

Ten Years After 9/11



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Lecture 2: Trying to Understand What Has Happened

Please Remember:

Your Obligations

- Attendance of the lectures is optional. No excuses needed for absences from lectures. The exam questions assume, however, that you were present in the lectures.
- Attendance of both exams is required.
- Complete all readings listed in the reader for a particular date before coming to the lecture that day. Bring your reader to class!
- Save all private conversations until after class. In other words: There is no talking while I'm talking!

1. The Shock



1. The Shock



2. Superlatives

The New York Times, Sept. 12, 2001: “U.S. Attacked”

- “a hellish storm of ash, glass, smoke and leaping victims”
- “thousands had perished”
- “the worst and most audacious terror attack in American history”

3. Talk of “War”

The New York Times, Sept. 12, 2001: “U.S. Attacked”

- headline “U.S. Attacked”
- “Within an hour, the United States was on a war footing. National Guard units were called out in Washington and New York, and two aircraft carriers were dispatched to New York harbor.”
- “the history of attacks on American targets led many officials and experts to point to Osama bin Laden, the Islamic militant”
- “President Bush vowed that the United States would hunt down and punish those responsible for the ‘evil, despicable acts of terror.’”

TV footage: difficulty of a military response:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=htAFmcYBLtQ>

4. A Sense of Vulnerability

The New York Times, Sept. 12, 2002

- “Then every sound was cause for alarm. ... it was a fighter jet. But was it friend or enemy? People scrambled for their lives, but they didn’t know where to go.”
- “I don’t know what the gates of hell look like, but it’s got to be like this.”

5. Responses
in *The New
Yorker*,
Sept. 24, 2001
(first issue
after the
attacks)



Responses in *The New Yorker*, Sept. 24, 2001

John Updike (fiction writer):

- “the false intimacy of television”
- “at first glance, more curious than horrendous”
- “there persisted a notion that, as on television, this was not quite real”
- “The nightmare is still on.”
- a sense of disbelief
- national identity: “risk is a price of freedom”

Responses in *The New Yorker*, Sept. 24, 2001

Jonathan Franzen (novelist):

- “In a space of two hours we left behind a happy era of Game Boy economics and trophy houses and entered a world of fear and vengeance.”
- “deep grief for the loss of daily life in prosperous, forgetful times”
- “new world” after 9/11: “instability and dread”

Responses in *The New Yorker*, Sept. 24, 2001

Denis Johnson (journalist):

“I think we sense—but don’t care always to apprehend—the reality that some people hate America. To many suffering souls, we must seem incomprehensibly aloof and self-cetered, or worse. For nearly a century, war has rolled lopsidedly over the world, crushing the innocent in their homes. For half that century, the United States has been seen, by some people, as keeping the destruction rolling without getting too much in the way of it—has been seen, by some people, to lurk behind it. And those people hate us.”

Responses in *The New Yorker*, Sept. 24, 2001

Aharon Applefield (Israeli writer):

- “I used to feel that those of us who had suffered in the Holocaust were immune to fear.”
- “The daily disasters evoke images of the Holocaust.”
- “the evil that refuses to disappear from the world”

Responses in *The New Yorker*, Sept. 24, 2001

Rebecca Mead (reporter):

- exclusivity of a restricted zone
- “a post-traumatic instinct to congregate”

Responses in *The New Yorker*, Sept. 24, 2001

Susan Sontag (essayist and cultural critic):

- “the self-righteous drivel and outright deceptions being peddled by public figures and TV commentators”
- “a campaign to infantilize the public”
- “an attack on the world’s self-proclaimed superpower, undertaken as a consequence of specific American alliances and actions”
- “We have a robotic President who assures us that America still stands tall.”
- “The unanimity of the sanctimonious, reality-concealing rhetoric spouted by American officials and media commentators in recent days seems, well, unworthy of a mature democracy.”

Responses in *The New Yorker*, Sept. 24, 2001

Amitav Ghosh (Indian writer living in New York):

- “It was like the onset of a nuclear winter,” she said. “Suddenly, everything went absolutely quiet and you were in the middle of a fog that was as blindingly bright as a snowstorm on a sunny day.”
- “He knew that I would be safe and the kids would be looked after. That was why he felt he could go back to help the others. He loved the towers and had complete faith in them.”

Responses in *The New Yorker*, Sept. 24, 2001

Donald Antrim (New York novelist):

- “Is the United States now part of the rest of the world?”

(lost sense of invulnerability and invincibility)

6. Paul Auster, “Random Notes—September 11, 2001, 4:00 P.M.; Underground”

- “the smells of fire have settled into every room of the house. A terrible, stinging odor: flaming plastic, electric wire, building materials.”
- a place of “indelible beauty” “turned into a place of death”
- “now that the tragedy has struck, it’s far worse than anyone ever imagined.”
- “My fellow New Yorkers sit in the dark, waiting with the patience of angels.”

7. Retrospection: Martin Amis, "The Second Plane" (2001)

It was the advent of the second plane, sharking in low over the Statue of Liberty: that was the defining moment. Until then, America thought she was witnessing nothing more serious than the worst aviation disaster in history; now she had a sense of the fantastic vehemence ranged against her.

I have never seen a generically familiar object so transformed by affect ("emotion and desire as influencing behavior"). That second plane looked eagerly alive, and galvanized with malice, and wholly alien. For those thousands in the South Tower, the second plane meant the end of everything. For us, its glint was the worldflash of a coming future.

Retrospection: Martin Amis, “The Second Plane” (2001)

Terrorism is political communication by other means. The message of September 11 ran as follows: America, it is time you learned how implacably you are hated. United Airlines Flight 175 was an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile, launched in Afghanistan, and aimed at her innocence. That innocence, it was here being claimed, was a luxurious and anachronistic delusion.

A week after the attack, one is free to taste the bile of its atrocious ingenuity. It is already trite but stringently necessary to emphasize that such a *mise en scène* would have embarrassed a studio executive's storyboard or a thriller-writer's notebook (“What happened today was not

Retrospection: Martin Amis, “The Second Plane” (2001)

credible” were the stunned and wooden words of Tom Clancy, the author of *The Sum of All Fears*). And yet in broad daylight and full consciousness that outline became established reality: a score or so of Stanley knives produced two million tons of rubble. Several lines of U.S. policy were bankrupted by the events of last Tuesday, among them national missile defense. Someone realized that the skies of America were already teeming with missiles, each of them primed and cocked.

...

Retrospection: Martin Amis, "The Second Plane" (2001)

The Pentagon is a symbol, and the WTC is, or was, a symbol, and an American passenger jet is also a symbol of indigenous mobility and zest, and of the galaxy of glittering destinations. The bringers of Tuesday's terror were morally "barbaric," inexpiably so, but they brought a demented sophistication to their work. They took these great American artifacts and pestled them together. ...

 Their aim was to torture tens of thousands, and to terrify hundreds of millions. In this they have succeeded. ...

Retrospection:

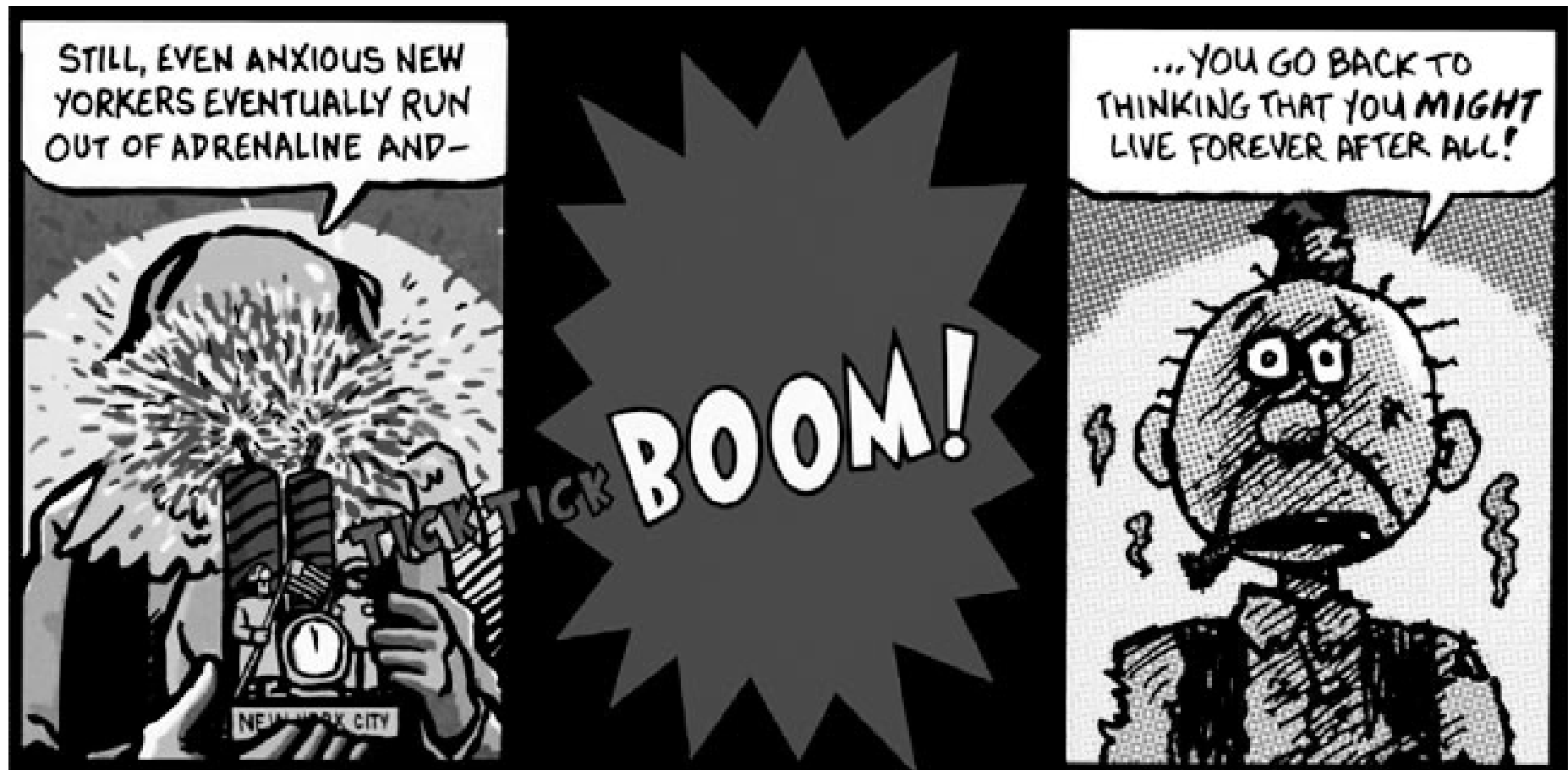
Martin Amis, “The Second Plane” (2001)

It will also be horribly difficult and painful for Americans to absorb the fact that they are hated, and hated intelligibly. How many of them know, for example, that their government has destroyed at least 5 percent of the Iraqi population? How many of them then transfer that figure to America (and come up with fourteen million)? Various national characteristics — self-reliance, a fiercer patriotism than any in western Europe, an assiduous geographical incuriosity — have created a deficit of empathy for the sufferings of people far away. Most crucially, and again most painfully, being right and being good support the American self to an almost tautologous degree: Americans are good and right by virtue of being American.

8. Retrospection: Art Spiegelman,
In the Shadow of No Towers (2004)



Retrospection: Art Spiegelman,
In the Shadow of No Towers (2004)



Retrospection: Art Spiegelman, *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004)

- oversize dimensions of the book, only 42 pages
- non-linear, collage narrative, to be read in different directions: why?
(incoherence and gruesomeness of war experiences)
- large variety of drawing styles (computerized, Sunday strips, painterly panels, raw drawings, ...): evocation of an Internet narrative consisting of loosely connected parts
- genre: personal memoir of the attacks, essay on their effects on the author and the world, homage to comic strips in Sunday newspapers

Retrospection: Art Spiegelman,
In the Shadow of No Towers (2004)

- p. 17 top and bottom: the mediated catastrophe
- p. 17-18: repetition of the metaphor of “waiting for the other shoe to drop”
- individualized trauma of looking for “Nadja”
- p. 17-18 right and 19 top: autobiographical trauma

Retrospection: Art Spiegelman, *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004)

- use of Sunday paper comic strips:
 - Spiegelman says that in the days after 9/11 he turned to old Sunday paper comics for comfort
 - 12-page supplement reproduces seven vintage Sunday newspaper strips from the early 20th century that dealt with war, patriotism, Arabs, Lower Manhattan and buildings threatening to fall.
 - nostalgia for the Old World of comics (as the New World is becoming increasingly uncertain and threatening)
- critique of “the bombardment of kitsch” that capitalized on 9/11

Retrospection: Art Spiegelman, *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004)

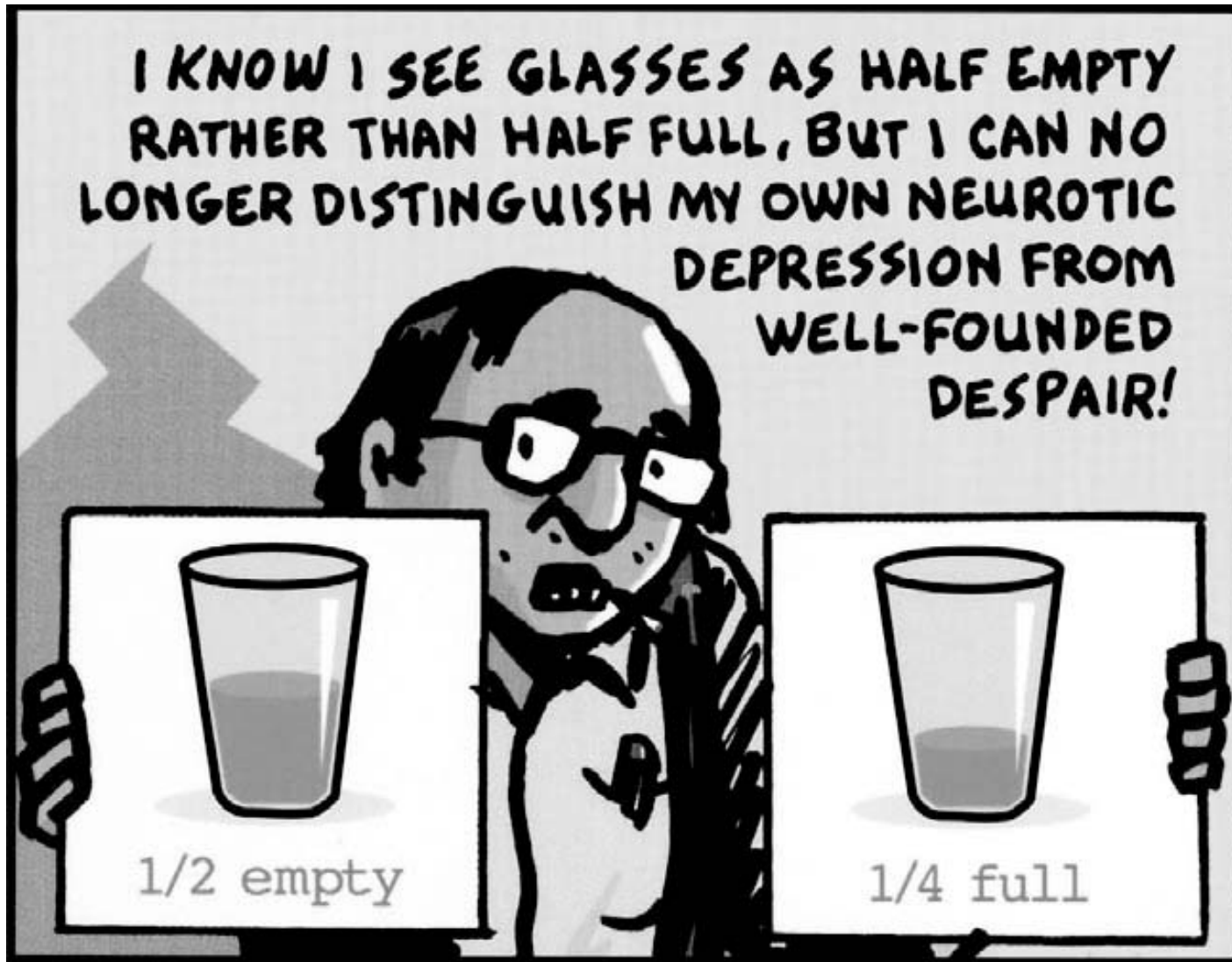
- critique of an arrogant, power-hungry political regime:
 - “The feelings of dislocation reflected in these ‘No Towers’ pages arose in part from the lack of outcry against the outrages [of the Bush administration] while they were being committed.”
 - Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld as the “architects of Armageddon”
- draws explicit parallels between 9/11 and the Holocaust (e.g. p. 21: “the smoke in Auschwitz,” p. 24: “Kristallnacht”)
- filled with despair:

“Maybe I really WANT the world to end, to vindicate the fears I felt back on 9/11! Maybe it's just MY little world that ended . . . but then I glance at the news and there's absolutely no doubt . . . THE SKY IS FALLING!”

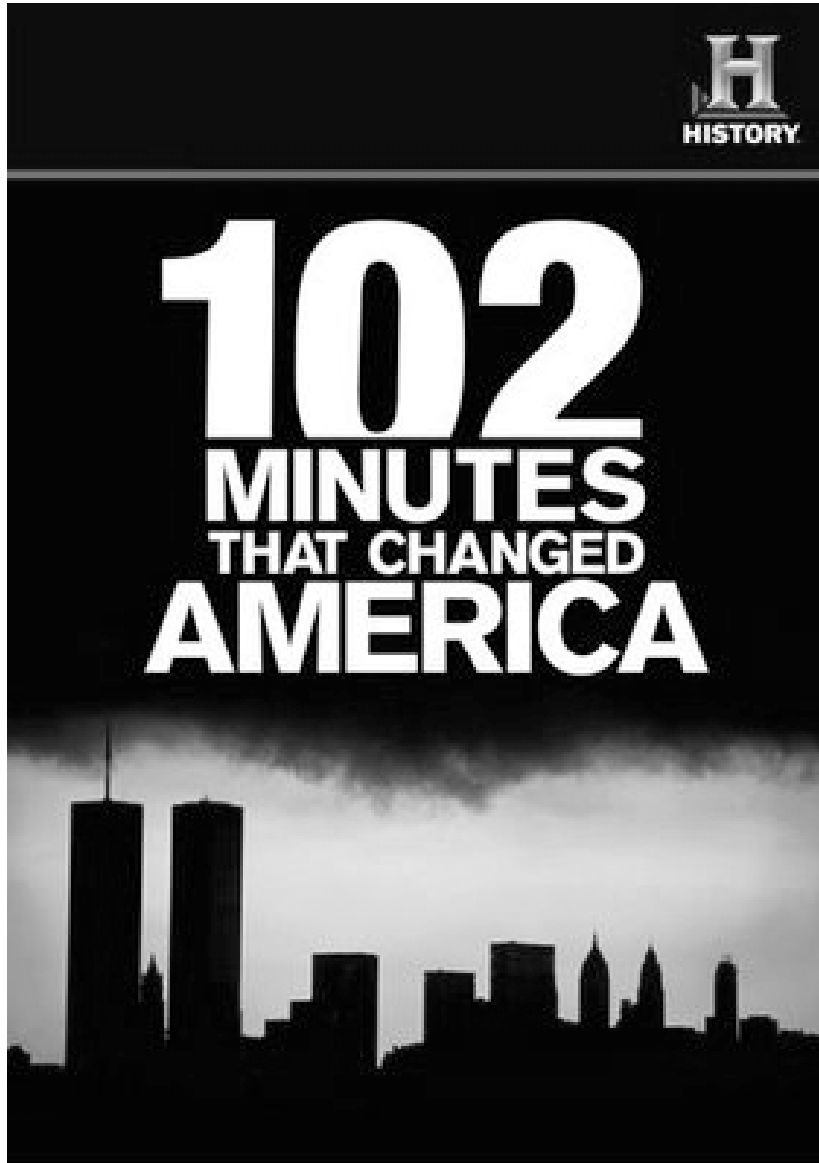
Retrospection: Art Spiegelman, *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004)



Retrospection: Art Spiegelman,
In the Shadow of No Towers (2004)



9. Retrospection: The History Channel



Dir.: Nicole Rittenmeyer
and Seth Skundrick
(2008)

TV documentary of
terror, cries for help,
radio transmissions,
emergency response,
chaos and confusion in
real time.

(102 min. long)

No commentary.