulty and, in some ways, completely insulting, placing the mother of a deceased victim in an unnecessary defensive position that produced individual trauma on top of the already mounting social trauma. This piece did not merely offer a record of what happened that day, but provided a record of the feelings surrounding that day as they were experienced in other parts of the world and, as such, represent a valid piece in the historical record.

Ken Loach's piece accomplishes a similar goal, emphasizing Halbwachs's idea of collective frameworks for memory by explaining that, though the United States and indeed much of the world, immediately associate the date "September 11" with the attacks on the U.S., to those in Chile, September 11 has an entirely different meaning. This piece, most stylistically similar to a typical documentary, is composed primarily of archival footage, traces the history of the Chilean struggle for control through the eyes of a Chilean man labeled a terrorist and arrested following Pinochet's rise to power. The man, identified as Paolo at the very end, writes a letter to the loved ones of 9/11 victims, aligning himself with them through a shared sense of loss on that day. His September 11 though, took place in 1973 when President Allende was murdered as a part of a U.S.-supported coup d'état aiming to put Pinochet into power. He labels that day as one that "destroyed [their] lives forever" as Pinochet's rule came with war, death, and torture resulting in the murder of over 30,000 innocent civilians and, in Paolo's case, a loss of identity as, having been exiled from his country, can never return to his homeland. This segment extrapolates the typical understandings of the meaning behind the phrase "September 11" and places them within another cultural framework,

demonstrating Halbwachs's idea that memory is socially constructed and, as a collective, represents the culture in which it was created. The segment concludes with a call for unity and common memory, as Paolo ends his letter with a simple request: "This is the 27th anniversary of our 11th of September and the 1st anniversary of yours. We will remember you. I hope you will remember us." By paralleling the two traumas (along with the traumatic images associated with each of them), this segment functions as a unifying piece that at once aligns the United States and Chile in their devastation while also demonstrating how, though the event was decisively traumatic, 9/11 was not the worst tragedy to overtake the world. In this way, Loach is simultaneously recognizing the trauma while historicizing it as one in a series of devastations rather than the sole defining one.

The third documentary segment is the least comparable to the standard History Channel style *modus operandi*, yet it is easily the most chilling, making the most use of the traumatic images from 9/11. The piece, one of the few to directly use and reference the footage from that day, comes from Mexico's Alejandro González Iñárritu, a filmmaker who recreated the event through visual absence, quite contradictory to the prevailing portrayals. A majority of the eleven minutes is spent in utter darkness, pierced only by audio including news reports both in English and Spanish, planes coming in, people screaming and running, trapped victims calling their loved ones, and, in many cases, witness narrations of the events as they happened (i.e. "Oh my god the next building has been hit" or "everyone is jumping. It's crazy."). The only images we see the entire time are brief flashes of people jumping from the buildings. As the segment progresses, these flashes become more frequent and longer, but are still always divided by segments of darkness. In this sense, it almost acts as a reverse documentary, avoiding the typical visual representations of the attacks and forcing audiences to rely on their ears to recreate what was happening. Furthermore, this segment operates in direct opposition to the media treatment, showing *only* images of people just before the moment of their death, images the media deemed *too* traumatic and pulled in an effort to be more sensitive

and humanized. What this accomplishes is the creation of a counter-memory, one that supplements the existing collective memories with pieces we were either denied access to (the footage of the jumpers) or largely ignored, choosing the visuals over the audio. In this way, Iñárritu's segment fills in what was missing and creates a more well-rounded, complete record of the visual history, one that is, in its utter absence of imagery, largely haunting. His evocation of the most traumatic pieces of the visual record forces audiences to relive the heart-stopping moments they experienced initially and, in doing so, takes advantage of the audiences' emotional reactions to help preserve the feeling of trauma surrounding 9/11.

What *11'09''01* as a whole demonstrates is the ways in which the collective memories of September 11 include not only those created within the United States, but those created worldwide. In some cases, the memories are composed of similar material and are treated with similar narrative and structural strategies as those produced by Americans, but in some cases, these memories run counter to the dominant U.S. version, simultaneously creating a feeling of international tension and a sense that the communal nature of the memories created that morning is truly uninhibited. In this way, it becomes an international record of the event that expands upon the numerous American renditions and places the event in a broader idea of history.

The third documentary produced as a record, released in the same month as *11'09''11*, was *7 Days in September*, a film that created an archetypal treatment of the attacks that would be repeated time and time again in later memorial films. The film follows the events of September from the morning of September 11th until the evening of the 17th, skipping very briefly at the end to six months afterwards. In a New York Times review of the film, poignantly titled "Cameras Were Rolling the Day Time Stopped," film critic A.O. Scott discussed the production of this film, saying that "In some ways, 'Seven Days' measures the city's return since [September 11] to a bruised normalcy." This comment accurately encapsulates the overall arc of the film, beginning with the

panic and destruction of the attacks and working its way through the city's initial attempts at recovery.

The film is composed of home videos from over 100 people, some professional filmmakers and some simply citizens with a video camera. It begins with images of the towers themselves recorded *before* the attacks (meant to establish a sense of what was) before jumping into the narration of that day. The segment portraying the attacks is composed of footage similar to what was seen in the media that morning: images of the towers burning both from the streets and from the safety of interiors (offices, homes, stores, etc.), shots of the reactions of witnesses on the streets (often portraying a sort of sad, confused, terrified awe, necks craned to take it all in), and scenes of people running from the cloud of debris that chased them through the city. These shots are accompanied by the interview commentary of the filmers themselves, many of which are just as telling as the images. One in particular, from Peter DiPilato, a student recording the event, stands out as a verbalization of a downfall of collective memory. DiPilato describes the horror he experienced when he saw, through a camera, a person jump, after which he immediately stopped filming, saying he “didn’t want any other deaths on [his] hands.” This statement, almost lost amidst the chaos of screams, explosions, and commentary, is one of the most important of the film as it assigns a collective responsibility to the act of filming, an act previously seen as a harmless, passive way to witness an event. In doing so, it convicts all of the audience of being partially responsible as they watch these things happen on screen, removing a sense of their innocence and making the event even more traumatic than it already was (the guilt factor enhancing the feelings of distress).

But, alas, despite this pointed comment by Mr. DiPilato, the film continues in the same fashion, showing the streets of New York from the moment of the initial crash to the zombie-like sense of calm that followed the final tower's collapse. What this film does that few others do is, like *9/11* following the firemen's return to the station, it keeps the cameras turned on during the

immediate aftermath as onlookers reconvene in the streets, trying to understand what just happened, an effort one filmmaker describes as fruitless: “You can’t wrap your mind around what you’re looking at, so you just film it.” This allows the audiences to connect further with the direct witnesses as they were experiencing the same confusion and helplessness as those on screen.

This initial segment creates one of the most complete recreations of what New York saw that day, a view that was not as private as that seen in *9/11* and thus was more accessible to the audience as these were the images that they too, either in person or through their TV screen, saw that morning. In this way, the section comes to stand as a concrete, “finalized” version of the panicked, shaky segments initially offered up by the media. It is as if the collective memory has been revised and produced in a “final draft” that, though bearing enough resemblances to the media’s “first draft” to become its substitute, has the added benefit of hindsight and interview mediation to contextualize and narrativize what we see on screen.

From there, the film follows the next six days as the city reemerges from its hideaways and tries to make sense of the disaster, to, as A.O. Scott said, return to a “bruised normalcy.” This includes scenes of people gathered at “Point Thank You” to cheer on the rescue workers as they went to and from Ground Zero, of candlelight vigils at Union Square, and of a communal chalking project seeking to help people get out their emotions. The film also includes two major pieces of the story not often shown. The first shows the scares of additional bombs (one in the Empire State Building) and collapsing buildings that happened in the days after the attack, scares previously believe to be irrational, but, as one witness comments in the film, “after you’ve seen the Twin Towers collapse, nothing is impossible.” The other shows the rescue effort that began immediately after the attack, starting with people on the streets encouraging blood donations and accumulating massive collections of food and goods to help feed the rescue workers, the use of a small cruise ship (appropriately titled “Spirit of New York”) to provide a place for volunteers to eat a hot meal and

sleep for a few hours. Though the incredible spirit of the New Yorkers is often referred to, *7 Days in September* lays it out clearly before the viewers eyes, making these after effects as much a part of the memory as the attack itself, in many ways enhancing the feelings of a collective unity by showing that same sense of unity on screen.

The final film to be analyzed here within the category of “historical record” is the one that is perhaps the most straightforward: *102 Minutes that Changed America*. Though the film was not released until 2008, it provides the most simple, unmediated version of the attacks, one that might be expected to have preceded the commentary-filled versions mentioned above. The film is, like *7 Days in September*, composed of video footage taken from hundreds of cameras across New York but unlike *7 Days*, the footage is left alone, unnarrated, void of any contextualization, moderation, or commentary and guided only by a timeline style editing that serves to create a continuous string of images documenting the attack from beginning to end. This approach allows the images, audio, and reactions captured that day to truly speak for themselves, thus creating their own meaning instead of being used as tools to create formalized meaning. In *102 Minutes*, the history *is* what we see on screen rather than the history being framed or supplemented by what we see. Though the construction of the attack is similar to that seen in *7 Days in September* and *9/11*, the use of real time and the absence of interviews or other forms of commentary recorded after the fact construct a film that draws audiences into the moment, making them relive every single moment as if they were there. This denies them the respite and comfort of interview footage, footage that temporarily removes them from the situation and helps to situate the events in their overall narrative. This film forces audiences to become a part of it, to commit every moment to memory with only the comfort of the screen itself. In editing terms, viewing this film is like watching the rushes instead of the typical highlight reel.

While each of the previous three films offer a valid version of historical memory, *102 Minutes* lets history speak for itself and, in the commentary heard by those recording the event lie some of the most honest and jarring moments that tear the memory from a broad, abstract concept and return it, though still in a collective sense, to the people in effect humanizing it. Jonathan Kahana, in his book *Intelligence Work*, argues for the importance of the participation of the amateur (in this case the witnesses who, out of an urge to do something, picked up their cameras) in documentary photography, saying that it is only through their participation that “documentation by the camera of our age and our complex society [can] be intimate, pervasive, and adequate” (Kahana 47-48). The construction of *102 Minutes* is nothing if not intimate, taking viewers into the homes of the cameramen, hearing their raw, unrehearsed reactions, and seeing their family members (in many cases children) react to the unnatural event along with them in their natural environments. Though the use of editing removes the film from any true characterization as “natural,” it is still constructed largely along the lines of Vertov’s “life caught unawares” theory as its only source of mediation is the selection of the clips to be edited. Over the 102 minutes of run time, the sense of reality this film provides invites audiences to truly become a part of a collective memory, from the initial darkness as the reports began flooding in to the final mass exodus of the city, keeping time all along with a time stamp that appears in the lower left-hand corner with every significant turn of events.

These four films represent a vital area of documentary film: films intended to produce a thorough and precise record of major historical events as a way to commit them to permanent memory through the emotional resonance of the images established on the morning of the attacks. While each did so in its own way, all four function as visual replicas of September 11, not only in Manhattan, but around the world. As Andre Bazin, famed film theorist claims,

only a photographic lens can give us the kind of image of the object that is capable of satisfying the deep need man has to substitute for it something more than a mere

approximation, a kind of decal or transfer. The Photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it. No matter how fuzzy, distorted, or discolored, no matter how lacking in documentary value an image may be, it shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it *is* the model. (Renov 22-23)

These films are the model, not only in the sense of the word used here, but also as the model for the collective memory of that day, the model for future documentary productions, and, ultimately, the model for the documentary treatment of traumatic events (the “script” similar to that the news media developed in the days following the attacks). As the imaged equivalent to textbooks, these films offer the official visual version of September 11, a version still alive today in the American memory.

(2) Challenging the Official Story

The second major category of documentaries produced are those films that intended to challenge the official story established by the United States government, the media, and the aforementioned documentary films. Like Murphy’s “rhetoric of dissent,” these films sought to evoke the traumatic images as a way to question the provided narrative, deconstructing certain aspects and encouraging disbelief in the truth as produced by those in charge (in essence, a challenge to the cycle of power, right, and truth Foucault proposed). This category is most widely composed of conspiracy films that suggest that there is more to the story and that, in many cases, the U.S. government may itself have been involved in the attacks. The rest of the category includes films that, while not explicitly proposing alternative versions or implicating the U.S. government, do question or criticize the administration’s treatment of the attacks, particularly looking at the aftermath and the United States entry into the Middle East. As the name implies, films in this

category reconstruct the original memory of the event (both the images that compose the memory and the content of the memory itself) as a way to challenge their original meaning and, in doing so, expand the collective memory to include different, more critical perspectives.

Since 2001, there have been numerous conspiratorial documentaries produced about September 11, many of them following the same *modus operandi* (MO) intended to create doubt in the audience. Sara Quay argues that conspiracy films use four main arguments to unseat the dominant narrative: (1) countering the obvious account, (2) arguing that the true intentions of the account are nefarious, (3) tying together seemingly unrelated events, and (4) claiming that the truth is a “well guarded secret,” a categorization that almost always urges its recovery (Quay). This MO is best demonstrated by Dylan Avery’s film *Loose Change*, a film re-edited and released four times, each offering slightly different perspectives, revised to include new facts and discard old ones proven wrong. *Loose Change: Final Cut* (Avery, 2007), the third of the four installments, is seen as the most accurate and complete rendition and thus it will be the one analyzed here. The film begins with footage of large lines of people protesting 9/11, claiming that the truth was being withheld and demanding new investigations. This footage is seen in many conspiracy films and is often used as it is in *Loose Change* to create a new sense of the collective, taking it away from the streets of September 11 and the living rooms of those all watching TV and placing it in the picket lines, urging audiences to identify with *these* masses instead. The film then takes a brief leap backward, to 9/11/01, showing an abbreviated version of the previously established record, with new footage from that day and testimonials exposing the FBI’s refusal to investigate further.

The film is then broken down into segments, each titled with a simple phrase (often one word) clearly outlining what it was discussing. In this way, Avery constructed it like a novel or scholarly essay, with clear segments meant to build off of each other in the accumulation of an argument and lend an air of authority. Each section features footage of the attacks, often repeated

or slowed down to emphasize certain points within the imagery itself (the absence of a visible plane at the Pentagon, for example, or the “secondary explosions” in the Twin Towers), in addition to still photographs, witness testimony contradicting the official story, and a voiceover guiding audiences along, asking the questions they deem the footage requires be asked. *Loose Change* systematically goes through many of the key claims used by conspiracy theorists to poke holes in the official story. These claims include the lack of military interceptions of the hijacked airplanes (standard operating procedure), the lack of remnants at both the Pentagon and the crash site in Shanksville, the rumors of secondary explosions within the Twin Towers coming from places far below the impact zone, the nature of the towers collapse (typically argued to be indisputably a controlled demolition), and, finally, the lack of a thorough investigative report following the attacks. While similar claims are outlined in other conspiracy films, including *9/11 In Plane Site* (Lewis, 2005), *Hijacking Catastrophe* (Earp and Jhally, 2004), and *Zero: An Investigation into 9/11* (Fracassi and Tre, 2008), they are never as methodically pursued as in Avery’s version.

The end of *Loose Change: Final Cut* represents the culmination of what Avery, and other conspiracy theorists, were attempting to accomplish. After repeating and manipulating the video footage of the attacks and using witness interviews, both techniques intended to make the film read like a credible History Channel documentary, the film turns towards the creation of a collective confusion. The bulk of the film raises more questions than it answers, leaving audiences in a state of perplexity, curiosity, and, in the hopes of the filmmakers, resolve to pursue the truth. In the end, the film concretizes this sense of uncertainty by asking “Who will pay? Will you? Will your children?” By turning the aftermath back on the audience, the filmmakers challenge them to take an active role in constructing a new history of the event by creating a feeling of fear at what will happen if they lay still. The film then invokes the constitution, in particular placing emphasis on the “We the people” opening, using the collective “we” in similar ways to Lorentz in *The River*, to

reinforce a society-wide need for change. The final scene leaves audiences in utter darkness with the last words “what’s happening?” – an open-ended conclusion that begs the audiences to find out not only for the sake of creating a more accurate history, but to help settle the dust of confusion and be able to accurately and conclusively answer that very question.

Another tactic employed by conspiracy filmmakers is the use of images that tie the event to other significant moments in history, typically aligning its representation with those who have been cast as the enemy. This is seen in the opening quote of *Hijacking Catastrophe* that reads, “The people can always be brought to the bidding of their leaders. That’s easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked and denounce the peacemakers for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same in any country.” As the quote appears, audiences are expected to reluctantly identify with it, recognizing in themselves and their leaders the processes it describes. The source of the quote then appears -- Nazi Reich Marshall Hermann Goering speaking at the Nuremberg Trials – and in that moment, the confidence of the audience is immediately shattered allowing the film that follows to rebuild it, not in the prevailing memories of the collective, but in a new memory that seeks to shake the grounds of the Bush administration and splinter its image in the public perception. Here, even without a single frame of video, the film has reconstructed history by linking the treatment of September 11 with the ideas of the Nazis, the archetypal “bad guys” in contemporary history.

Hijacking Catastrophe makes use of another technique often seen in conspiracy films: the use of expert or insider interviews. Echoing the survivor and witness interviews used in the documentary records, conspiracy filmmakers use interviews to establish a credibility associated with witness accounts. These filmmakers typically pick their interview subjects carefully so as to represent a broad spectrum of perspectives and thus lend the maximum amount of believability. In the case of *Hijacking Catastrophe*, these interviews included a Nobel Prize winner, members of the

U.S. Air Force, university professors, pop culture icons, a former Chief UN Weapons Inspector, and a Pentagon whistleblower. Combined, these individuals are representative of government, education, military, and entertainment, a range seen as all encompassing and thus useful as a tool to draw in wider audiences and expand the realm of the collective. In this way, they are manipulating the reliability of witnessing in ways that typically question the video memory while offering up an alternative as explained by a wide range of well-informed professionals.

Additionally, many conspiracy films use charts, animations, or text to emphasize induce questioning in the audience. *Zero: An Investigation into 9/11* uses all three of these techniques.

Dario Fo, a Nobel Prize winner used as a scientific expert in this film, is shot standing in front of a whiteboard on which various charts of the attacks are drawn throughout the film, each drawing attention to different holes in the story. The film also uses animations as ways to create alternative views of the event, namely an animation showing one of the planes hitting the World Trade Center from the perspective of the pilot as the plane got closer and closer to the side of the building.

Though not particularly revealing, this animation presents an alternative view of the attacks symbolic of the alternative view the film as a whole provides. Finally, the film often flashes key words and phrases on black screens as they are being said, explicitly drawing emphasis to them not only with their existence, but also with their ostentatious, repetitive, and active presence interrupting the visual flow of the film. All three of the categories function as stand-ins when visual imagery is deemed inadequate. By using them, filmmakers are turning away from the visual record because it is often argued as definitive evidence, and are looking to reconstruct 9/11 in a new, virtual space of *new* visuals and *new* associations.

These techniques align with the utilization of documentary films as a means to provide an alternative view of history that seeks its own truth instead of merely recreating the truth established by the powers at be. These films are aimed at what Foucault classifies as an “insurrection of

subjugated knowledges,” an action he argues is vital to the production of accurate truths (Foucault 81). As he defines them, subjugated knowledges are “historical contents that have been buried and disguised in a functionalist coherence or formal systemization [...] which criticism [...] has been able to reveal” (81-82). In this sense, conspiracy films are simply looking to unearth the truths hidden from the production of the dominant narrative (i.e. the documentary records) and bring them to light in a way that invigorates a new version of history that is more accurate and indicative of our current society. Despite the release of numerous books and even films made specifically to counter the claims made by conspiracy theorists (e.g. *The 9/11 Conspiracies: Fact or Fiction*, a History Channel piece released in 2007 that goes through each conspiracy theory in a manner as methodical as Avery’s *Loose Change*), these films continue to be made, recasting the infamous imagery from September 11 in newly challenging contexts.

Aside from those focusing on conspiracies, a number of films have been made that serve to question not only the specific events of 9/11, but also their use as justification for what was to come. *In Their Own Words* (Nowosielski, 2006), a documentary composed of footage cut from *9/11 Press for Truth* (Nowosielski, 2006), questions the lack of responsibility taken within the U.S. government that left no agencies accountable for the intelligence failures that led to the tragedy. While pieces of this film use footage from the day of the attacks, this segment is composed primarily of footage of wives of victims, footage that invokes the memories of 9/11 through their relationship to the loss that occurred on that day. This is demonstrative of how, in an effort to question or even simply evoke the memories and histories of September 11, it is not always even necessary to use direct footage because any connection to the events of that day will immediately evoke them in the minds of the audiences. This is a tactic that comes to be of the utmost importance in the films that criticized both the U.S. entry into the Middle East, namely *No End in Sight*

(Ferguson, 2007), as well as the administration's treatment of the tragedy, most famously produced in Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* (Moore, 2004).

Moore's film is easily the most famous documentary related to September 11. Produced just after Moore's Oscar win for best documentary (*Bowling for Columbine*, 2002), the film was released to critical acclaim at the Cannes Film Festival, taking home the Palme D'or for that year.

Though the film does not so much argue for the falsity of the narration of the attacks, it looks critically at the political circumstances surrounding them with the "explicit goals of unmasking [Bush's] supposed crimes and removing him from office" (Zagorin 2). The film uses a combination of archive footage (primarily footage of President Bush), interviews, and scenes of Moore as a cultural activist (most prominently seen in the segment towards the end of the film where the filmmaker approaches members of congress on the streets outside the capitol building and pushes them to enlist their own children in the military). The film, and Moore himself, has been harshly criticized as over-editorialized propaganda created to support Moore's radical, anti-Bush views rather than question the circumstances from a more fair, unbiased standpoint. A large part of the criticism looks down on Moore's informal narration that challenges the viewer in ways more direct and, in many cases, sarcastic way than do the images. Many of his comments poke fun at the administration and certain details of the aftermath (e.g. the invention of "skyscraper chutes" as an attempt at avoiding this devastation in the future), casting Bush as an incompetent fool and producing what has been called a "discourse in sobriety" (Bernstein 186). This discourse alternates between these more comedic moments and moments of somber realization (e.g. Lila Lipscomb's reconciliation with the death of her son, a soldier who died serving his country in the Middle East), creating a dichotomy often deemed inappropriate. By setting up these contradictory sides to the film, Moore's production creates an alternative view of the story in which the audience is asked to choose between the dominant narration, as created by Bush's apparently baboonish administration,

and Moore's version, a more critical yet seemingly more open version. "*Fahrenheit 9/11* asks us to choose our reality," Moore scholar Matthew Bernstein says, "[and] that's what makes it radical. It also asks us to remember. That's what makes it dangerous" (Bernstein 220). While there appears to be no danger in remembering, an action often in fact associated with safety and prevention, what Bernstein is referring to here is the placement of this request within the alternative version of history Moore is advocating. In other words, there is no danger in remembering itself, but when the call for memory is situated in a highly critical discourse intended to derail the administration and, thus, our country's sense of stability, it becomes potentially harmful to the current social order.

Moore's film, despite being catapulted to a level of fame not afforded to other conspiracy films, still utilizes many of the same invocations of the established collective memory as its less successful counterparts. The film's treatment of the attacks themselves is similar to many others, starting in complete darkness with the sounds of the 9/11 attacks doing the work of recreation rather than the images. When the images do appear, the sounds fade away into music and, instead of showing the towers on fire or the hole in the Pentagon, Moore relies solely on images of the witnesses looking up in horror and desperately running through the streets. This treatment achieves two rhetorical goals. First, by choosing to only show images of the on-scene witnesses, Moore aligns the audience with them, creating a sense of communal witnessing that is vital to Moore's overall call to collective action. Second, by leaving out all images of the attacks themselves, Moore directly invokes the pre-existing memories of the event, asking the audiences to do the visual memory work themselves and, in doing so, underlining the collective nature of these memories as it is assumed that any contemporary audience will be able to fill in the gaps themselves.

The strategy that sets this film apart is the addition of one important element: Moore's personal character. Despite being attacked as insensitive and misleading, the inclusion of Moore's voice (invoking notions of his overall character as understood through his already established fame)

serves an important rhetorical function. Moore paints himself as the “everyman,” a down-to-earth average civilian with which audiences, particularly those in the lower and middle classes, can relate. In doing so, he enhances the audiences’ ability to connect with the film and creates a collective based in not belonging to the political and social elite. This locates his call to action in a different sense of the collective than many of the dominant narratives, encouraging audiences in this “less influential” class to find their voice or, in this case, find Moore’s voice and follow it towards a new construction of history.

While Moore’s film, along with the others identified in this category, is often ignored or devalued as an unfair criticism seeking to dishonor the memories of September 11, it serves an important function of the documentary film since “historical documentary not only tells us about the past, but asks us to do something about it as well” (Rabinowitz 132). These films ask audiences to use memory as a political act to remake history into a new, more inclusive narrative. In doing so, they become an important part of the collective memory of the event itself as they provide alternative versions that both help to expand the overall perception of history and represent, in and of themselves, an important part of the progression of history by serving as temporal and theoretical markers in the progression of the collective through the process of recovery.

(3) Memorializing the Fallen

One of the most immediate reactions to 9/11 was the urge to memorialize the event, starting with candlelight vigils that Tuesday evening and spanning through the present with the building of memorials, the ritual of ceremonies, and, to be discussed here, the production of films honoring the fallen. Strozier labels these attempts at memorialization as “orgies of remembrance,” saying that it is “only in such public displays can victims feel fully human, though the irony of such ritualization borders on the tragic. It was the event itself that interrupted the flow of their lives and caused such

suffering, but it is the event itself that must be honored for the victim to remain whole” (224). By this argument, this type of attempt at memory occupies an important piece of the process of recovering from trauma as it allows an opportunity to regain the feelings of unity and completeness that the trauma disrupted.

Many of the documentaries produced to aid in this progression were released by major television channels on anniversaries of the events. Some focused on the breakdown of the event itself in ways similar to the historical record films previously discussed (e.g. A&E’s *Anatomy of September 11*), some focused specifically on the heroes and victims (e.g. PBS’s *Heroes of Ground Zero* and Discovery Channels *Portraits of Grief*), and some provided general overviews of the tragedy, touching on the history itself, stories of victims and survivors, and the American spirit that emerged out of the devastation. This last category is the most prominent, creating of an overall attempt to honor 9/11 in all its forms, with nearly every major news and documentary channel producing its own version of this general “commemoration” film. These films are all composed in a similar manner, using a combination of the traumatic footage from 9/11 and interviews with survivors and their loved ones to honor the heroism and bravery of those who perished in the attacks. Unlike the films that merely sought to produce a record, these films took the process one step further to measure the emotional and psychological effects of the attacks after 2001 in more holistic, poetic ways and evoke the memories of the trauma in ways to help refocus it on the memory of those who perished rather than the memory of the trauma itself. Each of the films offers a unique take on the process of memorialization that come together to compose a broad portrait of the loss felt on that day.

The overall structure of these films follow a similar pattern – tracing the attacks from the initial collision through to the recovery in a way that, though similar to *102 Minutes*, provides additional commentary and context that situates the films within the context of ritual

commemoration instead of mere factual presentation. The film that most explicitly follows this format is the second episode of National Geographic's series *Inside 9/11*. Named "Zero Hour," this 2005 film goes through the attacks minute-by-minute, tracing exactly what happened on each of the four planes (as informed by radio and telephone communication from the air) as they reach their tragic ends. The film explicitly names some of the victims aboard the planes and uses images of their faces, calling the audience's attention to the specific loss of life associated with an event typically considered in the abstract. One image in particular stands out in this context. A young fireman, eyes wide with fear and determination, heads up the stairs as the rest of those in the towers head down, his eyes catching the lens of a cameraman as he passes. While the fireman is never named nor do we find out if he survived or perished, this image humanizes the loss as, in one of the few images that stares directly into the face of a supposed victim, we see the true fear of death that dominated the city that day. In this way, *Inside 9/11* not only offers an unspoken memorial to that individual, but uses it as a symbol for all of the victims and adds the images of haunting fear to the repertoire of the collective memory.

This film also does as many others did in avoiding images of death, instead using footage of the victims' faces on the missing posters that, as the film said, "wallpapered the city." The closest "Zero Hour" gets to any real imagery of death is the inclusion of footage of the jumpers as they fall from the top of the towers. However, despite its inclusion, this footage is treated in a specific way, the images frozen while the jumpers are still in midair rather than allowing them to finish their descent. In this way, this freezing permanently preserves these individuals in mid-flight, between life and death, a notion representative of the overall purpose of memorialization to give the dead a place amongst the living.

Another memorialization film, *Inside the Twin Towers* (Dale, 2006), reconstructs the event in a similar chronological fashion, making rare use of dramatic recreations to simulate what it was

like in the tower that day. Though not as poignant as the footage obtained by the Naudet brothers, this perspective attempts to draw audiences into the towers themselves, adding a true sense of participation to the already established collective notion of memory. This film also uses the more typical archive footage and survivor interviews to show and explain what happened that day, often saving certain interviews for the end of the film to create the question in audiences' minds over whether or not those individuals survived (a strategy seen earlier in *9/11* with the delayed use of Tony Benetato's interview footage). This further dramatizes the event and adds to the emotional memory of that day, allowing audiences to not only witness what happened, but to feel what it was like to have a loved one unaccounted for. This treatment enhances the audience's personal connection to the attacks, augmenting not only the collective memory, but the individual ones as well by relocating the event on the individual level as a representation of the broader collective (as opposed to only using communal language and memories).

One particularly striking commemoration film, *Saint of 9/11* (Holsten, 2006), functions as a direct individual memorialization, honoring Father Mychal Judge, a beloved priest known for years of dedicated service to the New York Fire Department. This film serves as a sort of extended eulogy of the priest, tracing his life back to his Irish roots, through his commitment to the church, his coming to terms with his homosexuality, and his service to FDNY, service that ultimately resulted in his death (the first official casualty of 9/11). The film is composed in the standard documentary style, with a combination of archival footage and interviews, but instead of simply documenting what happened, these interviews served a new purpose: to honor a man whose passing left a void in the hearts of New Yorkers. This void is captured by not only the individual testaments to his character, but through the visual footage as well, the most notable of which is his funeral sequence that comes towards the end of the film. The combination of recorded eulogies (given by Hillary Clinton), scenes of a packed church, angelic music, and close-up images of Judge's white

fireman's hat (white due to his role as Chaplain) and candles lit on the altar paint a picture of a memorial service attended by the world. This effect is created by the footage of the massive number of people in attendance as well as its revelation to the broader collective audience of the film, audiences that become part of this service and in doing so become a direct part of the memorialization itself. The focus on an individual victim personalizes the tragedy, removing it from the abstract realm of collective ritual and reconstructing it in the world of one individual, an individual who, despite his impact on a broader community, was nonetheless just one person. In effect, this personalized the process of commemoration and in that way, though symbolic of the overall process of celebrating the dead, made it more attainable and understandable to audiences.

Three of the memorialization documentaries personalize it in a different way, following the events of that day through the perspectives of specific people or groups. The first, *America Remembers* (CNN, 2004), traces the day through the footsteps of the staff at CNN, featuring interviews with reporters, anchors, and producers interspersed with the network's footage from the day. The film jumps back and forth between New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania showing the media images audiences saw on September 11 as well as telling the story behind them, offering the correspondent's views not only as members of the media, but as witnesses to the attacks. This structure provided a sort of "behind the scenes" look at the construction of the images that have come to dominate the collective memory, letting audiences in on the "secret" behind new production while simultaneously commemorating the victims in the honest words of the anchors and reporters, people typically seen as composed and controlled and associated with fact rather than emotion. The interviews with these individuals offer a more honest and poetic perspective than their on-air alter-egos, describing the days after as "an odd cocktail of fear and rumor and vulnerability" and the smell of the aftermath as "jet fuel mixed with burning steel mixed with human tragedy." These descriptions enhance the narrative side of memory production by using

phrases typically restricted to the fictional realm, their poetic nature too seemingly contrived for the reality of documentary. This is important because it expands the notion of reality and the truth of memory to include the more poetic impressions the attacks left on witnesses. These impressions, like the aforementioned development of conspiracy theories, are an important piece of the overall memory of 9/11 as they represent expansions of history into the realm of human inquisition and creativity.

The second and third manifestations of personalized memorialization follow political figures identified as important to September 11: Mayor Rudolph Giuliani (featured in HBO's *In Memoriam: NYC 9/11/01* [HBO, 2002]) and President George W. Bush (seen in the aptly titled National Geographic film *George W. Bush: The 9/11 Interview* [Schnall, 2011]). These two films track the progression of the day through the eyes of these two political figures, showing their version of that day from start to finish. The purpose of these depictions is readily transparent: the films aim to reduce criticism of these figures by humanizing their experience. In other words, they use footage showing the event as they experienced it as a means to show that it impacted them in ways very similar to the general population, removing them from their pedestal and relocating them among the people. This is accomplished in number of ways, most prominently by showing footage of the two men in positions identical to the other witnesses. Giuliani is shown on the streets of New York, running from Ground Zero alongside the rest of the city. Bush is shown watching the attacks on television, first in a classroom in Florida and later on an unstable broadcast barely reaching Air Force One. These two images function to add the country's leaders to its sense of the collective unity and, having done so, can use that perspective to create memorial films that would naturally attract national attention due to the high profile of their dominant characters.

The films use this prominence as the backbone on which the bulk of their content, similar to that of *Inside 9/11*, rests. Both use a variety of footage of the attacks to recreate a broad virtual

record of the event similar to those previously discussed. This effect, specifically seen in *In Memoriam*, is aptly termed “the Rashomon effect,” making reference to the 1950 film from Akira Kurosawa that shows the same event in its entirety from three different perspectives (Ellis 335). Throughout *In Memoriam*, this multiplicity effect becomes explicitly tied to memorialization as the last segment of the film depicts a seemingly endless series of funerals that directly invites the audience to attend these commemorations. This segment begins with the loading of two firemen, their bodies wrapped in the American flag, into the back of adjacent ambulances in a procession lined by silent comrades ritualistically honoring the two heroes in a moment of collective silence.

The function of these two films in commemorating 9/11 is most readily evident in their annual appearance on the anniversary of that day, each time being replayed (often numerous times a day) as a form of ritual in and of itself, a way for the world to re-experience the events and re-mourn the losses. Rabinowitz labels looking in this way as a historical act, quoting French filmmaker Claude Lanzmann: “For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably” (Rabinowitz 137). These commemorations exist to keep the memory of the fallen alive and prevent 9/11 from disappearing into the past. As Paul Connerton, theorist behind *How Societies Remember*, says that a remembering reminds communities of their identity as represented by a master narrative as conveyed and sustained by ritual performance (Connerton 70). In this way, the annual replay of commemorative documentaries serve to keep the identity fostered on September 11 alive while reconstructing it in the future with the words and images originally associated with the memory. These rituals, in effect, become symbolic practices aimed at bringing and holding people together in “un-ordinary” times, continuously validating the frameworks of the collective.

(4) Recovering from the Trauma

The final category of films is the most hopeful. This category is composed of films that try to move past the trauma and start the process of healing, guiding the audience from loss to renewal. Jenny Edkins argues that what is traumatic about an event like September 11 is not the death itself, but the “survival in the face of particularly brutal or incomprehensible deaths” (99). This being the case, any attempts at recovering from the trauma necessitated a focus on the living and thus the documentary reconstructions of 9/11 that focused on the healing process of those who did *not* perish fulfill an important role in helping audiences to process the trauma itself and move towards individual and collective recovery.

As discussed in Section II, the symbolization of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and the sudden onset of the attacks created an immediate, collective sense of national trauma as their significance to the representation of American political and commercial power was under unanticipated siege. This collective trauma, in addition to the individual traumas of that day (witnessing death, losing loved ones, being physically injured, and barely surviving), required therapeutic treatment in order for it to be processed. These films act as that treatment, behaving like a visual version of Freud’s talking cure, a key tenant of psychoanalysis that claims that the only way to cope with traumatic situations is to dig deep and create a narrative from the fragmented remains of the original trauma. Zelizer supports this theory, saying that the visual record, in her case specifically still photographs but here expanded to include moving images as well, serves as a tool for “mobilizing a collective’s post-traumatic response” by dislodging people from their original shock and allowing them to continuously look at the images until recovery, facilitated by the reconstruction of the imagery over time, can finally occur (Zelizer “Photography” 49). One theory claims that bearing witness in and of itself offers a means to heal from social trauma (Waterson 62). These theories suggests that all films about September 11 that give audiences a chance to act as witness, regardless of their aim, can be used as therapeutic tools for a collective recovery, “an act of

witnessing that enables people to take responsibility for what they see...[moving] individuals from the personal act of seeing to the adoption of a public stance in which they become part of a collective working through trauma together” (Zelizer “Photography” 52).

This version of therapy includes all acts of visual participation, but there is a class of films that stands out further, guiding collective healing through narratives of specific individuals or communities who, having lost loved ones in the 9/11 attacks, are attempting to heal themselves and the people around them. These films look to move beyond September 11 and show how the narratives of those who suffered that day have been rewritten in the years since. One example of this comes from New York Times in the form of a virtual archive. In the aftermath of the attacks, the Times created a collected obituary, gathering information from the family and friends of each of the survivors and compiling them into a complete collection of short written pieces honoring the lives of the fallen, a collection aptly titled “Portraits of Grief.” Several years later, they returned to some of the loved ones originally interviewed and created short documentaries (three to four minutes long) looking at their individual paths to recovery and the ways in which their lives have changed since 9/11 (“Portraits”). While these pieces do take the time to demonstrate the loss felt by these individuals (one in particular ends with a man who, having been married for over five decades, now lives alone, having lost his son in 9/11 and his wife shortly thereafter), each of them leaves viewers with a note of hope, showing how, despite the tragedy that tore their lives apart, these people were able to pull themselves together and find ways of healing. For some, this healing was found in their children or an audience with President Obama while for others, it came in the form of reforming their grief into something productive: one man dedicated a memorial garden in his son’s name, a husband and wife created a foundation (also in their son’s name) to raise money to help support the families of the National Guard, and a widow, Alissa Torres produced a graphic novel documenting the five years after the death of her husband.

While “Portraits Redrawn” gives us a glimpse into the individual process of healing, it is the longer documentaries that more extensively draw audiences into the process, asking them to become witnesses for their stories while providing a model for collective healing. Three of these films in particular stand out as being particularly powerful: *From the Ground Up* (Gage and Gage, 2011), *Beyond Belief* (Murphy, 2007), and *Rebirth* (Whitaker 2011). Even their titles alone suggest a process of recovery, but it is in their content that the true beauty of this process is extrapolated.

The shortest of the three, *From the Ground Up* follows the lives of five widows of New York City Firemen after the attacks. The film is composed in a way similar to the short pieces of “Portraits Redrawn,” starting at first with the women providing portraits of their husbands and the grief they faced immediately after their deaths. Then, using interview footage and shots of the women going about their daily lives, the film turns away from mourning and towards the memorialization associated with regrowth. Each of the five women took the loss of their husbands as a call to action to have a positive impact on the world, channeling their emotional energy into productivity. One woman becomes a tour guide, telling the stories of 9/11 to visitors of New York as a way to keep her husband’s memory (particularly his heroism) alive. Another built a library as a way to show her children the good in the world and the importance of giving back. A third widow took the time after 9/11 to go on a humanitarian trip to Rwanda, connecting with a village of over 4000 widows in a shared journey towards healing. A fourth built two group homes for autistic children (herself having two autistic sons) in a way to honor her husband’s dedication to them. And finally, the fifth woman created the Tunnel to Tower Run retracing her husband’s footsteps on 9/11.

This segment holds particular power for the discussion of collective healing as, though the run was created in honor of her husband specifically, thousands of volunteers turn out every year and 646 firemen line the streets outside of the tunnel, 343 of them holding American flags (one for each victim) that creates a tight sense of community and family. This bond is not only shared by

those at the race, but is spread to the audience through its representation in the film, making viewers part of the experience, an experience that is, in this case, defined by recovery, not trauma. The film also shows the widows coming together in support groups to help each other heal. This process directly echoes the use of the film as a tool for collective recovery as watching a film and becoming a witness to the stories held within serves as a connective tissue (similar to a support group) that helps to light the path to recovery.

Beyond Belief, a feature-length documentary released in 2007 at the Tribeca Film Festival, records a similar form of recovery (a healing tied to altruistic humanitarian projects) focusing in on two women, Susan Retik and Patti Quigley, as they process their husbands deaths by creating an organization (aptly called “Beyond the 11th”) to help widows in Afghanistan. This film has three major effects on the view of collective recovery: (1) it shows how individuals can find new life after tragedy, creating a model for others to follow, (2) it illustrates the path to healing as one involving people from cultures across the globe, enhancing the feeling of the collective, and (3) it reclaims the imagery of 9/11, returning a sense of agency to the victims and their families. The first opens, like so many others, with the sounds of sirens cloaked in a dark screen that dissolves into a TV filled with the images of the attacks, instantly placing the audience, themselves having seen these images in this same way, within the scope of the film. After this initial invocation of 9/11, the film turns towards a section explaining the motivations behind “Beyond the 11th” with a combination of interviews with Patti and Susan describing what their lives were like after September 11 and footage of them collaborating to plan and ultimately completing a bike ride to raise \$100,000 to aid their cause. This segment represents a large portion of the first effect, to show individuals moving beyond tragedy, as it follows, in their own words, the process these women went through to try and deal with their losses. This movement takes its most symbolic form in the bike ride segment as it shows the women riding through the pain and taking action to literally move their lives forward.

After the bike ride, the film continues this forward motion as the women plan a trip to Afghanistan to meet the widows their fundraising benefits. This segment is the unstable in the film as the women go back and forth on whether or not it is safe to travel or, even if it is, if that is the right decision for their children and the healing of their families. This instability brings out an honesty and intimacy from the women as they are shown living through the continuous process of grieving and healing, made more poignant and difficult by the change in their children's handling of the loss. For example, Patti shows viewers her oldest daughter's folder from school. On the front is an drawing of the two towers, basic blue rectangles protruding up from the bottom of the page, with the names Rachel, Leah, Patti and Patrick (her family) written above them. As she turns it over, it reveals a second drawing of the towers, this time tarnished by fire and smoke and the name Patrick (Patti's husband) removed from the sky. We are also shown the first thing Susan's son ever wrote: "Wi did mi Dad di?" (sic). By including these two brutally honest moments, the film elicits an emotional reaction from the audience that helps expand the process of mourning and recovery from just the two widows to include their children and families, gently indicating that this process is necessarily one of communal action (i.e. the women must rally around their children to help them heal as well).

This expansion (the second effect of the film) is taken even further when the women, having resolved their uncertainties and committed to their mission, land in Afghanistan to meet their counterparts. The original reason Patti and Susan chose Afghanistan is because, upon seeing the images of war that emerged soon after 9/11, they immediately felt a connection to what lay beyond that violence, seeing it represented in the same manner as the violence that killed their husbands. Though their specific choice of Afghan widows was unpopular (criticized as an anti-patriotic motion to abandon their own troops in order to aid the enemy), the women viewed it as a vital alternative to violence that advocated for cross-cultural connection instead of opposition. By

including interviews with the Afghan widows that recounted the circumstances in which they lost their husbands, audiences are guided into a direct parallel that blatantly argues for a need for a collective healing, not only pertaining to September 11, but to the general process of grieving. Patti phrases the process as “post-traumatic growth,” a growth that not only did she and Susan achieve together, but that they were then able to share with the women across the planet. This story is vital to the idea of collective memory because it shows that the memories of September 11 travelled worldwide and were able to connect people from different cultures under the umbrella of loss and grief, regardless of their circumstance and, in order to deal with that grief in a productive way, the same sense of connectedness must be implemented in the process of recovery.

The film’s third effect is a reclaiming of traumatic images, specifically the imagery of planes. Because of the nature of the attacks, any image of planes associated with 9/11 is typically cast in negative light, underlining the fear of flying that manifested itself in much of the population after the hijackings. In *Beyond Belief*, however, images of planes are used in positive ways to instead underline a global connectedness. When the women first arrive in Afghanistan, their landing is shot via the shadow of the plane as it touches down. This image seems to suggest that what Patti and Susan are doing is all done “in the shadow” of September 11, using the event as a catalyst for action. When they leave Afghanistan, however, after connecting with the women and realizing that their feelings of grief and loss are so much more than 9/11, the planes themselves are shown taking off. This change in representation can be read as direct evidence of the change in the women’s perspectives that gave their mission meaning outside of the shadow of the attacks and, in that way, reclaimed the image of the plane and turning it from a symbol of destruction to one of rebuilding. The plane is shown taking off, suggesting the beginning of an more open future and acting as a visual marker for the women’s transformation from shadows of their loss husbands,

caught in the void of their loss, into strong, solid women determined to regain agency over their grief.

No film serves as a better indicator of progress than *Rebirth*, a 2011 film from Jim Whitaker that eventually earned the prestigious Peabody Award for excellence in electronic media. The film is a part of a larger Project Rebirth, a nonprofit aimed at creating a living history of the survivors of September 11 and making them available to the masses as a means to collectivizing the memories of that day. The film is a record of the changes in the lives of five individuals whose lives were impacted by the attacks in Manhattan: a high school boy who lost his mother; a member of the NYPD who survived the collapse, but lost his best friend; a woman whose fiancé perished in the towers; a man whose brother, a fireman, died rescuing others; and a woman who, though managing to escape the towers, was left with severe burns covering much of her body. Whitaker met with each of these five people once a year to interview them and track their progress in the path to recovery. In addition, his team set up 35mm cameras in fourteen different locations around Ground Zero that were set to capture one frame every five seconds, 24 hours a day. The result, a compilation of various angles of time-lapse footage, shows the clean-up efforts at Ground Zero and, eventually, the beginnings of the creation of Freedom Tower, the memorial built in the footprint of the original towers.

The combination of the interviews with the five key characters and the time-lapse footage of Ground Zero provides audiences with the most complete record to date of what the process of recovery was truly like, not only for individuals, but for the city of New York as well. This is a film that is intended to have an emotional impact, a fact underlined by the fact that Project Rebirth has published three variations of a viewing guide (one for educators, one for families, and one for community discussion) compiled by Donna Gaffney, a licensed therapist specializing in trauma and loss. These guides are meant to prepare audiences to watch the film and, after doing so, facilitate

their reactions and discussions. The guides include a warning that viewing the film may bring up emotions about 9/11 that have been repressed or ignored: “For families and friends of those who were lost in the terrorist attacks, for those who survived by escaping, for those who witnessed the events from near or far, or through the media and also for those who have experienced loss unrelated to September 11, we must exercise self care and realize that we may relive and re-experience some elements of that day” (Gaffney 6). According to Gaffney, this recognition is an important part in the preparation for viewing and it serves as an even more important part in the discussions held afterwards. These guides clearly establish that *Rebirth* is meant to be an experience that will help audiences process the trauma associated with September 11. Whitaker, in the filmmaker’s note, said that the project was “more than just making a film but doing something that would help others” by showing them a sense of hope amidst the sadness (Gaffney 13-14). The film turns the camera from the buildings and back onto the people as they try to create a new stability in their shattered lives.

Not only do the circumstances surrounding the films purpose underline the importance of grieving and healing, but the film itself creates a clear chronological example of these processes, serving as a model for those still stuck in the void that 9/11 created. What makes this film stand out among all of the others is that the progress is shown as it is happening, making it seem more real and genuine than if it were, as most reconstructions are, narrated from the present. Audiences do not hear about Nick, the high school student who lost his mom, moving from sadness to anger to connection and, eventually, self-realization; we *see* this process unfold before our eyes. We see Tanya, the woman whose fiancé perished in the towers, move from a place of utter melancholy, heartbroken by the loss of her one love, to a place of joy as she finds new love and starts her family. We see Ling, the woman who narrowly escaped the towers covered in burns, progress from

hopelessness and surrender, angry at her physical limitations and discouraged by her seemingly bleak future, to contentment and new resolve as she comes to accept her condition.

Seeing here becomes more powerful than any other rhetorical choice. Audiences are asked to be witnesses once again, but this time not to death and destruction as on the morning of September 11, but to the growth and, as the title implies, rebirth to emerge from the ruins. The Nick we see interviewed at the beginning of the film has no idea what the Nick at the end of the film will be like; his growth, like those of his four counterparts, is revealed to him at the same time as it is revealed to us and this process creates a strong connection between the film and its audiences that creates a new collective experience of growth and progress. The time-lapse footage of Ground Zero serves the same function as these annual interviews, showing us the rebirth of a city in patient chronological order and guiding us along the path to recovery.

The inclusion of footage along with the five stories creates a compilation that, while portraying deeply personal moments also extrapolates the healing process to a broader context wherein we are all invited to participate. The private revelations offered by these perspectives (including the time lapse footage) provide moments where “we sense that something transformative is happening in which we as spectators become caught up ourselves; when we realize that the effort at transmission is changing us, as much as it may be changing things for the participants” (Waterson 65). While Waterson is not speaking explicitly about *Rebirth* here, but rather of film in general, his idea is perfectly attributable to the form that this film takes the process of post-traumatic transformation and brings it to life on screen, drawing audiences into its intricate twists and turns and asking us to transform ourselves, be it as individuals still suffering from the trauma of 9/11 or as a collective caught in a world defined by that day.

In addition, this transformative format allows us to see the subjects grapple with the past versions of themselves and re-narrate the version of their story, “reassembl[ing] information about

earlier experiences according to their present goals, beliefs, and concerns” (Wessel 291). This process is nearly identical to the theories of collective memory discussed in Section IV as it asks subjects to continually reconstruct their own pasts according to their new frameworks of memory.

In this way, *Rebirth* is the ideal film for the exploration of collective memories of September 11 as it (1) invokes audiences memories of 9/11, (2) demonstrates on multiple levels the collective nature of not only memory, but healing, and (3) serves as an accessible, visual example for how the recasting of memory operates in our society, here using individuals as a symbol for the collective.

Rebirth, along with the other documentaries here classified as recovery films, attempt to offer solace and help audiences make sense of the world in a sort of visual and experiential public therapy, calling upon them to participate in a new construction of historical memory that focuses on what Patti Quigley so insightfully termed “post-traumatic growth.”

These films serve as a therapeutic tool to help audiences confront the trauma of the past through a visual process, using the medium’s relationship to reality to make them relive the moment and habitually “act out” past traumas, transforming them into something meaningful (Bell 11).

Alyssa Torres, one of the widows featured on The New York Times’ “Portraits Redrawn” site, says that it was this acting out, in her case through the production of a graphic novel portraying her husband’s death and her path towards recovery, that allowed her to move forward saying that “it really was [this] creativity that saved [her].” By reliving the experience through the eyes of the survivors, victims, widows, and widowers, audiences are taken along their path to recovery and are shown, as a collective, how to move beyond the trauma and begin to envision (literally through the image) the event in a different way. The intimacy of films like *Beyond Belief* and *Rebirth* ensure that they will have a lasting impact that will contribute to the ever-changing production of the collective memory.

What these four categories of film all serve to accomplish is the representation of trauma. While each attempts to achieve a different goal in doing so, together they serve as evidence that the visual image holds significant power in the way traumatic events are remembered by the masses. Written records of the event may be capable of getting across the basic information and even a feeling of the emotional atmosphere of the scene, but it will always remain a mere feeling. Documentaries make the events real, allowing them to be experienced by audiences in a similar way as they were experienced as they unfolded, thus causing the collective to confront the traumatic images as a way to achieve a larger purpose (recording, criticizing, memorializing, or healing). The images created by the media and utilized in these films continuously bring audiences back to the source of the trauma, creating a living collective memory that enhances the historical meaning of the event and permanently imprints it on the minds of their audiences. Indeed, it is because of the rich visual memory surrounding 9/11 that these historical reconstructions were able to be available so soon after the event itself (within a single year) and reach such broad audiences so as to truly historicize the attacks in a public forum.

Conclusion

After a major historical event, particularly one as traumatic and life altering as September 11, there is a natural drive to honor it, to create a memorial that designates its place in history and ensures that it will not be forgotten. With the technological improvements of modern society, film has become one of the means through which this desire is expressed. Documentary film in particular, with its specific theoretical ties to reality (or at least a closer approximation of it than its fictional counterpart), has become one of the dominant means through which history is remembered. Unlike monuments, cast with an unchanging permanence, documentaries are fluid and alterable, capable of continuously reconstructing memory to show its transformation over time and make it available and accessible to the next generation. The collective experience of watching a film makes documentaries one of the primary mediums through which information can be broadcast to the masses. In the case of the September 11 films, this information takes the form of the traumatic memory of that day as well as the memories of how people around the world were able to come together (partially because of film itself) in the process of recovery.

The September 11 documentaries explored in this thesis play a vital role in the collective memories of that day as they are representations of what was chosen to be remembered, how it was remembered, and what was forgotten. As Andre Bazin said, “every form of aesthetic must necessarily choose between what is worth preserving, [...] what should be discarded, and what should not even be considered,” decisions that occurs at the lens of the camera and the floor of the cutting room (Guyunn 33). These films in particular largely chose to directly recreate what the world saw on 9/11, many of them emphasizing and reinforcing the collective memories the media had already produced of the attacks. These decisions made audiences remember the event as it happened start to finish as a means of directly preserving history. Some, however, chose not to include a typical representation, instead alluding to or evoking the attacks in other ways (e.g. purely

through audio or interviews) or chose to remember it through the impacts of its aftermath. Still others chose to manipulate the imagery so as to produce an entirely different meaning, often discarding the official story in favor of the production of an alternative memory (e.g. the conspiracy films). Regardless of their intent, however, the one thing these films all have in common is a desire to remember, in the way their creators deem appropriate, and to create a lasting form of memory that can be useful in the future.

It is important to note that the documentary's drive to remember, despite its benefits to a deeper understanding of history, can be dangerous if not approached properly. Many documentaries, especially those that rely on witness testimony, tend to equate memory with history and disregard cases of mistakes, fabrications, misrememberances, and the like (Rosenstone 1174). While it is nearly impossible to eliminate these errors in the construction of a human history as these mistakes are human faults, it is important to consider the evidence offered as a representation of history and not a direct replica of it. Furthermore, the memory selection Bazin discusses adds to this need for caution as the way in which a film is edited can have drastic impacts on how it portrays an event (as evidenced by the variety of ways in which the same footage and the same situation has been portrayed in the films discussed herein). These films are, as Waterson says, "selective rendition[s]" rather than a literal history (Waterson 53). Additionally, while many documentaries attempt to open up history and provide new perspectives, they can sometimes have the opposite effect, closing down viewer's opinions to the positions presented in the film (Fitzsimmons 393). In a review of *7 Days in September*, A.O. Scott argues that they can also close down viewer's *emotions*, particularly around the anniversaries, saying that

the proliferating representations of that awful day have the paradoxical effect of pushing it away even as they try to recall us to it. The iconography that has been so vital in the effort to preserve what was widely and intensely felt in the aftermath of the terrorist

attacks -- the American flag, the image of the martyred towers of the World Trade Center, the FDNY logo -- has also, by misappropriation and sheer repetition, become a way of pushing those emotions away. (Scott)

In this sense, though poised at keeping the memory alive, the relentless representations of imagery can create a desire for distance that shuts down the emotional response of viewers and renders them null, if not counterproductive. Finally, the camera's persistent desire to preserve history can sometimes produce an "artificial memory" that decreases the ability for humanity itself to remember (Hoskins "Collective" 2). In other words, because history is committed to film, it removes the necessity for people to remember it themselves and can thus have the effect of diminishing the very processes of memory formation.

Regardless of these faults, documentary's preservative instinct has significant impacts on the treatment of events, particularly traumatic ones, helping to preserve a nearly accurate record of history, urge audiences to challenge the official story, aid in the process of commemoration, and guide the collective through the traumatic loss. They utilize, create, and reinforce the collective memories of September 11 and help to develop the cultural frameworks through which other events will be understood. These films are not only relevant to the present, but to the future as well, functioning as commemorations that will persist for years to come through the use of imagery that transcends time. This, in turn, reinforces social identities by illustrating "a social world capable, through the creation of this special form of empathetic connection, of containing, through the knowingness of it, potentially overwhelming experiences" and thus instilling pride and unity in a collective confronted with seemingly insurmountable traumatic loss (Prager 415).

As a "cinema of memory," documentary plays an important role in the process of remembrance, preserving not only history itself, but the emotions associated with it (Rabinowitz 120). In the case of September 11 documentaries, sometimes these feelings were of loss, sometimes

of confusion or distrust, sometimes of hope. In all cases though, these feelings were sealed onto the lasting record of film, giving the history back to the people in a lasting, endlessly consumable manner that used the traumatic collective memory of the attacks to fulfill their purpose of historicizing the event itself. This conservation is essential to forward progress as, in addition to the importance of the past on the actions of the present, “the most serious act of expropriation occurs when a person is deprived of his or her own history” (Santer 150). Documentaries create and preserve memory as a way to ensure that the past will never be forgotten, that important memories like the September 11 attacks will continue to inform the present, and that, as a collective, we never stop forgetting. Without the immediately established visual memories of 9/11, these documentaries would have been less effective at rapidly reaching mass audiences through visuals that often needed little narration. In other words, because of the rich visual record of the event, documentary was able to quickly preserve the memories in ways that were not only accessible to the collective, but that helped to reconstruct the trauma in more productive ways and aid in the process of healing.

Towards the end of *Fahrenheit 451*, Bradbury pens these poignant lines: “We’re going to meet a lot of lonely people in the next week and the next month and the next year. And when they ask us what we’re doing, you can say, We’re remembering. That’s where we’ll win out in the long run” (Bradbury 164). History is a careful battle between remembering and forgetting, the former being the victory and the latter the loss. The documentaries created about September 11 ensure that memory will win this battle, that history will not be allowed to repeat itself through lapses in knowledge, and that the events of that day will forever be a part of our cultural frameworks for establishing, understanding, and preserving our collective identity.

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