Narrative Exploits:

Space and Trauma in Contemporary American Literature

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyzes contemporary American literature, which includes novels, graphic novels, film, and television of the last forty years, to deconstruct the critical relationship between lived space, institutional power, and trauma. It examines literary representations of traumatic moments in recent American history—the attacks on the World Trade Center, Hurricane Katrina, the emergence of the Homeland Security state, and the introduction of the "new metropolis"—to demonstrate that collective trauma at the turn of the century is very much a product of the individual's complex relationship to the state and its institutional auxiliaries. As many philosophers and social critics have argued, institutional forces in contemporary America often deprive individuals of active political engagement through processes of narrative production, and this study discusses how literature both represents and simulates the traumatic consequences of this encounter. Looking to theories on urban, domestic, and textual space, this dissertation explores and problematizes the political and psychological dimensions of space, demonstrating how trauma is enacted through space and how individuals may utilize space and exploit narrative to achieve critical distance from institutional power. Literature as a narrative medium presents vital opportunities both for exposing the machinery of institutional power and for generating positions against the narratives produced by the state.

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INTRODUCTION

It is as if we dwell in the unique time between a traumatic event and its symbolic

impact, like in those brief moments after we are deeply cut, and before the full

extent of the pain strikes us—it is open how the events will be symbolized, what

their symbolic efficiency will be, what acts they will be evoked to justify. If

nothing else, one can clearly experience yet again the limitation of our

democracy: decisions are being made which will affect the fate of all of us, and all

of us just wait, aware that we are utterly powerless.

Slavoj Zizek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*

In the wake of September 11th, a national poll indicated that 73% of

Americans found themselves to be traumatized to some degree by the attacks on

the World Trade Center (Bennett 178). In the events that transpired that day and

the aftermath that continued during the following months, America experienced a

moment of national trauma that would irrevocably alter the nation's political

complexion. The psychological impact was equally profound. For those directly

experiencing the attacks and those witnessing them on television, 9/11 initiated a

radical, albeit temporary, disruption in the continuity of the nation's political

narrative, a narrative whose extraordinary resiliency depended in large part on its

capacity to deny Americans crucial channels for political engagement. For just a

moment, before the media and the state initiated aggressive projects of narrative

production, Americans identified themselves not as citizens or consumers but as

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survivors and witnesses, subjects whose frames of reference had been temporarily ungrounded by the traumatic event. This study searches for moments like these, in which individuals—survivors, witnesses, even readers of fiction—by confronting and accessing trauma achieve critical distance from the political narratives produced by the state.

Understanding the psychological and political mechanics of trauma is imperative here in the twenty-first century, as institutional power is more and more a part of our everyday lives. The state, whether through invasive surveillance measures or urban planning policies that displace the poor, is increasingly stitching itself into the fabric of our homes and our cities. The following chapters explore the psychological and political consequences of this process, seeing literature as a narrative medium that both represents political trauma and provides opportunities for readers to distance themselves from state-affirming political narratives. Trauma narratives are always sites of political strife; on the one hand, it is important for the survivor to preserve her memory of the traumatic event, as confronting the event, at some point, is crucial to processes of "working through" trauma. Meanwhile, the state, engaged in producing and disseminating discourses that justify and legitimate its political position, begins the work of co-opting and rewriting these narratives, thereby depriving the survivor of her memory of the event. Jenny Edkins explains that these institutional trauma narratives serve, first, to depoliticize history and, second, as justification for the future use of political authority (*Trauma* 172). This study uses

literature to describe these processes, seeking to understand how political trauma is perpetrated on individuals and to deconstruct the inherently traumatic relationship between individuals and institutional power.

What is institutional power? The aftermath of 9/11, which I discuss in greater detail in chapter one, provides us with a working definition of this term. After the attacks on the World Trade Center, Americans quickly found themselves the objects of a narrative campaign—waged by the media, by the White House, and by private interests capitalizing on the growing patriotic fervor—that required the support of a unified-under-one-flag American public. The convergence of these three bodies—the media, the state, and the private sector—provides a good example of my use of the term "institution." Institutional power represents the networked space generated by the convergence of multiple institutional bodies; the goals of each institutional body are the same: to encourage consumer participation and to cultivate political unity, and the two often go hand in hand. Because of the pervasiveness and, often, transparency of institutional power, best described through what philosopher Gilles Deleuze calls "societies of control" ("Postscript" 4), it is often difficult to determine exactly where and how institutional power is at work. To parse out these concepts, I draw from the writings of Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri, whose work on "biopolitics" and "biopower" I use to clarify the workings of institutional power.

As a work of literary scholarship, this study sees contemporary novels and films as sites of resistance, where the processes of political trauma are laid bare and where readers may establish critical positions vis-à-vis institutional power. Many of these works utilize experimental formal strategies to simulate the experience of trauma, and I am most interested in how literature, through these strategies, may position readers outside of otherwise pervasive mainstream narratives. The following pages pose questions that are vital to our understanding of trauma, politics, and literature in the era of biopolitics. First, what is the substance of trauma in a post-9/11 world and how do individuals cope with trauma when the traumatic referent—the trauma-provoking-entity—is dispersed and faceless? How does the personal intersect the public experience of trauma and how are institutional politics capable of producing traumatic encounters? Is it possible to establish oneself outside of institutional narratives? What role does literature play in communicating the experience of trauma? Where is political trauma enacted? How is space intertwined with trauma? The following chapters take on these difficult questions, offering not just new readings of contemporary American literature, but readings that aim to reveal the spatializing potentials of narrative-based media.

Trauma as a Spatial Encounter

This study sees trauma as an inherently spatial phenomenon, where individuals are both brought to moments of trauma through spatial encounters and, often simultaneously, given opportunities for subversive political action

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through their psychological and physical interactions with space. To understand how this works, and, more important, to understand how institutional politics may provoke traumatic encounters, we first have to understand space as a political medium. Serious interest in spatial theory began in France during the 1960s, when the Situationists, a radical Leftist group represented most prominently by Guy Debord, articulated theories on space that presented a radical challenge to a developing capitalist superstructure. Like their contemporary, Henri Lefebvre, the Situationists saw the modern urban environment emerging as a product of capitalism, a system that inscribes itself on the space of the city and thereby guides and disciplines the behaviors of individuals participating within that space. Despite the pervasiveness and transparency of this system, individuals could reclaim space by creating "situations," or temporary spaces of play. Sadie Plant, the preeminent scholar on the Situationists, writes, "It is in the play born of desire that individuals should now be able to recognize themselves, progressing with a new and chosen set of relations no longer dictated by the ethos of labour and struggle but governed by the free and playful construction of situations, of which the revolutionary moment is the first and best" (22). What remained pertinent about this critique throughout the twentieth century—especially to Baudrillard, Foucault, Jameson, and other postmodernist critics—was the insistence on space as a political medium capable of both disciplining and empowering individuals.

Through this lens, city space (and, indeed, any space subject to the forces of capitalism and biopolitics) must be understood as a discursive zone of political

strife in which institutional power is realized and materialized. For instance, the

freeway construction in Helena María Viramontes' *Their Dogs Came with Them*,

which I discuss in chapter four, reveals the enduring institutional presence in

urban planning and city development. The politics of space, however, are not

always so easily identified. Baudrillard's writings on the hyperreal here prove

useful in discussing our increased dislocation from urban "reality" and the ways

that institutional politics infiltrate our everyday lives. Rejecting the Situationists'

belief in the possibility of reclaiming politicized space, Baudrillard argues that we

have entered a state of endless simulation in which the Real has been absorbed by

simulated reality. He writes:

> It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor
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> even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the
>
> real for the real itself; that is, an operation to deter every real
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> process by its operational double, a metastable, programmatic,
>
> perfect descriptive machine which provides all the signs of the real
>
> and short-circuits all its vicissitudes. ("Simulacra" 167)

Here, the politics of space—again articulated in Marxist terms—achieve total

transparency through simulated reality. This echoes Debord's concept of the

spectacle, which depends on the production and consumption of the image as a

means of maintaining social control. He explains, "The spectacle cannot be

understood as a mere visual deception produced by mass-media technologies. It is

a worldview that has been materialised, a view of the world that has become

objective" (Debord 7). The spectacle has inscribed itself on the experience of modern life in such a way that our experience of reality is tied up in our experience of the spectacle. Using these related models helps to illuminate the ways in which, specifically, capitalism and, more broadly, all systematic, institutional discourses embed themselves in social space and thereby veil their political power.

While spatial politics, I argue, continually prove capable of provoking trauma in the era of globalization, the traumatic encounter, itself, and the way we understand trauma as a psychological phenomenon are intrinsically tied up with space. Beginning with his essay "The Uncanny" and continuing in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud insists that vital connections exist between space, the psyche, and the way we process trauma. Moments of the uncanny, for instance, occur as a familiar, domestic space becomes radically defamiliarized, and this experience, Freud argues, is tied to the traumatic moment of separation from the familiar space of the womb during childbirth. For Freud, the physical encounter with space is capable of provoking psychological responses that disrupt the flow of time and propel the individual into repetitive behavior and other neuroses.[1] These moments of trauma involve temporal ruptures that often produce the sensation of occupying multiple spaces simultaneously, and these ruptures ask us to consider temporality in non-linear terms, a process I explore in chapter one. This study therefore uses space in two ways: first, to understand trauma and the

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[1] See Anthony Vidler's *The Architectural Uncanny* for more on the connections between Freud's concept and the experience of space.

ways that spatial encounters stimulate traumatic memory and, second, to demonstrate how the politics of space prove capable of facilitating a potentially productive confrontation with trauma.

My understanding of space specifically draws from these two models: the Lefebvrian socio-political model and the Bachelardian phenomenological model. Henri Lefebvre and his contemporaries (Debord, Foucault, and later de Certeau) describe space as a discursive medium through which institutional power is enacted and contested. Bachelard, on the other hand, is more interested in the psychological encounter with space and our affective connections to intimate spaces, namely, the house. This study uses these two spatial models—the political and the psychological—as points of entry to discussions on city space, domestic space, and, finally, textual space. By situating space within the physical boundaries of place and discussing how spatial politics and, specifically, trauma inscribe themselves in those spaces, I build my analysis from the ground up; starting from a material position—the city, the home, etc.—we can begin to understand how trauma and politics are inscribed, often in subtle ways, in the spaces most familiar to us and, consequently, are capable of affecting us both materially and psychologically.

Trauma in the Age of Biopolitics

Narrative Exploits is concerned with exploring the effects of institutional trauma on the individual. How do individuals cope with the sense of powerlessness associated with participation in a system of globalization, a system

that is dispersed, faceless, and therefore impossible to grasp in its entirety? Andreas Huyssen locates the contemporary experience of trauma as a consequence of rapid cultural change. He writes, "our discontents flow from informational and perceptual overload combined with a cultural acceleration neither our psyche nor our senses are well-equipped to handle" (24). Like Freud's writings on trauma in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* which locate trauma as the result of sudden moments of "fright" or "shock" that the psyche is unprepared to process (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 9), Jill Bennett suggests that the contemporary environment of media and technology generates unexpected psychological encounters that we are unable to confront directly. Mediated narratives, she explains, require us to confront trauma outside of the traditional paradigms emerging from Holocaust studies and studies on PTSD in Vietnam veterans.

Unlike these zones of inquiry, which identify trauma as the result of distinct moments of violence perpetrated on individuals, political trauma occurs in more subtle ways, when networked and distributed institutional power becomes temporarily visible, revealing the increasing lack of political distance between the individual and systems of government.[2] Hardt and Negri's analysis of dispersed capitalism and biopolitics provides the best point of entry to this conversation. No longer confronted by a hierarchy of political power in which the state serves as

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[2] Majia Holmer Nadesan makes the important distinction between government and the state. She writes, "Government is not synonymous with the state because it includes regularities of conduct, security apparatuses, and strategies of control that are dispersed across all domains of life" (9).

the source of political authority, individuals, Hardt and Negri argue, are increasingly absorbed into a system where the boundaries between economics and politics have dissolved. Power, here, is dispersed and faceless, as individuals (i.e. laborers) serve as instruments of a globalized state. Thomas Lemke writes, "This form of capitalism is distinguished by an informatized, automated, networked, and globalized production process and leads to a decisive transformation in the working subject" (67). Internalizing the politics of the state, then, results in what Foucault calls "technologies of the self," in which "individuals act upon themselves, rendering themselves subjects of liberal/neoliberal government evolving out of liberal government" (Nadesan 9). Disciplining one's self according to the laws and moral codes of the state, then, involves "a sacrifice of the self, of the subject's own will" (Foucault, "Technologies of the Self" 45). The point of these observations is to demonstrate that political power—what Foucault calls "biopower"—is deeply embedded in the practice of everyday life, to the extent that individuals can no longer separate themselves from the political infrastructure of the state. During moments of national trauma—such as in the weeks following 9/11 and in the days following Hurricane Katrina—the relationship between the individual and the state is temporarily destabilized and rendered visible. The experience, as the literature in this study demonstrates, can be both jarring and productive.

This process is further complicated by notions of American exceptionalism, which often require Americans—as biopolitical instruments of

the state—to accept, bolster, and perpetuate national narratives of American political innocence. Donald Pease writes:

> The state's policies get internalized through state fantasy work. State fantasies lay down the scenarios through which the state's rules and norms can be experienced as internal to the citizens' desire. Fantasy endows the state's rules and laws with the authority of the people's desire for them. Fantasy does so by investing the state's rules with the desire through which the state's subjects imagine themselves to be the authors of these rules and laws as well as their recipients. (4)

In this way, Hardt and Negri's suggestion that individuals comprise the connective fabric of globalized capitalist power and are dislocated from top-down processes of power is only partly true. Although Americans very much participate within the global arena, we are nonetheless deeply psychologically and emotionally connected to the nation as a home largely "written," I argue in my second chapter, through narratives of domesticity. Pease's analysis correctly identifies the ways that national narratives—which are intensely political—are internalized and perpetuated by Americans who consequently serve as biopolitical agents of the state, unable to distance themselves from the discourses of institutional power.

The negotiation of biopolitical power—following the theories of Hardt and Negri—is complicated when considered in the context of America's position

within a system of global capitalism. Thomas Friedman's writings on

globalization help to parse out the complex, and often uncomfortable,

psychological effects of individuals positioning themselves within vast networks

of power (336). In this spirit, David Harvey explains, "what is most interesting

about the current situation is the way in which capitalism is becoming ever more

tightly organized *through* dispersal, geographical mobility, and flexible responses

in labour markets, labour processes, and consumer markets" (*The Condition of

Postmodernity* 159). Harvey argues that this movement toward a system of

"flexible accumulation" entails dramatic shifts in the way we understand the

politics of space and power, and, specifically, how individuals may use space to

position themselves against systems of power, i.e., global capitalism.[3] It is

important to note in these analyses of globalization the tension existing between

the institution and the individual within this system; despite theories that might

locate networked power as inherently more democratic, these critics demonstrate

that the dispersal of biopower in no way diminishes its potential to govern and

discipline private lives.

The individual's participation in this system ultimately results in feelings

of profound dislocation, alienation, and, consequently, political apathy. The

novels and films of interest to this study address these very issues. Drawing from

Alain Badiou's commentary on Americans' latent desire for authenticity in the

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[3] Harvey's argument on space largely pulls from Henri Lefebvre's work in *The
Production of Space*. Lefebvre argues that space is a fundamentally political
medium, which individuals must produce through social relations that react
against the dominant economic order of capitalism.

twentieth century, the characters in these texts demonstrate a "passion for the real" (48) in their traumatic responses to institutional authority. They recognize in the traumatic event both the possibility of psychological injury and the potential for political awareness and mobility. If this century's underlying impulse is the passion for the real, then the century is equally invested in the passion for the traumatic encounter. Ana Douglass and Thomas Vogler explain, "Driven underground in the poststructuralist moment, the 'real' has returned to mainstream discourse like the Freudian repressed, this time as the traumatic event. 'History is what hurts,' Fredric Jameson wrote in 1982, and the traumatic event, now the paradigm for the historical event, is what hurts by definition" (5). The simultaneous fear of and desire for the traumatic encounter with the real perhaps explains the boom in memory studies that began in the 1980s and continues today. The memorial industry—most recently spearheaded by the 9/11 Memorial and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, two projects, combined, costing billions of dollars—has seen unprecedented growth in the last three decades. However, memorial culture, as Marita Sturken explains, often downplays or renders invisible the political machinations that lead to moments of national disaster; memorials tend to function "as a form of depoliticization and as a means to comfort loss, grief, and fear through processes that disavow politics" (6). Here lies a fundamental problem with memorial culture: how can the traumatic event— one which is political by nature—be stripped of its political vitality and still effectively convey the encounter with the Real? My position holds that, although

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tourists flock to memorials for the encounter with the real, the experience—

lacking its political vitality—invariably ends in a state of psychological vacancy.

To compensate for this lack of fulfillment, visitors—in line once again with

Sturken's analysis—seek comfort in consumer culture by purchasing kitsch—

teddy bears, snow globes, etc.—that commemorate the event.

While memorial culture may fail to produce the encounter with the Real, it

fulfills its promise to "remember" history through musealization and other

memorial strategies. The problem, of course, is that history, especially in

instances of national trauma, becomes a project of writing nationhood and,

specifically, of inscribing America's position of political innocence into the

historical archive. Its political task, then, is to erase the traumatic moment and

produce stable narratives that affirm America's exceptional position in history and

global politics.[4] Trauma works against this practice, and this, perhaps, is why

memorials generally tend to shirk the issue of engaging political trauma in favor

of more neutral practices of "remembering," "honoring," "rebuilding," etc.

Duncan Bell writes, "if political trauma is defined as a moment that through its

catastrophic impact ruptures settled narratives and frames of meaning, and for

which…there can exist no adequate language, discourses of state authority and

legitimacy are called into question, exposed as 'social fantasies', and a window

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[4] For a more detailed discussion on America's exceptional position in global politics, see Giorgio Agamben's *State of Exception*. Agamben offers a detailed analysis of the relationship between politics and law and, more specifically, how the suspension of law in nation-states produces and, in fact, justifies political and juridical exceptionalism. For Agamben, America's global political agenda of the last several decades—in its repeated transgressions of international law—clearly establishes it as a state of exception.

for re-inscribing new understandings of the world emerges, albeit briefly" (10).

Trauma, then, both through its initial occurrence and its psychological residue,

provides potentially productive discursive opportunities that run counter to the

forces of the state. In exposing the machinery of the political Real, trauma gives

us perspective beyond the hyperreal narratives created and sustained by the state

and the global economic community.

Jenny Edkins' work on political trauma, like Bell's, confronts trauma as a

consequence of political oppression and specifically designates political violence

as an intrinsic component of the nation-state. For Edkins, trauma always involves

a betrayal.[5] She writes, "What we call trauma takes place when the very powers

that we are convinced will protect us and give us security become our tormentors:

when the community of which we considered ourselves members turns against us

or when our family is no longer a source of refuge but a site of danger" (*Trauma*

4). Later, she explains, "in the west both state and subject pretend to a security, a

wholeness and a closure that is not possible. From this point of view, an event can

be described as traumatic if it reveals this pretence. It is experienced as a

betrayal" (11). Political trauma therefore involves a betrayal of trust, a moment

when what was perceived to be a system of security and "wholeness" shatters and

our institutional fabric, in its ostensible political neutrality, is revealed to be an

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[5] This move signals a departure from Freud's writings on trauma. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud uses the example of a survivor of a train-wreck, who, in a state of shock, represses the near-death experience. Only weeks later does he begin to develop a "traumatic neurosis," which he cannot connect to the traumatic event. For Edkins, trauma is the result of the dramatic reversal of politics of power and community. Thus, the Freudian "shock" is replaced by the less tangible "betrayal" perpetrated by the State.

apparatus of political control. The intangible political presence at the heart of

Edkins' analysis and at the heart of this study escapes definition partly due to its

repression by the popular imagination. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud

claims that the trauma patient is rarely able to recall or locate the traumatic event

underlying his neuroses. The same logic operates in the context of political

trauma. Part of the difficulty we have locating the causes of political trauma owes

itself to the ways we have repressed the political and subsequently embraced the

modes of production that support the spectacle: consumerism, nationalism, and

the belief in American exceptionalism.

Before continuing further, it might be useful to clarify our terms,

specifically, politics and the political. Again, I turn to Edkins:

> Politics is the regular operation of state institutions, elections, and
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> such like within the framework of the status quo. In other words it
>
> does not challenge existing ways of doing things. The political on
>
> the other hand is the moment where established ways of carrying
>
> on do not tell us what to do, or where they are challenged and
>
> ruptured: in traumatic moments, for example. ("Remembering
>
> Relationality" 108)

For Slavoj Zizek, we have entered a state of political paralysis in which it is

exceedingly difficult to separate politics from the political, thus resulting in

political apathy and, ultimately, the desire for the perpetuation of "the very

fundamental fantasy that sustains our being" (97). In the traumatic encounter with

our hyperreal political landscape, we repress the political real and, subsequently,

subscribe to the fantasy of the spectacle. This study is continually aware of the

distinction and tension between politics and the political; trauma functions

paradoxically both as a dangerous disruption of stability—psychological and

institutional—and as an opportunity for political engagement.

Narrative Exploits begins with a discussion of the traumatic moment of

9/11 precisely because the attacks on the World Trade Center—in their symbolic

dimensions, their media coverage, their ability to exploit the image, and the public

reaction they provoked—revealed the dimensions of an institutional presence

deeply involved in the everyday lives of Americans.[6] The traumatic moment of

the attacks on the towers was followed by an immediate frenzy of nationalist

discourse that positioned America as an innocent victim of terrorism. Rhetorically

defined in this way, the state was not only justified, but obligated to take military

action against those responsible for the attacks. Caught within this milieu, the

traumatic experience of 9/11 was codified along political channels that aligned

individuals with state power. The terrorists did not attack America; they attacked

Americans. The processes by which the state co-opted these channels for

processing trauma perfectly capture the tension between the initial traumatic

destabilization of the individual and the system and the rapid reconstitution of the

biopolitical nation-state. Shortly after the attacks, individuals found themselves in

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[6] For an interesting discussion on how the mediated event of 9/11 in many ways turned the spectacle against itself, see *Afflicted Powers* by the San Francisco-based activist group Retort. The four writers of the book offer an informative analysis of the modern nation-state, calling attention to its chief means of political control: the production of appearances.

the midst of intersecting vectors of trauma: the personal, private experience of "witnessing" the attacks on television and the ensuing articulation of a collective, public, national trauma. Paradoxically, it was precisely this traumatic moment—the moment when the mediated spectacle resisted personal and collective psychological processing—that our problematic relationship to the state was temporarily laid bare. The individual's lack of political agency within biopolitical systems of control became evident through the horrific destruction and death as well as through the more unsettling realization that the attacks were connected to political operations of a higher order.

The events of 9/11 (chapter one) and the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (chapter three) suspended us in what Edkins calls "trauma time," or time outside of the linear and historical time of institutional power. Although the national conversation about these two events differs in critical ways, what the events revealed about our relationship to state power can be pieced together with the same set of tools. For Edkins, trauma time offers us ways of confronting a political presence that is invisible under normal circumstances. She writes, "what trauma or a traumatic encounter does, then, is reveal the way in which the social order is radically incomplete and fragile. It demonstrates in the most shocking way that what we call social reality is nothing more than a fantasy—it is our invention and it is one that does not 'hold up' under stress" ("Remembering Relationality" 109). Later, Edkins elaborates, "A traumatic event is one that entails the blurring of the very distinctions upon which everyday existence

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depends, upon which people rely to continue their lives" (110). Jay Winter calls trauma time the defining mode of temporality in contemporary existence, particularly considering the potential for trauma to be broadcast via television media (72). For Jennifer Loureide Biddle, instead of blurring the distinctions of the everyday, trauma reinforces boundaries that separate subjects and thereby prevents victims from identifying with society. She writes, "Trauma causes a closing-off of the boundaries of one's inhabited, intersubjective generosity…[it] causes a failure of and in identification; the violence of a loss that cannot be assimilated" (56). The two approaches in fact complement one another; during trauma time, the victim experiences a radical destabilization of identity during which her belief in the wholeness of a social reality—a totality integral to the stability of her identity—begins to collapse. Suspended in trauma time, she is both psychologically-vulnerable and politically-aware in ways that she had not been prior to the event. In the following minutes, hours, days, etc., she shores up her identity as a kind of healing mechanism to protect herself from future psychological harm occurring as a result of the encounter with the real.

The national response to the attacks on the WTC, the subsequent initiation of the Homeland Security state, and the traumatic aftermath of Katrina provide fertile ground for unpacking these complex political and psychological processes. In these national events, the "social reality" that was believed to be stable and whole was shown to be incomplete and flawed, and the media images that documented them contained deeper symbolic resonances that spoke to this

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reversal of perception. What was so disturbing about witnessing these events on television was not that the terrorists had undermined our social and economic power, or that the hurricane had wrought such devastation on New Orleans, but rather that these external forces had temporarily illuminated the machinery of a complex institutional system of social and political control in which we were (and are) all invested.

Literatures of Trauma and The Trauma of Literature

The attacks on the WTC on 9/11 serve as an obvious starting point for confronting trauma in the twenty-first century, but they hardly represent the only instance of the destabilization of institutional politics in America. This study addresses political trauma through literature of the last four decades, attempting, first, to reveal the modes of political control that are embedded in contemporary life and, second, to discuss how trauma is mediated by the spaces we inhabit every day. Political trauma affects individuals in a number of contexts, from the socially-dislocating urban spaces of Helena María Viramontes' *Their Dogs Came with Them* to the politically-charged domestic spaces of Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*. Like these two novels, the primary texts in *Narrative Exploits* deal with the trauma arising when individuals are deprived of political agency as a result of the state's increasing control over public and private spaces. In every example, conflict arises not between individuals, but between individuals and their environment, which, in the age of biopolitics, serves metonymically as an extension of the state; the "home" becomes the "homeland." Trauma narratives

frequently utilize first-person or limited third person narration to slowly reveal the traumatic event through its traces in the narrator's psyche and, subsequently, the narrative, and, indeed, several of the texts I discuss—from Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* to Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*—use such formal strategies to reveal and simulate the psychological effects of institutional trauma.

The conflict between the individual and the institution is certainly not a new concept in American literature; this study attempts to understand the relationship between the individual and the institution in terms that are specific to the American experience at the turn of the century. During the 1950s and 60s, in particular, Ken Kesey, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and others associated with the Beat movement explored the power dynamics at play between the individual and complex, oppressive systems of control. What these writers could not have anticipated, however, is the extent to which biopower would govern and preside over our experience of reality here in the twenty-first century. Individuals are no longer merely positioned against institutional power; individuals *are* institutional power, channeling the politics of the state in their everyday lives through "technologies of the self." More often than not, it is individuals who bring exclusionary politics to the urban and domestic spaces they inhabit, and the laws of the state are merely formalities that outwardly legitimate political discourses that have been transmitted and naturalized through far more complex techno-socio-cultural processes. Confronting this political landscape, the individual is

faced with the impossible task of challenging political power that is networked, dispersed, and faceless. We no longer have the Nurse Ratcheds of the world to rail against; instead we have The Matrix. Furthermore, in the past few decades, trauma and memory—perhaps emerging from the burgeoning interest in Holocaust studies in the 1970s and 80s—became increasingly relevant to notions of how we understand America and its place in history, and these concepts have infiltrated contemporary literature in ways that cannot be ignored.

As a work of literary criticism, this study's primary aim is to provide new ways of looking at these texts and, subsequently, new ways of understanding the American experience. As I have outlined above, America has entered uncharted territory in the age of biopower, and the institutional politics that were once visible have largely become embedded in our everyday lives, naturalized and therefore transparent. These texts provide valuable points of entry to discussions on the difficulty of negotiating this kind of contemporary environment, and they emphasize the pressures individuals face—both material and psychological—that come part and parcel with biopower and institutional authority. Seeing trauma both as a result of oppressive spatial politics and as an opportunity for reclaiming political agency is critical to the way we position ourselves politically against and within systems of power.

The question arises: why look to literature for answers to the complex questions at the heart of trauma and the political? Since trauma in many ways escapes conventional modes of examination, we must look to approaches that take

us outside of practical and intellectual models and move us toward experiential and psychoanalytical models. Cathy Caruth explains, "literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is, indeed at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet" (3). Shoshana Felman makes the claim that trauma is fundamentally embedded in processes of testimony; as witnesses to a traumatic event narrate their experience, the listener, too, bears witness to the narration and opens herself to the experience of trauma. Literature, especially trauma narratives concerned with the personal or collective processing of a traumatic event, involves an immersive testimonial encounter as the reader (listener) confronts the text (witness) as a site of trauma. Felman writes, "texts that testify do not simply *report facts*, but, in different ways, encounter—and make us encounter—*strangeness*" (7). Furthermore, literature offers us roundabout ways of confronting the political milieu that is at once immediately present in the everyday and, simultaneously, obscured by our modes of understanding and intellectual processing. As I explain in the chapters ahead, viewing narrative as a spatial practice provides opportunities for generating critical distance from state-endorsed narratives that often produce harmful cultural imaginaries. Examining representations of trauma through literature provides a starting point for addressing the relationship between trauma and the political.

Beyond forwarding discussions on literature's representations of trauma, a concept that, as I will demonstrate, is inherently limited by the failures of language, *Narrative Exploits* is interested in addressing how literature may *produce* trauma through formal strategies that invite readers into immersive spatial environments. If, as Freud implies in his writings on the uncanny, traumatic repetition occurs in space and in the individual's psychological associations with space, then, if literature is to accurately represent the experience of trauma, it, too, must engage the spatial. Trauma theorist, Kali Tal, writes,

> Trauma is enacted in a liminal state, outside the bounds of
> 'normal' human experience, and the subject is radically
> ungrounded. Accurate representation of trauma can never be
> achieved without recreating the event since, by its very definition,
> trauma lies beyond the bounds of 'normal' conception. Textual
> representations—literary, visual, oral—are mediated by language
> and do not have the impact of the traumatic experience. (15)

Elaine Scarry takes this concept further: "Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned" (4). In order to confront and simulate trauma, then, we must find ways of articulating the experience of psychological pain outside the boundaries of language.

Unlike conventional representations of trauma (which are bound to language), formal strategies, such as satire, adaptation, and performativity, immerse readers in spatial environments and similarly propel them into ungrounded, liminal states, thereby simulating the experience of trauma. Caruth writes, "In trauma…the outside has gone inside without any mediation" (59). The traumatic event, an unanticipated moment of violence originating "outside" the individual's psychic space, bypasses the normal modes of psychological processing and penetrates the individual's interior space. Because these modes of processing information have not detected the traumatic intrusion, witnesses have no recollection of the event, which results in the eventual appearance of repetitive neuroses and dreams that unconsciously reenact the event. Space, however, provides an alternative avenue—one that eludes language—for confronting traumatic events; Pierre Nora's term for sites of memory, "lieux de mémoire," establishes the critical connection between material, inhabited spaces and memory practices that link individuals to the past. Considering the difficulty of unearthing, confronting, and articulating political trauma, especially through texts grounded in language, it is imperative that we develop new modes of representing trauma that give readers critical distance from institutional narratives. I argue that literature, as a medium particularly conducive to generating spatial environments, provides valuable opportunities for representing and simulating trauma, and in doing so removing readers from the political narratives of the state. These kinds of immersive formal strategies utilize space as a means of simulating the

experience of trauma, which—if paired with the political content of the narrative—offer critical ways of understanding literature, trauma, and our political environment. Scholarship that overlooks spatial approaches to experimental narrative forms simply cannot engage trauma literature with the depth that it requires.

Unpacking Trauma

This study follows two basic trajectories in its organization: first, it traces the evolution of biopolitics in the years following 9/11, from the attacks on the World Trade Center to the inauguration of the Department of Homeland Security to the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and finally to the contemporary American metropolis, where institutional narratives embed themselves in our everyday lives. Paying particular attention to the ways in which state-endorsed narratives infiltrate private and public life, I have also organized these chapters around the spaces in which these political maneuvers occur. I move from the space of the home (which was once private but is now linked to public citizenship) to the space of the city (which was once public but is now linked to private citizenship and a culture of privatization). These divergent vectors reveal the tendency for biopolitics to dissolve spatial boundaries in the interest of creating uniform "paths to citizenship," in which Americans may practice and perform identities that are consistent with the state's goals. In the final chapter, I turn my attention to formal strategies that invite readers to experience trauma through their interaction with the space of the text.

Chapter one addresses novels published after 2001 that confront 9/11 and its aftermath through the lens of political satire. I argue that state-endorsed narratives circulating around 9/11 systematically deprived survivors of their memory of the event, preventing them from accessing the politically-vital experience of "trauma time." Positioning oneself outside of these national narratives was difficult in the months and years following 9/11, and these texts provide important counter-narratives that contest the political rhetoric generated by the state. I argue, more importantly, that their use of satire as a spatial tactic allows readers to generate critical distance from the discourses of the state. Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*, a graphic novel whose textual layout resembles that of a newspaper, presents an autobiographical account of the author's experience on 9/11 and during the months following the attacks. Using writing as a means of confronting trauma, Spiegelman is most concerned with the individual's private experience of trauma and how that experience intersects with public, national demonstrations of trauma; here, the individual is positioned within much larger institutional networks that all too often work to dilute the traumatic experience of its political dimensions. Jess Walter's *The Zero* similarly introduces a protagonist whose traumatic experience is as much a result of the political maneuverings of the U.S. government as of the attacks themselves, and, like Walter's novel, Ken Kalfus' *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* uses satire as a spatial tactic to distance readers from state-endorsed narratives. In each text, I address the dissonance between individuals legitimately traumatized by the

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attacks and an institutional presence that reinforces itself by co-opting and reproducing national narratives of trauma.

In chapter two, I address the institutional response to 9/11: the inauguration of the Department of Homeland Security and concomitant emergence of the homeland security state. The well-documented debates on national security that followed 9/11 and that persist even today are often rhetorically figured around domestic imaginaries that use the home as a symbol for security, stability, and political innocence. Situating the nation as a home, specifically a home under attack by a hostile foreign enemy, the state co-opted the traditionally private space of the home for the public project of generating political consensus. The end result of this process, of course, was the widespread endorsement of the Iraq invasion in 2003. I am interested in how psychological and political attachments to domestic space around the issue of national security made possible the rapid expansion of biopower in the years following 9/11. Using Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*, I discuss how the seemingly-apolitical investment in domesticity invites the production of dangerous narratives that ultimately disengage Americans from political discourse. I extend this argument to Michael Haneke's film, *Funny Games*, claiming that domestic space, however innocuous it may appear to be, is inherently political and inherently violent; situating the nation as a home legitimates egregious acts of political violence both at home and abroad.

These discourses on homeland security came to the surface in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, when thousands of New Orleanians—mostly poor and black—were disenfranchised of their fundamental human rights by a state apparatus myopically committed to national security. In chapter three, I discuss the volatile politics of urban space in New Orleans in the weeks, months, and years following Katrina. Examining Dave Eggers' *Zeitoun* and the HBO television series *Treme*, I trace the narrative of New Orleans' city space, from a depoliticized, "smooth space" immediately following the hurricane to a highly-regimented, militarized zone, and back, finally, to a performative space in which the people of New Orleans contested the disciplinary forces at work in their city. This chapter utilizes theories on urban space to explain the complex negotiations of space that occurred on both individual and institutional levels in New Orleans, using the two texts to theorize testimony as a performative speech act with significant social, political, and psychological consequences.

Chapter four continues the work of theorizing our relationship to urban space, confronting the socially-corrosive politics of the "postmetropolis," Edward Soja's term for the emerging cities of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Metropolitan growth in recent decades, facilitated most visibly by an increasingly ubiquitous freeway system that disperses, rather than condenses, urban space, has forced us to reconsider our relationship to the cities we inhabit. Deprived of the opportunity to engage in politically-vital street-level spatial practices as a result of this system, individuals are increasingly dislocated from one another and from

communities that foster social engagement. I begin by discussing Helena María

Viramontes' *Their Dogs Came with Them*, a novel that describes the

disappearance of an East L.A. barrio as a result of freeway construction. Lacking

material sites of memory, the characters in Viramontes' novel fail to socially or

politically situate themselves in the transformed space of their city. Expanding on

the deleterious effects of postmetropolitan growth, I discuss Robert Altman's

film, *Short Cuts*, which depicts Los Angeles as a hyperreal urban environment in

which empathy and productive social exchange have all but disappeared. This

social climate, I argue, is the result of institutional policies of privatization that

have severed individuals from their connection to the city.

In each chapter I am interested in highlighting narrative strategies that

involve the reader in the negotiation of the text and simultaneously generate

critical distance from state-endorsed narratives. In the final chapter, I exclusively

address formal strategies—textual presentation, adaptation, and textual

performativity—that simulate trauma by generating textual spaces for readers to

inhabit. If trauma eludes language, as many theorists have argued, then textual

strategies that simulate the experience of space may provide valuable

opportunities for narrating traumatic experiences and achieving critical distance

from state-endorsed political narratives. The texts of interest to this chapter are

Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*, and

Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*. Not intending to provide conclusive theories

on any of these three broad fields of inquiry, this chapter encourages further critical approaches that recognize and engage textual space in literature.

The project of identifying and representing political trauma is difficult to realize in part because narratives of trauma are continually being co-opted and absorbed by institutional power. As quickly as individuals narrate their experience—be it falling towers or flooding streets—the media and the state begin the work of assimilating those narratives into easily reproducible packages for cultural consumption. Understanding the causes and effects of political trauma requires us to adopt critical approaches that move us outside of the production and consumption of narrative. Literature, and specifically texts that encourage spatial readings, provides vital avenues for this productive engagement with trauma, history, and culture. As the state increasingly dictates where and how power is distributed, we, too, must better understand the politics of space and trauma, and how these concepts play out in the practice of everyday life. *Narrative Exploits* begins this project.

CHAPTER 1

TRAUMATIC IRONY: THE NARRATIVE POLITICS OF 9/11

The writer begins in the towers, trying to imagine the moment, desperately.

Before politics, before history and religion, there is the primal terror. People

falling from the towers hand in hand. This is part of the counter-narrative, hands

and spirits joining, human beauty in the crush of meshed steel.

> Don DeLillo, "In the Ruins of the Future"

DeLillo, in the above quote, identifies the intensely problematic task of

writing 9/11. History, religion, trauma, politics, narrative: these contested and

often highly-malleable terms—whether or not writers openly acknowledge their

rhetorical baggage—are involved in the consumption of 9/11, an event that, over a

decade after the attacks, is still being absorbed and defined by complex narratives

of American innocence, retribution, and national identity. Probing the event and

the ways we have come to understand it reveals the narrative processes that

underlie American cultural and political discourse. DeLillo's article, written

almost immediately after 9/11 and published in December of 2001, acknowledges

the tension between the individual and the state, implying that 9/11 is perpetually

in danger of being defined in political terms that bolster the state. The "counter-

narrative" that he describes emerges only through exposing oneself to the moment

of trauma, a moment so radically removed from our interpretive framework that it

provides opportunities for representation that exist and go beyond the language made available by conventional modes of discourse. In the "primal terror" resides the potential for challenging and resisting the political narratives that inform our understanding of 9/11.

In this way, writers attempting to represent 9/11 must be continually aware of the tension existing between the raw moment of trauma and the national narratives that threaten to deprive it of its dynamic political power. To engage this moment, to dwell in and simulate the experience of trauma, offers writers the opportunity—by redefining and rewriting political narratives—to reveal the discursive machinery of the state and the systems of control embedded in the spectacle. The best 9/11 literature gives us these critical glimpses of the political Real and, in doing so, produces counter-narratives that provide vital alternatives to the systems of political control sustained by nationally-endorsed narratives. In this chapter I discuss three political satires emerging in the decade after 9/11: Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*, Jess Walter's *The Zero*, and Ken Kalfus' *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country*. These novels describe and simulate the political trauma of 9/11, suggesting the possibility of inhabiting textual spaces removed from nationally-endorsed processes of narrative production and consumption. Literature aiming to challenge state authority in the post-9/11 world must generate critical distance from state narratives and provide alternatives to the systems of political control sustained through narrative production. Always aware of the cultural and political baggage attached to 9/11, these novels are more

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concerned with deconstructing the national response to the attacks on the World Trade Center than representing the isolated event itself; the event, rather, inspires a moment of political clarity that takes us outside the pervasive discourses of consumerism and nationalism that proliferated after the attacks. In this respect, these texts might be better labeled "9/12 novels," considering their investment in confronting the political residue of 9/11 (Walter, "Interview" 4). Addressing the narrative strategies utilized in each text, this chapter theorizes spatial tactics, such as satire, that remove readers from the claustrophobic interpretive spaces of contemporary discourse, and our negotiation of the "counter-space" generated by these strategies creates vital opportunities for reestablishing political subjectivity.

Also important to these works are the ways in which the personal intersects with the political. That these novels demonstrate an overt concern for depicting the impact of political trauma on the family and the individual speaks to the ways that state politics, through the increasing mediation and dissemination of political narratives, infiltrate our personal lives. Characters understand themselves and their relationships primarily through the complex political narratives that surround them. These narratives, I argue, as much define the personal lives of ordinary Americans as they do the complexion of the nation. This chapter addresses the increasing permeability of private and public boundaries as a consequence of political and institutional power; national narratives—insofar as they define what it means to be an American—profoundly and fundamentally

disrupt one's sense of identity and one's position within and in relation to the state.

The task that writers of the post-9/11 generation face, then, is positioning themselves against mainstream political discourse in order to expose the ways that politics are inextricably bound to projects of narrativization and how narrative, itself, is an intrinsically political exercise. John Duvall and Robert Marzec argue that 9/11 fiction, even those books concerned with the effects of trauma on domestic life, should not shirk political discourse. In *The Zero*, as Duvall and Marzec note, "even the deployment of a domestic situation is not a retreat from but rather a covert engagement with the political," and this observation could be even more aptly applied to *No Towers* and *A Disorder* (386). Fiction provides many valuable opportunities for engaging in necessary political exchange. Novels and, specifically, satire as a genre give us ways of circumventing mainstream discourse and challenging the political narratives that have largely been normalized in contemporary culture. This chapter, then, challenges the logic of Andrew Pepper's claim that "literary fiction is singularly ill-equipped to illuminate the complex geopolitical arrangements that the events of 9/11 brought sharply into focus" (404). Rather, as Kristiaan Versluys writes, "The novelistic practice of viewing a situation in its full complexity entails the denial of the reductive logic of terrorism, the black-and-white ideological view that legitimates indiscriminate violence. It equally goes against the simplifications of patriotic

rodomontade and revanchist rhetoric" (17).[1] Through satire, we approach this

rhetoric behind the veil of irony, which removes us from the discursive space of

the state; the critical distance we achieve through this practice allows us to receive

and produce narratives from a number of subject positions simultaneously,

contesting the political narratives that often seek to interpellate Americans in

static positions of political complacency. Ironic detachment, in short, generates a

discursive space of resistance that enables these critical spatial practices.

From this position, we can begin to see how power is invested in narrative

and how the production of spaces outside of national discourse is critical to

contesting these political narratives. This is why the three novels of interest to this

chapter in various ways attempt to deconstruct our notions of narrative stability

through experimental, spatializing narrative strategies. These novels suggest that

adhering to conventional narrative forms only serves to support the projects of

narrativization at the heart of political trauma; alternative approaches to narrative

offer avenues for resistance to political narratives produced by the state. Not all

post-9/11 novels, of course, utilize this template. Jay McInerney's *The Good Life*,

for instance, sees shared trauma as the foundation of an extramarital affair

between two survivors of the attacks, but its disavowal of politics in large part

aligns it with narratives of the state. Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and*

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[1] Versluys' book along with Birgit Däwes' *Ground Zero Fiction: History, Memory, and Representation in the American 9/11 Novel* and Richard Gray's, *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11* are the most comprehensive studies of 9/11 fiction to date. As surveys of 9/11 fiction, they provide useful entry points to discussions on 9/11 political and trauma discourse, but they do not adequately address the complex workings of political trauma and space in the novels of interest to this study.

Incredibly Close, too, trades political commentary for sentimentality,

understandably in this case, considering its nine-year-old narrator—who

effectively releases his creator from his political prerogative—cannot reasonably

be expected to address the complex machinations of institutional politics.

DeLillo's *Falling Man* succeeds in its commentary on trauma as an ongoing,

affective experience for individuals and for the nation, but DeLillo's tone suggests

he is writing from a psychic proximity that precludes the kind of detached

political commentary that we see in the novels of interest to this study. In their

willingness to take on America's dominant political narrative, these novels give

us critical ways of understanding the substance of political trauma and its effects

on individuals and their families.

Mediated Narratives

In the aftermath of 9/11, a number of social critics made the dubious claim

that the age of irony was coming to an end (Rosenblatt). The attacks on the World

Trade Center, the carnage, the destruction, and the grief were so overwhelmingly

immediate that any attempt to distance oneself from the horror of the event would

somehow cheapen the sacrifices made by those in the towers and those involved

in the relief effort. In many ways, it was this brand of rhetoric that prevented

Americans from publicly identifying with any political ideology beyond that

manufactured by the state. Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*, a series

of broadsheet "comix" first appearing in the German newspaper *Die Zeit* in 2002

and later published as a collection in 2004, challenges the notion that irony is

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dead through a brutal, satiric indictment of the Bush administration and the jingoistic rhetoric it espoused in the months after the attacks. As a means of deconstructing these political narratives, Spiegelman uses text and image to create spaces of trauma—spaces that resist the temporally-defined, highly-mediated channels generated by the spectacle—that both he and the reader may enter in order to produce counter-narratives of trauma.

Unlike many other 9/11 novels, *In the Shadow of No Towers* treats trauma not as an effect of experiencing the attacks on the towers, but rather as a symptom of existence in the post-9/11 political environment, an environment in which media saturation and state-endorsed discourses continually threaten to deprive the traumatic moment of its political vitality. "Equally terrorized by Al-Qaeda and by his own government," Spiegelman sees the political machinations of the Bush administration as a new source of trauma for Americans attempting to come to terms with the initial trauma of the attacks (Spiegelman ii). In the book's introduction he explains, "When the government began to move into full dystopian Big Brother mode and hurtle America into a colonialist adventure in Iraq…all the rage I'd suppressed after the 2000 election, all the paranoia I'd barely managed to squelch immediately after 9/11, returned with a vengeance. New traumas began competing with still-fresh wounds" (ii). These "new traumas" interestingly arise not from the immediate, visceral experience of the attacks, but rather through the mediated, processed political space created by the spectacle. Although Spiegelman often designates the Bush administration as the chief

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perpetrator of political violence, the text's insistence on challenging the diverse

modes of narrativization at the heart of institutional politics locates a more

dispersed network of media, politics, and democracy as the cause of political

trauma.

One of the chief aims of *No Towers*, then, is to create an alternative, fluid

space for the reader to occupy, one that challenges and subverts the traditional

narrative modes claimed by the spectacle: television, newspaper, text, and the

image. In the introduction, Spiegelman discusses his textual experiments with the

broadsheet form:

> The giant scale of the color newsprint pages seemed perfect for the
>
> oversized skyscrapers and outsized events…I wanted to sort out
>
> the fragments of what I'd experienced from the media images that
>
> threatened to engulf what I actually saw, and the collagelike nature
>
> of the newspaper page encouraged my impulse to juxtapose my
>
> fragmentary thoughts in different styles. (i-ii)

Here Spiegelman begins to articulate the complex relationship between the private

experience of trauma and the public rituals, guided by mediated narratives,

involved in processing the event. Spiegelman's book is continually aware of the

tension between mediation and politics. Describing this process, David Holloway

writes, "As nodal points for rapid flows of information in a time of crisis and as

communications networks linking Americans together, corporate American

media, particularly TV, played a vital role in mitigating this sudden subsidence in

symbols of collective American belonging by reaffirming some of its core totems" (61). Media narratives, in short, provide a very limited space of political engagement for Americans attempting to process trauma. The book's overt attention to television and the televisual image underscores the difficulty in communicating discourse outside of these self-affirming rituals of national identification. In one frame depicting an oversized American flag broadcast over television, Spiegelman writes, "Logos…look enormous on television; it's a medium almost as well suited as comics for dealing in abstraction" (1). Moving past his ironic treatment of comics, we can see how nationalism and mediation are fundamentally intertwined in the post-9/11 landscape and how mediated politics open the door for dangerous abstractions. Using news media—the trusted source of information for most Americans—to introduce and promote political abstractions ultimately results in a collective disavowal of political critique; banding behind the flag, we define ourselves narrowly along lines provided by the state.[2]

Opening productive discursive lines outside of these mediated channels, then, emerges as the chief challenge for Spiegelman. Comparing his use of the image in *Maus* to that in *No Towers*, Katalin Orban writes:

> *No Towers* needs to negotiate the powers of the documentary
> image, but in the context of image saturation rather than of image
> prohibition: its images are vulnerable to the visual text's

[2] For more on the relationship between corporate media and the government see Edward S. Herman's and Noam Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media.*

unintended absorption into the lightness of the infinitely repeated
and repeatable televisual documentary image, into the CNN-
image-as-document. So in *Maus* the work's main concern is how
not to overwrite another visual archive of its subject; in *No Towers*,
it is how not to be overwritten by it. (60)

One of the ways that *No Towers* resists being overwritten by the televisual image
is by inscribing narrative in a fluid space that denies the possibility of political
stasis. In Spiegelman's comics, we experience narrative as a fluid spatial practice.
On a formal level, the book strategically resists formal classification, at once
simulating the experience of newspapers, novels, television news reports,
advertisements, coffee table books, photographs, postcards, and, of course, serial
comics. On the first broadsheet, Spiegelman juxtaposes an image of Dan Rather—
framed as a talking head by what appears to be the border of a television—with
(1) a three-frame contemporary comic strip showing a "normal" American family
reacting to the attacks on television; (2) a stylistically turn-of-the-century strip;
(3) a pixilated stock image depicting smoke pouring out of the towers before they
fell; (4) a digitally-rendered image of the tower's glowing frame; and (5) a
photographed image of a shoe, completing the joke initiated in the second strip.
By using television as the connective motif of this panel and by playfully
juxtaposing these media against one another, Spiegelman satirically comments on
the ways that national politics and media ubiquity are intertwined.

More importantly, though, this first sheet conflates mediated narratives in such a way as to call our attention to the problematic task of challenging political discourse through a single lens. By challenging these modes of discourse, Spiegelman sets out his project of creating a counter-narrative through the conflation of various media, thereby generating a textual environment in which time and space are removed from static mediation. In moving freely between media and, therefore, between political spaces, as readers we resist being interpellated as static subjects within a single, politically-inscribed discursive space. As Martha Kuhlman has already noted in her essay on *No Towers*, Spiegelman uses the spatial potential of comics to break the frame of conventional narrative, allowing readers to creatively determine their narrative movement through the book (856). Kuhlman correctly notes the ways that Spiegelman critiques the stable, linear narratives that determine mainstream politics, but she largely overlooks his commentary on mediation and its role in narrative production. Spiegelman's interest in mediated narratives appears in the first frames of the book, entitled "The New Normal," in which he depicts a family— over the course of three frames—reacting to the events of 9/11 while watching television in their living room. The first frame, September 10th according to the calendar on the wall, shows them complacently watching television, indifferent to politics; the second frame, September 11th, shows them reacting to the attacks, clearly traumatized by the events transpiring on television; in the final frame, the calendar has been replaced by an American flag and the family has returned to

their state of political complacency. This strip demonstrates the extent to which Americans' responses to the attacks were informed and, indeed, dictated by the media. The family's only source of information comes from the television, which has presumably defined patriotism as the "normal" response to the attacks; under the direction of a media presence that consistently reinforces the politics of the state, Americans, Spiegelman satirically suggests, can return to a state of normalcy, that is, a state of political complacency. Spiegelman seems to argue that the only way to separate oneself from the politics of the state is to challenge the modes of production that strategically embed these discourses in mainstream popular culture.

Spiegelman's critique of the mediated environment in many ways falls in line with work being done in media studies and its application to 9/11. Fritz Breithaupt's essay, "Rituals of Trauma: How the Media Fabricated September 11," offers interesting ways of approaching Spiegelman's experiments with mediation. Breithaupt argues that the media response to 9/11 served as a fabrication of trauma in which, by representing the attacks as "traumatic," the media was able to play the role of both friend and therapist, representing the trauma of the attacks and simultaneously providing the means through which the public could come to terms with that trauma (73). By interpellating the public as "traumatized" and therefore incapable of making sound political decisions, this process gave free license to the government and the military to conduct military campaigns in the Middle East without the oversight of a politically-savvy public

(81). In this way, the media was able to induce a state of trauma as a means of depriving the public of political agency. Noting the connections between media representations and the experience of trauma, Breithaupt writes, "The media are the apparatus that make possible the repetition of events, that amplify the magnitude of events, that offer events as an experience to those who were not present, and that bridge spatial and temporal orders (such as the past and present)…Thus, there is a functional similarity between the concept of 'trauma' and the modern mass media" (68). Through repetition, the media simulates trauma and packages it for consumption, all of this working, of course, to locate Americans within a particular political framework. Processes of mediation therefore mirror, reflect, and produce the experience of trauma, and this process tends to interpellate individuals in positions of political complacency.

While Breithaupt sees the production of trauma as a negative consequence of mediation (to a certain extent—as we see in the "The New Normal"—Spiegelman subscribes to this view) it also could be seen as an opportunity to resist the discourses of the state. As Jenny Edkins suggests, seeing trauma as a moment of political suspension that temporarily removes individuals from these discourses allows us to harness trauma as a potentially empowering psychological response to violence. Commenting on the media's ability to fabricate trauma, Spiegelman uses intermedial experiments to simulate the experience of trauma and, in turn, produce spaces of political agency and mobility that contest an otherwise pervasive system of politics. Acknowledging the relationship between

media and trauma, the book produces highly-mediated spaces that mimic the media's ability to initiate traumatic repetition and, simultaneously, produce that repetition as a means of removing the reader from the space of dominant discourse. Thus, Spiegelman both critiques the media's production of trauma ("The New Normal") and uses its heteromedial textual space to induce a potentially productive traumatic experience for the reader.

If modern mass media simulates the experience of trauma, then Spiegelman's interest in using media to produce and sustain counter-narratives is significant; by overwhelming us with narratives embedded in various everyday media—television, newspaper, digital media, etc.—he simulates the experience of living within the spectacle and thereby simulates the trauma of the spectacle: the sense of dislocation and powerlessness associated with our relationship to institutional power. Moving between these media and encountering Spiegelman's fragmented narratives, we exist in between zones of mediation, occupying uncomfortable, but ultimately productive, liminal spaces that prevent us from subscribing to any single narrative invested in any single narrative medium. If it is true, as Kali Tal has noted, that "Trauma is enacted in a liminal state, outside the bounds of 'normal' experience, [where] the subject is radically ungrounded" (15), then the textual space of *No Towers*—with its intermedial resonances—invites readers to enter the space of trauma and thereby take steps toward dismantling official narratives.

Katalin Orban notes the ways that Spiegelman resists presenting a central narrative in *No Towers*, instead offering a series of fragmented, "micronarratives" that circulate throughout the book. She interprets this "antinarrative impulse" as an attempt to provide alternatives to state-endorsed master-narratives (85). What is interesting, here, is how Spiegelman's narrative concerns have evolved from their earlier iterations in *Maus*. Using the Holocaust as its traumatic referent, Spiegelman there adopted fairly conventional, linear narrative models for the novel's two chief narratives: his parents' experience in the Holocaust and his own experience as a secondary witness. In *No Towers,* the only consistent sense of temporality we experience is each broadsheet's increasing temporal distance from September 11th, and this lack of narrative unity suggests that Spiegelman's aims are very different in the two books. In this era, Spiegelman seems to suggest, narratives are dangerous, and the book's anti-narrative structure attempts to resist the political forces always threatening to claim 9/11.

Considering his emphasis on media as the perpetrator of political trauma, Spiegelman's attempts to create heteromedial spaces—spaces that deny investment in any single media presence—reveal his interest in seeing trauma as a complex result of mediation. This appears most explicitly in the repetition of the book's central image: the glowing frame of the North tower moments before its collapse. This image appears on every broadsheet, and its presentation as a digitally-rendered image stands in stark contrast to the conventional illustrations that make up the rest of the book. Spiegelman writes, "I repeatedly tried to paint

this with humiliating results but eventually came close to capturing the vision of disintegration digitally on my computer" (ii). It is significant that the pixilated image—a visual representation of the traumatic Real—finds its closest articulation through digital production. Spiegelman seems to acknowledge that only through the hypermediated image can trauma be accurately represented, suggesting that trauma—especially for those witnessing the attacks on television—is, even as it occurs, caught up in processes of image production and consumption. Understanding that Americans experience and process trauma in this way, Spiegelman produces a political counter-narrative that works from within the narrative machinery of the spectacle. This is significant and effective considering the psychological distance Spiegelman achieves in the years following the attack; in the final frames of the last broadsheet, the glowing towers, he writes, "seem to get smaller every day" (10).

More importantly, though, the reader experiences a sense of traumatic repetition as the image continually intrudes on and interrupts the micronarrative frames, representing and reenacting trauma through the digital image. In her article on *No Towers*, Karen Espiritu questions Spiegelman's decision to digitally-render the tower's glowing frame. Her response, that the "image of the attacks lies at the core of Spiegelman's traumatic experience, the sheer vividness and meaning of which—try as he might to incorporate, master and contain it in all ten of his renderings of 9/11—will always already elude him" (188) does not quite address the chief issue at stake here: the image's digital production. Spiegelman

chooses a highly-mediated, highly-synthetic mode of production precisely to comment on the ways that we have come to understand trauma in the digital age. The repetition of the mediated image replicates the spectacle's modes of transmission and simulates the non-stop media coverage that prevented Americans from processing the event in personally-productive ways. Mimicking the institutional mediation of trauma within a politically-subversive textual space, Spiegelman produces a politically-fluid, rather than static, traumatic encounter.

Furthermore, the digital image reminds us of our detachment from the Real, particularly as it relates to our political and economic environment—the tower operating as the chief symbol for American hegemony and global commerce. The image functions more specifically as a variation on Vincent Mosco's notion of "the digital sublime." Whereas Mosco describes the digital sublime as a result of the individual's encounter with technology and the awe-inspiring mythology of progress associated with it, my reading of the digital sublime posits the sublime experience as the result of the inseparability of fantasy and the Real as a result of mediation. As we encounter the glowing tower over and over again in the pages of *No Towers*, we, too, are continually reminded—through the traumatic repetition of the visual spectacle—of the extent to which the spectacle shapes, dictates, and produces our modes of understanding and interpreting the world.

In "Welcome to the Desert of the Real," Slavoj Zizek famously challenges the claim that the attacks on the World Trade Center represent an intrusion of the

Real, a dissolution of the fabric of the hyperreal.[3] He writes:

> We should…invert the standard reading according to which the
> WTC explosions were the intrusion of the Real which shattered our
> illusory sphere: quite the reverse—it was before the WTC collapse
> that we lived in our reality, perceiving Third World horrors as
> something which was not actually part of our social reality, as
> something which existed (for us) as a spectral apparition on the
> (TV) screen—and what happened on September 11 was that this
> fantasmatic screen apparition entered our reality. It is not that
> reality entered our image: the image entered and shattered our
> reality (i.e. the symbolic coordinates which determine what we
> experience as reality). (16)

This passage helps to explain the function of the glowing tower in Spiegelman's
text. Rather than attempting to circumvent the mediated channels that inform our
experience of reality, the image of the glowing tower—in its digital
reproduction—presents itself as a hypermediated component of the spectacle. The
only way to confront the spectacle—to "shatter our reality"—is to expose the
violence of the mediated image and, in this case, its ability to produce the
traumatic encounter.

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[3] It is this brand of thinking that would lead pundits to declare that the age of
irony is over. Seeing the falling of the towers as the symbolic end to
postmodernity ignores the manner by which the spectacle reinforced itself in the
months after the attacks. The national response to the attacks made clear that, if
anything, irony would be more necessary now than ever before.

Through Spiegelman's repetition of the glowing tower, we can begin to understand the substance of trauma in the age of globalization and digitization. Again I look to Zizek: "we should not mistake reality for fiction—we should be able to discern, in what we experience as fiction, the hard kernel of the Real which we are able to sustain only if we fictionalize it. In short, we should discern which part of reality is 'transfunctionalized' through fantasy, so that, although it is part of reality, it is perceived in a fictional mode" (19). Spiegelman uses the digital image as a "fictional mode," one that, in its overtly synthetic appearance, mediates and therefore buffers the raw experience of the Real. What is significant about this process is the way that Spiegelman's fictional mode, itself an attempt to communicate trauma, actually makes evident the more complex and traumatic relationship between the individual and the mediated environment of the twenty-first century; the more insidious threat than the specter of global terrorism, Spiegelman would have us believe—and the one which permeates every page of *No Towers*—is the relationship between politics and mediation (and the processes of narrativization embedded within it), processes that ultimately deprive us of political agency. Thus, while the glowing tower on a personal level signifies Spiegelman's attempts to communicate the trauma of witnessing the towers fall on September 11th, the fictional mode of the digital image speaks to a far more disturbing component of the mediated spectacle; the digital image reveals the spectacle's capacity for transmitting trauma *and* determining the modes by which we process trauma.

By deconstructing and fragmenting the mediated presence in *No Towers*,

through both the image of the glowing tower and his textual apparatus,

Spiegelman simulates the traumatic encounter, allowing the reader to experience

trauma as an immersive, rather than descriptive, event. In the absence of

conventional narrative structuring, the reader encounters the book's textual

arrangement as a highly-mediated arena of discourse, one which simulates the

experience of trauma and space. It might be worthwhile to step back for a moment

to discuss the relationship between narrative and space, a concept explored by

philosopher Michel de Certeau in many of his writings. De Certeau describes the

experience of space as the experience of narrative; we organize and understand

physical spaces in the same way we organize and understand narrative.[4] He

writes:

> In modern Athens, the vehicles of mass transportation are called
>
> *metaphorai*. To go to work or come home, one takes a
>
> "metaphor"—a bus or a train. Stories could also take this noble
>
> name: every day, they traverse and organize places; they select and
>
> link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of
>
> them. They are spatial trajectories. (115)

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[4] De Certeau's commentary on spatiality in large part draws from the writings of
Henri Lefebvre, his predecessor in spatial theory. In *The Production of Space*,
Lefebvre argues that space is produced through social interaction and lived
experience. Spatial practices offer resistance to capitalism and its inscription on
urban space, and by producing space, we generate nodes of resistance within an
otherwise dominant power structure.

By offering a number of spatial trajectories, each, by itself, undercut by the presence of mediation, Spiegelman produces a spatial environment that offers the reader political mobility. To use a media analogy, we could say that he replaces our old-school television antenna, which picked up only one channel, with the premium satellite package, which now gives us hundreds of channels and a wide array of political perspectives (in stunning HD!). Spiegelman similarly realizes the potential to create immersive textual environments through narrative. We look again to de Certeau: "*space is a practiced place*…an act of reading is the space produced by the practice of a particular place: a written text, i.e., a place constituted by a system of signs" (117). Spiegelman's fragmented textual presentation complicates this process. When we, as readers, enter the textual space of *No Towers*, we immersively *practice* the text, producing narrative space through our interaction with the various frames that make up each broadsheet.

By seeing *No Towers* as an immersive spatial environment, we can better understand the ways that Spiegelman both simulates the experience of the mediated spectacle and provides us with agency and mobility as we attempt to create counter-narratives in an intensely mediated environment. Describing the book's indebtedness to spatiality, Hillary Chute writes, "through the play of internal and external space, the architecture of the page splinters and enmeshes temporalities, showing how in a state of trauma, time is no longer able to be understood and chronologized" (238). Seeing the text as a spatial environment encourages us to question the temporal order of narrative and, specifically, the

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legitimacy of the American master narrative of political innocence. One of Spiegelman's chief concerns is to stop the inexorable progress of time, both as a means of confronting personal trauma and as a means of resisting the inscription of the state's political narrative on History. "On 9/11/01 time stopped," Spiegelman tells us, but "by 9/12/01 clocks began ticking again…" (10). Creatively negotiating the space of the text—itself comprised of a series of simultaneous temporalities stretching from the nineteenth century to the present day—we open ourselves to a *spatial* encounter as opposed to a *temporal* one, and this helps us to resist a chronological interpretation of history, one which is intrinsically caught up in the politics of narrativization.

Moving between temporalities, narratives, and media allows us to produce spaces of political agency and mobility and, subsequently, generate valuable counter-narratives that challenge the dominant discourse surrounding 9/11. One of the charges levied against *No Towers* is that its polemical, highly-political approach never rises above mere diatribe against the politics of the Bush administration. Spiegelman's formal stylistics suggest otherwise. In challenging the notion of a stable, mediated, linear narrative of 9/11, he opens the door to counter-narratives that help to deconstruct the machinery of the spectacle. Treating the text as a spatial environment allows us to put de Certeau's ideas into effect in even more radical ways than he had imagined; as we practice space—as we move between the frames of *No Towers*—we create and sustain narratives of our own making, narratives loosed from even Spiegelman's narrative authority.

Reading becomes a creative practice in which we confront and understand trauma as a personal experience that stands apart from the processes of mediation and narrativization that often manufacture trauma for political purposes. In deconstructing the relationship between media, trauma, and narrative, Spiegelman's book both pulls back the veil covering the political Real and gives us ways of contesting its political makeup.

Fractured Narratives

Whereas *No Towers* demonstrates the connections between mediation and the transmission of political narratives and provides spaces of mobility that contest the forces of the spectacle, Jess Walter's 2006 novel, *The Zero*, describes the workings of political trauma, revealing the ways that trauma produces counter-spaces that resist state-endorsed narratives. Walter's book describes the comic adventures of Brian Remy, a New York police officer who, having experienced the destruction and carnage of the attacks on the World Trade Center firsthand, is severely-traumatized and struggling to make sense of his place in the post-9/11 political environment. In the months following the attacks, Remy finds himself working for a shadowy intelligence agency, searching for clues that might help to explain the connections between the attacks and an office worker who supposedly escaped the towers before the planes hit. Walter is emphatic in his critique of the American political and institutional response to the attacks, and the trauma Remy experiences is as much a product of the attacks themselves as of the covert movements of the numerous intelligence agencies that manipulate him over

the course of the novel. Remy's increasing dislocation, disillusionment, and confusion emerge as a result of his unwilling participation in an American intelligence community, a system that, in the interest of national security, justifies intrusions on the personal lives of its own citizens.[5]

Walter's interest in exploring the terrain of political trauma is evident throughout the novel. Like Spiegelman, Walter describes the difficulty of isolating the personal trauma resulting from his protagonist's experience in the towers with the institutional project of projecting trauma through media and other avenues of political discourse. This latter process, Walter seems to argue, deprives individuals of their encounter with the Real, an encounter vital to breaking through the hyperreal layers of political discourse that preclude political engagement. Remy's son explains that generalized grief—the kind, Walter subtly notes, involved in American memorial culture—is "a trend, just some weak shared moment in the culture, like the final episode of some TV show everybody watches" (*The Zero* 34). "History," another character notes, "has become a thriller plot" (150), where the experience of trauma is commodified through survivors' testimony. Jaguar, the purported head of a terror cell, tells Remy, "Entertainment is the singular thing you produce now. And it is just another propaganda, the most insidious, greatest propaganda ever devised, and this is your only export now" (222). Remy's friend, Paul Guterak at one point explains, "Sometimes I wish

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[5] The complex workings of the institutional apparatus that Walter describes is reminiscent of Gilles Deleuze's "control societies," which, following Foucault's "disciplinary societies," exert "ultrarapid forms of free-floating control" on individuals in both public and private space (4). See his essay, "Postscript on Societies of Control" for more on this topic.

we'd just gone to a bar that morning and watched the whole thing on CNN...the

people who watched it on TV saw more than we did. It's like, the further away

you were from this thing, the more sense it made. Hell, I still feel like I have no

idea what happened. No matter how many times I tell the story, it still makes no

sense to me" (Walter 85). Guterak's articulation of trauma and his failed attempts

to narrativize his experience largely emerge as a response to an environment

saturated by media representations of 9/11, representations that have deprived his

experience of its traumatic vitality.

For Remy, the traumatic moment is continually in the process of being

absorbed by media representation. Watching television in a waiting room, "Remy

felt a jolt of déjà vu, anticipating each muted image before it appeared, and it

occurred to him that the news had become the wallpaper in his mind now, the

endless loop playing in his head—banking wings, blooms of flame, white plumes

becoming black and then gray, endless gray, geysers of gray…" (Walter 8). Like

Spiegelman attempting to separate the mediated narrative from his personal

experience of the attacks, Remy's recollection of 9/11—now an integral

component of his character—is continually under the threat of being rewritten and

re-narrativized by external, political forces. Kali Tal explains this process:

"Mythologization works by reducing a traumatic event to a set of standardized

narratives…turning it from a frightening and uncontrollable event into a contained

and predictable narrative…Traumatic events are written and rewritten until they

become codified and narrative form gradually replaces content as the focus of

attention" (6). Remy's chief goal is to preserve his personal experience of 9/11,

which, existing outside of language and, therefore, narrative, provides him with

the crucial opportunity to see beyond nationalist discourse.

On a formal level, *The Zero* attempts to deconstruct its narrative as a

means of simulating the experience of trauma. Suffering from severe

psychological trauma, Remy cannot connect the events in his own life, frequently

losing track of narrative continuity as the novel's narration moves forward. We,

like Remy, find ourselves disoriented by the frequent gaps in the narrative, gaps

that prevent us from understanding History as a continuous narrative. Walter

writes, "These were the most common gaps that Remy had been suffering, holes

not so much in his memory but in the string of events, the causes of certain

effects" (43). By resisting the forces of narrativization that attempt to write

History in political terms that bolster the state, Walter comments on the need for

memory and narrative that go beyond the "official version." He explains, "What

do you trust? Memory? History? No, these are just stories, and whichever ones we

choose to tell ourselves—the one about our marriage, the one about the Berlin

Wall—there are always gaps" (160). Remy's dislocation from "reality"—itself a

term that Walter repeatedly calls into question, noting the ways that the state

manufactures a self-endorsing political reality—in many ways allows him to exist

apart from the dominant discourses surrounding 9/11. Furthermore, Walter seems

to insist that Remy's condition is not unique, but rather a symptom of existence in

the post-9/11 spectacle. He writes, "Perhaps nothing made sense anymore (the

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gaps are affecting everyone) and this was some kind of cultural illness they all

shared" (264). Unlike Spiegelman in *No Towers*, who actively resists subscribing

to core, linear narratives, Remy seems quite simply incapable of sustaining

narratives; his fractured consciousness cannot process the events that transpire

around him. This inability to narrativize reflects the basic substance of trauma,

which Freud outlines in "Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through." He

tells us, "Particularly in the case of the many forms of obsessional neurosis,

forgetting is limited in the main to losing track of connections, misremembering

the sequence of events, recalling memories in isolation" (*Beyond* 35). While it is

no great revelation that Remy is, in fact, a victim of trauma, it is important to note

the fact that his processing of trauma denies him the ability to sustain continuous

narratives, a symptom which gives him crucial access to alternate versions of

reality.

Remy's fractured psychological state, though problematic in terms of his

ability to understand his political environment, in fact offers an alternative to the

state endorsed versions of History that we see both in this novel and in *No

Towers*. Since Walter utilizes a third-person limited perspective with his

narration, we are able to understand the world as Remy understands it: as a

confusing jumble of political vectors embodied most immediately through his

hazy interactions with government agencies: the FBI, the CIA, and his own

department, the Documentation Division of the Office of Liberty and Recovery.[6]

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[6] The purpose of this department is to collect every bit of documentation lost in
the World Trade Center in the ostensible attempt to construct a narrative of

Lost amid these institutions and suffering from trauma largely as a result of this confusion, Remy exists in a liminal zone that prohibits his investment in the state's project of narrativization. He explains, "You can't wake up and you can't go back to sleep. Physically, you're in that…middle place, moving in the real world while your mind is in a dream" (Walter 102). He is "living in two worlds" (54). As Birgit Däwes notes, "he embodies both Self and Other at the same time" (363). At once a government agent and a trauma victim, Remy's identity is perpetually in flux, which, in denying him access to the linear narrative under construction by the state, affords him the critical insight necessary to see beyond these constructed versions of reality.

The novel's repeated commentary on vision and Remy's inability to perceive his environment accurately speaks to this phenomenon. Suffering from macular degeneration, he repeatedly claims to see "flashers and floaters," bits of tissue floating behind his retina, that limit his vision throughout the novel. By the end of the novel, he has completely lost his vision in one eye; Walter is attentive here and throughout the narrative to drawing connections between his failing vision and his increasingly traumatized psyche. Here, blindness as a motif operates in interesting ways, as, in preventing Remy from "accurately" perceiving the world around him, a world saturated by political rhetoric, it in fact gives him a *more* accurate perspective on his environment; the political landscape is significantly more fragmented than state-endorsed narratives, which are packaged for easy consumption, would indicate. Conventional ways of seeing the world,

political innocence.

Walter implies, only provide access to a limited discursive set, one that supports

and justifies the state's political position. Remy's blindness therefore

paradoxically affords him deeper insight to the machinery of the spectacle than

that provided by conventional modes of perception, which often only reinforce a

state of political blindness.

Remy's ability to move beyond this "official version" by "seeing through"

state narratives and resisting a static subject position resonates with both Tal's and

Edkins' commentaries on trauma as a potentially subversive psychological

phenomenon. In *Worlds of Hurt*, Tal emphasizes that "Trauma is enacted in a

liminal state, outside the bounds of 'normal' human experience, and the subject is

radically ungrounded" (15). In Walter's novel, we can clearly see that Remy's

inability to sustain a stable subject position—that is, remove himself from the

liminal state in which he exists—and his consequent inability to make sense of the

state's political machinations appear as symptoms of an ongoing traumatic

relationship to his environment, and both of these symptoms paradoxically afford

him with a perspective beyond the spectacle. Edkins' analysis gives us ways to

understand this. Noting that trauma victims experience a radical disruption of

their temporal coordinates, Edkins explains that this process in fact removes

victims from linear time, providing them with new, productive ways of

understanding their political environment. She writes, "The time of the political

then, which I have called 'trauma time', is the aporetic time of the present, the

moment at which no decision is assured, nothing is certain, the time in which

responsibility is called for, and the time of the precipitate gesture. This is the time of resistance, the time in which the drawing of lines must be resisted and yet political engagement grasped fully" ("Remembering Relationality" 113-114). Walter's novel finds Remy precisely in this position, a position of confusion and uncertainty that prevents him from assimilating and engaging narrative, even on its most basic level. It is important to note that Remy's most severe moments of disorientation are also the moments in which he acts on his conscience, separating himself from his prescribed role as an extension of the government; for instance, he makes a daring attempt to free a political prisoner from torture and, in the final scenes of the novel, attempts to thwart a complicated government plot to entrap innocent Arab-Americans. Confused and bewildered—and operating in trauma time—Remy acts on his human moral impulses, which in the novel are directly opposed to those of the morally-unscrupulous and politically-corrupt state.

Remy's dislocation from his surroundings furthermore situates him (and us) in a subversive space in relation to the state, and Walter teases this out through the novel's political satire. Remy's inability to make sense of his environment produces a series of comic encounters that move the narrative forward. In fact, the novel's narrative impetus relies on the misunderstandings that occur as a result of Remy's inability to comprehend the events around him. For instance, Remy's interactions with Markham, his partner in the Documentation Division, follow a uniform trajectory: Markham enlists Remy's assistance; Remy—in a state of confusion—appears reticent and noncommittal; finally Markham—impressed by

Remy's apparent aloof professionalism—relinquishes his authority and confirms

his opinion of Remy as an elite government agent. This cycle of confusion occurs

throughout the novel with many of the characters Remy encounters. While these

scenes are comical and certainly lighten the mood of an otherwise serious

meditation on political violence, they more importantly establish the spirit of

ironic detachment critical to the novel's commentary on political trauma. Aware

of Remy's lack of investment in the state's covert operations, the reader identifies

the state as comically-incompetent in its campaign against terrorism; while

amusing, this critique achieves political *gravitas* by the novel's conclusion, when

several innocent civilians are killed by government agents.

The irony embedded in Remy's relationship to his environment provides a

model for our ironic relationship to the text, and, as a satire, the novel forces the

reader into a position of ironic detachment from the events that transpire in the

novel. Through satire, both Walter and, to a lesser extent, Spiegelman situate the

reader within an absurd environment in which the most fantastic and far-fetched

political maneuvers are presented as commonplace and politically-justified. For

instance, the basic premise of *The Zero* involves Remy negotiating his

involvement in numerous covert government agencies, none of which are aware

of the others' activities. Seeing as Remy serves as the informational conduit

between these groups, and furthermore recognizing Remy's constant state of

confusion, Walter, adopting satire as his formal mode, provides a space in which

readers may critique the hopelessly incompetent government bureaucracy charged

with protecting Americans from terrorism. When this flawed system results in a botched raid on a terror cell, the reader can only conclude that the bureaucracy, itself, represents a greater threat to Americans than any hostile foreign enemy. Our ironic detachment from these events suggests that "The New Normal," in Walter's view, can only be adequately addressed through the lens of satire, as the political environment is too complex and pervasive for direct confrontation. This, perhaps, is why *The Zero* has drawn so many comparisons to *Catch-22* and the novels of Kurt Vonnegut. Like his predecessors—who also were very much interested in deconstructing America's political environment through satire—Walter seeks to challenge this environment by creating an alternate space for the reader to occupy, one that provides a perspective removed from and critical of the discourses of the state.

If we look at Walter's use of satire as a spatial practice, we can begin to understand how satire provides ways of dismantling the spectacle's discursive power. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau establishes the critical connections between our experience of urban space and our experience of texts. The two, he suggests, are closely-related; we intrinsically understand space in terms of narrative and through the language of narrative.[7] Texts, he goes on to show, serve as spatial environments that operate in the same way as urban

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[7] De Certeau describes the ways that individuals, when describing spaces, almost invariably use narrative as the vehicle for description. For instance, when describing the interior of a house or apartment, instead of describing a birds-eye layout of rooms as depicted in, say, a blueprint, we tend to narrativize space: "you move through the living room, follow the hallway, pass the bathroom on the right, and turn left into the bedroom." The same kinds of narrative impulses, de Certeau argues, govern our experience and understanding of urban spaces (119).

environments; embedded in texts are the politics that dictate urban space, politics

which both deprive individuals of agency and simultaneously provide

opportunities for the production of politically-productive counter-spaces.[8] De

Certeau specifically describes the two avenues for political positioning in space:

strategies and *tactics*. Strategies, he explains, involve the institution's inscription

of power on place (36). Urban environments, for instance, employ strategies—

roadways, office buildings, panopticism, etc.—that facilitate the smooth flow of

labor, consumption, and production. Tactics, on the other hand, are the tools

available to individuals as they contest this space and create counter-spaces of

individual agency. He writes, "The space of the tactic is the space of the other.

Thus it must play on and within a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law

of a foreign power. It does not have the means to *keep to itself*, at a distance, in a

position of withdrawal, foresight, and self-collection: it is a maneuver…within

enemy territory…it operates in isolated actions, blow by blow" (37). Remy's

moments of moral clarity, which occur when he is most deeply implicated in the

government's covert operations and simultaneously dissociated from his official

position, could be read as tactical maneuvers in the text. On a formal level, satire

provides a space for tactical resistance. Head-on narrativization and political

commentary, Walter implies, merely reinforces the political discourse of the

spectacle and perpetuates now-benign modes of political resistance. Tactically

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[8] Here de Certeau draws on the writings of Foucault, who describes space as a
system of discursive control designed to discipline individuals. De Certeau offers
a more optimistic reading of space, describing the ways that individuals may
creatively *read* texts and urban spaces as a means of redefining those spaces.

inhabiting the space of ironic detachment provided by satire, however, allows us to undermine and contest the politics of the spectacle through roundabout ways.

Satire is a tactic insofar as it provides a counter-space within a broader network of political discourse. It uses the political terrain of the state—and specifically the *textual* domain of conventional narrative—as its vehicle for political commentary and resistance. It engages political discourse through the generation of textual space, creating counter-spaces that readers may inhabit to achieve critical distance from linear state narratives. If we view satire as a spatial phenomenon, one that adheres to the spatial politics and practices that de Certeau describes, then we can see how forms that simulate and create spaces can provide tactical resistance to the state's apparatus of narrative production. Satire engages textual space on multiple levels: first, under the guise of realism, it faithfully represents an environment of homogeneous political discourse. Second, it establishes a counter-space to that environment by generating a position of ironic detachment for the reader to occupy. In this way, the spatial distance we achieve from "reality"—that is, the primary space of political discourse—aligns it with de Certeau's commentary on tactics as tools that generate critical distance from the immaterial "reality" sustained by institutional capitalism. For effective political resistance to occur, de Certeau argues, political critique must arise from within dominant structures of power, here, the state and its modes of conventional narrative.

This occurs in *The Zero* when readers find themselves gripped by the suspenseful, fast-paced, neatly packaged central narrative and simultaneously hyperaware of its artifice, thereby occupying critical positions generated by Walter's satire. For instance, we cannot reasonably be expected to believe that Remy's son could perpetuate the belief that his father died in the World Trade Center, especially considering their repeated interactions with one another and their explicit conversations on the topic. Walter here satirizes the processes by which proximity to the attacks, both physical and emotional, were used for cultural capital. In instances like this one, the reader willfully suspends her disbelief, aware of the political satire at work within the central narrative, or "within enemy territory," in de Certeau's words. At once engaged by the novel's "bestseller" qualities and simultaneously attuned to its satirical dimensions, readers may critique institutional politics from a position of ironic detachment that exists under the radar, so to speak, of institutional power.

De Certeau's work in fact borrows from Foucault's writings on the heterotopia, which here provide a more specific tactical model for satire as a spatial practice. A heterotopia is a "counter-site, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within a culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" ("Of Other Spaces" 24). According to Foucault, heterotopias are intrinsic in all societies, both ancient and modern, and they function as responses to the threat of cultural or social homogeneity. The presence of heterotopias, therefore, suggests that space is

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inherently heterogeneous, and that within any dominant discourse exist competing discourses that challenge the homogeneity of the system. In this way, heterotopias insist upon the egalitarian potential of space to challenge cultural and social hegemony and give voice to marginalized positions. The very existence of these spaces within *and* in relation to an established spatio-political structure suggests that no system can free itself from subversive activity that leads to cultural change. Foucault writes, "[heterotopias] have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect" (24). Therefore, these spaces carry the potential for social and political movement insofar as they tactically respond to and challenge the spatial environment in which they exist.

Satire specifically responds to, contests, and subverts institutional modes of narrative production. The fact that satire exists within and in relation to conventional forms of narrativization is important here, considering the crucial relationship between narrative and political power that I have explored in the pages above. Like trauma time, which disrupts the temporal order of narrative and thus calls into question projects of narrativization, satire, by creating a space that "designates, mirrors, and reflects" the values of our political environment, creates a spatial dynamic that encourages us to question both the substance of this environment and the ways it projects itself onto narrative. In *The Zero*, Walter asks the reader to occupy this heterotopic space in order to challenge spectacular

politics. By placing us in a position of ironic detachment and by asking us to engage the text outside the interpretive realm of conventional narrative, he creates a discursive space that encourages subversive political interaction with the text. Like Remy, we are "living in two worlds" as we engage the text, existing simultaneously within the superficial narrative of Remy's adventures and, more importantly, within the heterotopic space of satire, where we, unhindered, are free to critique the machinery of the spectacle. Within this process Walter often sacrifices realism for the political exigencies of satire, opting to characterize the primary narrative as an absurd caricature of contemporary life. This is evident in Remy's relationship with his son, as well as in the novel's central premise that Remy's psychological instability could be consistently misinterpreted by Markham and others. By presenting the chief narrative in these terms, however, Walter shifts our focus from the realist narrative to the space of irony, where his political commentary takes place. In these instances, he critiques the production and consumption of 9/11 survivor narratives and presents the state as both incompetent and politically irresponsible. His political commentary therefore emerges not in the chief narrative but rather from the space of irony generated by satire.

It is important to look at this process in spatial terms because these terms provide the only available means for contesting the discourses of the state, which have embedded themselves in the fabric of contemporary existence. Foucault tells us, "the anxiety of our era has to do fundamentally with space" (23). By this he

means that the increasing sense of powerlessness in the modern environment

derives from the manipulations and disciplining of space perpetrated by

capitalism and the political systems that support it. Politics inscribe themselves on

space through the stratified networks of communication and control that hold

society together: "paths, roads, railways, telephone links, and so on" (Lefebvre

403). Lefebvre explains the fundamental necessity of challenging these spatial

relations—through "the production of space"—in order to regain political agency

in a rapidly transforming modern state. He writes, "The production of things was

fostered by capitalism and controlled by the bourgeoisie and its political creation,

the state. The production of space brings other things in its train, among them the

withering-away of the private ownership of space, and, simultaneously, of the

political state that dominates spaces" (*Production* 410). Here, de Certeau,

Foucault, and Lefebvre find common ground; in each spatial practice—the tactic,

the heterotopia, the production of space—resides the potential for political

resistance, and only through these processes can we begin to challenge the

spectacle. If we see satire as a spatial practice that removes us from a set of

discourses attached to realist narrative conventions, here, associated with the

"official version" of 9/11, then we can see how the secondary spaces that Walter

produces in *The Zero* allow us to engage a discursive set largely silenced by the

state.

By introducing multiple spaces for the reader to inhabit, Walter similarly

asks us to reconsider temporality and its critical role in the formation of national

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narratives. Understanding the world in terms of spaces and geographies requires

us to understand the ways that time operates and, specifically, how temporality

and narrative are related. As many critics have noted, postmodernity sees

simultaneity as the defining temporal mode. As technology and communication

cause our perception of the world to shrink, and as spaces overlap and networks

of power superimpose themselves on one another, time appears to condense, and

individuals increasingly are forced to recognize time outside of conventional

linear models. Events occur simultaneously. Incorporating John Berger's views

on time and space[9] into his own critique, Edward W. Soja explains that we must

embrace:

> a fundamental recomposition of the 'mode of narration', arising
>
> from a new awareness that we must take into account 'the
>
> simultaneity and extension of events and possibilities' to make
>
> sense of what we see. We can no longer depend on a story-line
>
> unfolding sequentially, an ever-accumulating history marching
>
> straight forward in plot and dénouement, for too much is
>
> happening against the grain of time, too much is continually
>
> traversing the story-line laterally. (*Postmodern Geographies* 22-
>
> 23)

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[9] Berger's influence on Soja's work in *Postmodern Geographies* is profound. Particularly in his writings from the 1970s, Berger suggests that the world is more and more organized around space and not time, and that experiencing events simultaneously is the new mode of existence in contemporary life. These concepts would form the foundation for Soja's theories on postmodernity. See Berger's *The Look of Things* for further reading.

Adopting a spatial perspective allows us to more accurately understand the kind of environment that Soja describes and the kind of political space that Walter depicts. The national narratives of 9/11, and of any moment of national trauma, for that matter, adhere to linear narratives as a means of restructuring, ordering, and writing events in history: the more direct the rendering, the more easily it is processed by the American public.

As we encounter Walter's satire, we inhabit multiple spaces simultaneously, which complicates our understanding of time in the novel and, to a degree, simulates Remy's movement through the narrative. This process serves to impugn the national narrative under construction and produce alternative spaces for readers to inhabit. Existing between two subject positions—the morally unscrupulous government agent and the conscientious trauma victim—Remy, too, inhabits multiple spaces and multiple identities simultaneously. From this liminal space, where he experiences the "second-sight" of trauma time, Remy begins to understand time in ways that illuminate the projects of narrativization under way in the post-9/11 environment. At one point, Markham tells him, "You can't race time. It's like trying to swim faster than water. No matter how fast you go, time is the thing you're moving in; it's the thing against which your speed is measured" (Walter 231). Here, time is understood as merely a medium and not an instrument of power. In the novel's conclusion, after shredding the documents associated with their work and effectively erasing their history as government agents, Markham tells Remy, "You know, the more I think about it…maybe you *can* race

time. But I don't think you can win" (319). Here, Walter subtly designates time as an instrument of power, a tool for creating narratives of innocence. However, despite efforts to exert total control over History, time remains flexible and beyond the reach of institutional power. This, perhaps, is because projects of narrativization adhere to linear conceptions of time, which are inconsistent with the temporally-fragmented experience that we see in Remy's narrative. At one point, The Boss—the shadowy mastermind behind the covert operations in the novel—says, "The first rule of effective leadership is to manage your time better than your money. Anyone can make money. Only leaders can make time" (295). Although he is correct in noting the political potential of time and memory, The Boss, unlike Markham, fails to recognize that time operates in more complex ways than projects of linear narrativization would suggest.

The novel's attention to space and time—in both its formal dimensions and its commentary on time as a political tool—brings together the chief concerns of 9/11 literature: trauma, narrative, and space. Trauma victims like Remy, in their ability to engage the productive potential of trauma time, are able to see beyond and outside of the narratives of political innocence perpetrated by the state. The fact that Remy repeatedly acts on his conscience and often prevents acts of political injustice, and that these moments occur when he is most disoriented, suggests that his liminal psychological state, generated by his experience with trauma, has afforded him critical distance from state narratives. In its ability to compress time and thrust individuals into multiple spaces simultaneously, trauma

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provides important avenues for contesting dominant discourses. As we see in the formal strategies the novel employs—its fragmented narrative and its use of satire as a spatial practice—the book creates vital opportunities for penetrating the pervasive dynamic of space and power that defines existence in the post-9/11 era. National narratives, as both Walter and Spiegelman are keen to point out, are continually inscribing themselves on the official record of History, and these two books make overt attempts to destabilize this process and create alternate spaces for productive political exchange.

Manufactured Narratives

While Spiegelman and Walter both represent and simulate trauma as a means of situating characters and readers outside the boundaries of national narratives, Ken Kalfus' *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* challenges the very substance of political trauma, suggesting that the modes we use to process trauma are themselves caught up in the discursive realm of institutional politics. Set in the months following the attacks on the World Trade Center, the novel depicts the acrimonious divorce proceedings of a New York couple, Marshall and Joyce Harriman, who are incapable of understanding their separation in terms outside of those provided by the political narratives of the state. Their divorce is figured throughout the novel as an extended metaphor for the internecine political actions of the Bush administration; the separation serves as a vehicle for commentary on the New Normal as a state of profound personal and public instability and simultaneously presents the mutually-destructive schemes of each character as

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corollaries for the state's political campaigns both at home and abroad. Kalfus'

playful rendering of these issues parodies the American response to 9/11,

suggesting that *all* modes of processing personal trauma and establishing

positions of political agency have in fact been co-opted by the state; even

engaging trauma time, it seems, is no longer a viable response to the machinery of

political trauma. In this regard, *A Disorder*, despite its irreverent tone, is

significantly darker in substance than *No Towers* and *The Zero*. Kalfus recognizes

that, positioned against political discourses that blur public/private boundaries,

individuals are increasingly prevented from producing spaces of political agency.

From the first pages of *A Disorder*, Kalfus establishes ironic distance from

the traumatic event of the attacks on the towers. Joyce, watching the towers

collapse and imagining the death of her husband, who works in the World Trade

Center "felt something erupt inside her, something warm, very much like, yes it

was, a pang of pleasure, so intense it was nearly like the appeasement of hunger.

It was a giddiness, an elation...she felt a great gladness" (Kalfus 3). Marshall,

narrowly escaping the World Trade Center before its collapse and believing that

his wife had boarded United Flight 93 en route to California, heads home, covered

in ash and nursing a head wound, "nearly skipping" (20). These passages refuse to

subscribe to conventional representations of the traumatic event, instead

rhetorically transforming 9/11 from a national tragedy to a personal triumph for

each character; believing that their messy divorce has been settled by the

"disaster," each character celebrates what he/she perceives to be a personal

victory in the divorce proceedings. These reactions are particularly startling due to the graphic account of Marshall's escape that we see in the same chapter. Marshall, attempting to rescue a man from the collapsing tower, "saw that [the man] wasn't listening, that half his head—Marshall couldn't tell which half—had been ripped away…[Marshall] would have to will himself to forget whatever he saw" (17). By juxtaposing this horrifying scene with their dispassionate reactions, the novel recognizes the immediate experience of the attacks as traumatic, but undercuts this experience by suggesting that the traumatic encounter—itself caught in the discourses of the state—is immediately assimilated into the fabric of everyday life. By refusing to acknowledge the traumatic event and instead projecting it onto their personal lives, the characters of *A Disorder* demonstrate the impossibility of sustaining trauma time and thus penetrating nationalist discourse.

In the absence of these modes of processing trauma, Joyce and Marshall are denied the possibility of any viable political engagement and instead project their lack of agency onto their failed marriage. Each character engages in acts of betrayal and sabotage against the other in efforts to ruin the other's social standing and potentially secure a more favorable divorce settlement. For instance, Joyce seduces Marshall's closest friend, Roger, in an attempt to undermine their friendship. She comically carries out the plot as an extended reenactment of an Afghan tribal conflict in which, according to Joyce's limited knowledge of the topic, sex "was a weapon," operating on the logic that "the friend of my enemy is

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my enemy" (63). Marshall, on the other hand, succeeds in sabotaging the wedding of Joyce's sister and her groom, a Jewish man whose faith—Marshall correctly surmises—is a concealed source of resentment for Joyce's WASP mother. Marshall secretly engineers a plot that nearly ruins their wedding, attempting to reveal the mother's latent anxieties and, more importantly, bring to life the specter of religious difference that he hopes will forever taint their relationship. He sees himself as "a crazy fucking divorcing superpower" and remarks, "It was like going back into the building and finding Lloyd [the man he attempted to save]. He didn't know what would happen next and he didn't care" (106). Unable to channel their trauma in productive ways, both Joyce and Marshall reenact trauma through the vindictive, counterproductive schemes that offer no positive outlet for the very real trauma that each of them has experienced.

Rather, these ploys—and the Harriman's divorce, in a broader sense—function as empty projections of political frustration resulting from their lack of political agency. This sense of helplessness is best represented in the sections that locate the narrative perspective behind their pre-adolescent daughter, Viola. Confused by the chaotic domestic environment in which she lives, Viola cannot make sense of the complex negotiations, bitter disagreements, and general instability that surrounds her at all times as a result of her parents' divorce. Kalfus writes, "She knew her understanding was limited. You could identify what lay in front of you, but what it meant was invisible. You could never be sure that you had sufficient data. A person went around in her own shell, defined by what she

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didn't know" (132). Kalfus here uses Viola's limited perspective to comment on Americans' inability to access political reality; extending the metaphor, the divorce—in its confounding complexity—represents American politics and the country's dubious political agenda, which many Americans could not access with any degree of confidence. Kalfus later writes, "[Viola] didn't understand everything the News said. No one did. The News spoke about their lives in secret" (133). News media, in the interest of engaging viewers through the popular rhetoric of patriotism, are most often responsible for disseminating state-endorsed narratives. Like the superficial understanding of divorce that Viola gleans from her friends in school, the news media provides Americans with a perspective that limits access to the complex workings of institutional politics. This, of course, produces an American public inclined, from the start, to support the state's political agenda. One cannot help but recall the 72% of Americans who, misled by our government and the media, initially supported the Iraq War (Newport). Kalfus sums up this process: "The universe was an immense construction that rose from facts, an infinitesimal fraction of which could be apprehended in a single glance. Evidence about everything was around [Viola], if only she could see it. But she couldn't even imagine what she was ignorant about. She was *still* stupid. But what else was she missing?" (145). We, like Viola, find ourselves in this state of political complacency; lacking the vocabulary and the appropriate avenues for addressing the discourses of the state, we cannot begin to establish legitimate positions of agency.

Adopting Viola's narrative perspective in this section forces us to consider the ways that the state has infantilized Americans as a means of manipulating support for its political initiatives. Kalfus involves the reader—both in this section and in the extended divorce metaphor—in the experience of dislocation and confusion that we have come to associate with 9/11. In her book on the American response to 9/11, Marita Sturken describes the infantilization of the American public through the modes of processing trauma that were made available after the attacks. Through consumerism and comfort-culture, and particularly the use of the teddy bear as an ostensibly depoliticized source of comfort, Americans were interpellated as children and, in the process, denied access to legitimate positions of political agency. Sturken explains, "Much of the culture of comfort functions as a form of depoliticization and as a means to comfort loss, grief and fear through processes that disavow politics (6). As "children" experiencing these psychological reactions to the attack, the American public would look to the state as a figure of parental authority, thereby conceding political agency under the assumption that the state would "do the right thing." As the culmination of this process, Sturken argues, the Bush administration was given unchecked license to engage in military campaigns against Iraq, operating in the absence of a politically-cognizant American public. Even worse, these modes of coping with trauma served to strengthen the relationship between consumerism and American politics; patriotism, as George W. Bush, Rudy Giuliani and others made clear in the weeks following the attacks, could be enacted through spending and

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consumption, two processes they deemed necessary for bolstering a reeling

economy (15). This process not only discouraged individuals from asserting

political agency, but also helped to consolidate an institutional presence that, I

argue, contributes to a more pernicious and opaque source of political trauma.[10]

Viola's narrative presence in the novel suggests the ways that Americans

were positioned as children within a political space designed to generate political

ignorance and apathy. Kalfus seems to recognize the difficulty in confronting a

discursive space generated and sustained to operate outside of our vocabulary and

beyond our comprehension. This, perhaps, is why the divorce serves as a stand-in

for post-9/11 politics. With it, he provides us with a more manageable set of

discourses with which to confront an impossibly-complex institutional presence.

More specifically, the divorce reveals the ways that institutional politics have

permeated the fabric of private life and have, in fact, begun to dissolve the

boundaries that divide the public from the private. In the broadest sense, the

language used to describe the divorce—Afghan tribal wars, clandestine,

intramarital plots, associations with the World Trade Center, etc.—indicate the

extent to which politics have embedded themselves in everyday life. Kalfus

writes, "The specter of her marriage rose up before her, a tower one hundred

stories high. So high, you can't get over it. So low, you can't get under it. She

didn't know where to begin" (45). Funkadelic reference aside, Joyce here

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[10] See also Zizek's "Welcome to the Desert of the Real." Zizek claims that we
have entered a state of political paralysis in which it is exceedingly difficult to
separate politics from the political, thus resulting in political apathy and,
ultimately, the desire for the perpetuation of "the very fundamental fantasy that
sustains our being" (97).

articulates the fundamental problem of her relationship with Marshall: she cannot compress it into manageable frames of reference because, like the discourses circulating around 9/11, the marriage is impossibly complex and therefore resists her attempts to process it. As the novel progresses and as the divorce proceedings move forward, the Harriman family feels itself increasingly complicit in state-endorsed narratives; as their nuclear family dissolves, the two are forced to restructure and align their personal lives with the inexorable progression of politics and capitalism. For instance, describing Marshall's evolving role in his company, Kalfus writes, "now, the company had become a family with stronger obligations to its individuals than were observed these days in most natural families" (68). Here Kalfus describes the transition from definitions of the nuclear family as a private entity to the family unit as an extension of the institution; politics have begun to dissolve the boundaries separating private and public spheres.

This phenomenon comes to a head near the novel's conclusion, where Marshall, backed against a wall and facing an increasingly unfavorable divorce settlement, constructs a bomb and attempts to kill himself and his family. The scene, which, thankfully, ends with the bomb malfunctioning (despite Marshall and Joyce's attempts to set it off), demonstrates the disturbing consequences of this blurring of boundaries between public and private spheres and the inauguration of a new kind of nuclear family. Kalfus' rendering of this scene is at once comical, disturbing, and provocative. Entering the living room with the

makeshift bomb strapped to his chest, Marshall seeks Joyce's assistance in setting

off the device. Strangely, Joyce complies, and the two of them carry on an

uncharacteristically congenial conversation about how to fix the problem. The

children, pulling themselves from the television, enter the tableau. Kalfus

describes the intimate process by which Joyce and Marshall check the wiring on

the bomb, noting how, "against [Marshall's] will his body grew warm" and that

"she too had quickened her breath" (190). The children huddle close to their

parents, and Kalfus writes, "This is how the family once looked to the outside

world, how it had once been: a compact unit, loving and intimate" (191). This

alarming depiction of domestic harmony is the only one of its kind in the novel,

and Kalfus seems to suggest that the concept of the private, nuclear family has

evolved to the point where its fabric is now held together by the politics of the

state and the specter of political violence. The scene carries with it an elegiac tone

that suggests the passing of an era in which privacy and family life were separate

from the state. As the moment passes and the family disperses, "[Marshall] could

hear Joyce move away from where they had been in the kitchen, and the

machinery of the apartment's daily life eventually resumed operation: lunch being

made, TV. He buried his face in the pillow and quietly sobbed until it was

soaked" (192). Later, as Marshall stands between his family and the television and

attempts to explain his innocence in the marriage, Viola cries out, "Dad…we

can't see! You're in the way!" (226). Here, the television—a medium promising

new, more complex modes of identification and communication, and certainly a

medium more conducive to manufacturing political consent—provides a more attractive alternative to the outdated concept of the nuclear family.

Through these scenes and the repeated representations of the family as a political unit, the novel asks us to consider how the Harrimans and, more broadly, the American people have allowed divisions between public and private discourse to disappear. Remarking on the tendency for 9/11 novels to follow an interiorizing narrative trajectory, Richard Gray writes, "cataclysmic public events are measured purely and simply in terms of their impact on the emotional entanglements of their protagonists" (30). *A Disorder* utilizes this trajectory to comment on eroding public/private boundaries, and the processes of narrativization and trauma I have described throughout this chapter are at the heart of this phenomenon. In *Unclaimed Experience*, Cathy Caruth writes, "In trauma…the outside has gone inside without any mediation" (59). The traumatic event, an unanticipated moment of violence originating "outside" the individual's psychic space, bypasses the normal modes of psychological processing and penetrates the individual's interior space. Kalfus uses the nuclear family to demonstrate how these public/private zones are compromised by the traumatic encounter; here, the political infiltrates the interior space of the home and reconstitutes what once was a fortified, domestic space. After the moment of trauma, as a means of processing and confronting the traumatic event, we produce narratives that reiterate core values and carry the promise of stability. In the age of hypermediation, however, in which media produce narratives simultaneous to

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the traumatic event, this process becomes more an instrument of the state and the media than a psychological process for individuals to engage. Ana Douglass and Thomas A. Vogler write:

> [In the present age] we have a much more immediately materialized history, one that can even be fabricated and recorded on the spot by the modern media—making history come before collective memory rather than after. Advances in technology do not guarantee greater accuracy for collective memory, since those technologies can readily be manipulated by those in power. (17)

This creates what Douglass and Vogler call a "permanent state of witness," in which individuals are exposed to both trauma and narrativization as two non-distinct processes. Mediation facilitates this process, and to resist the public (state) modes of processing trauma means to resist what the media and the state would have us believe are necessary processes of national identification.

This, perhaps, is why the children in *A Disorder* migrate back to the television set after what should have been a horrifying moment of domestic trauma in their own living room; legitimate, personal trauma does not fit within the constantly proliferating industry of trauma narrativization perpetuated through the media and its representations of 9/11. Describing Joyce's decision to watch Iraq War demonstrations on television, Kalfus writes:

> She remained home with the children, the three of them watching the news on TV, where the worldwide protesters were an image

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shrunk within the screen to make room for the 'War on Terror'

logo, the Homeland Security Threat Bar, and the news crawl. The

crawl scurried: you had to have quick eyes to catch it—UN

resolutions…troop movements…terrorist attacks—and still follow

the stories being told by the live images. You could never catch it.

(222)

Consistent with Breithaupt's analysis of the media's ability to produce trauma,

Kalfus depicts television news as a form heavily invested in generating a

continuous, permanent condition of trauma. Part of Marshall's sense of

dislocation arises from the fact that he has experienced legitimate embodied

trauma and—in a political environment that has laid claim to the language of

trauma and its modes of transmission—he cannot find appropriate avenues

through which to process his experience.

The production and consumption of political narratives in *A Disorder* is

different from what we see in the other novels discussed in this chapter, mainly

due to Kalfus' resignation to the impossibility of engaging the traumatic core of

9/11. Both Joyce and Marshall approach their divorce and the consequent

dissolution of the family as inevitable endpoints in a long history of familial strife,

one whose origins they cannot recall (Kalfus 228-229). Their history, like the

history of the country, has been overshadowed and, arguably, erased by the more

recent conflicts surrounding the divorce (i.e. the 9/11 political landscape). To

highlight this point, Kalfus employs an interesting narrative strategy in the final

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chapter of the novel. The book follows a chronological chapter arrangement, with each chapter representing a month following 9/11: "September," "October," "November," etc. Each chapter traces the chronological progress of the divorce proceedings alongside the political movements of the country. In the final chapter, however, entitled "February March April May June," Kalfus accelerates time and radically alters the novel's narrative structure, departing from a recognizable history and instead creating what one reviewer called "a raucous, Republican dreamscape in which Bin Laden is captured, the invasion of Iraq leads to a blooming of democracy throughout the Middle East and peace, it seems, is finally at hand" (N. Oates 162). Marshall, watching on television as American investigators uncover nuclear weapons in Iraq, tells his children, "This is history" (Walter 230). At the close of the novel, partaking in the celebrations over news of Osama bin Laden's death,[11] "Marshall felt a huge emotion surging within him: it was a relief at bin Laden's capture, of course, but also sudden love for his country, at that moment an honest, unalloyed, uncompromised white-hot passion" (236). Marshall's exuberance, of course, is generated in the patriotic fervor of the 9/11 spectacle and in the culmination of the manufactured narrative of American hegemony. Disavowing political engagement and ignoring a history of American political injustice and violence, Marshall subscribes to the narrative of American innocence.

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[11] Kalfus' novel, written five years before the death of Osama bin Laden, provides an eerily accurate rendition of the actual response to bin Laden's death in 2011. His portrayal of Americans packing the streets around Ground Zero almost perfectly anticipates the events as they occurred and as they were broadcast to the world via news media.

Kalfus' incorporation of this alternate historical narrative complicates the book's commentary on narrativization and trauma. *Within* the novel, this manufactured narrative records the events that occur in its post-9/11 environment: Saddam Hussein's public execution, bin Laden's death, etc. *Reading* the novel, however, we recognize this narrative as a construction, a fiction generated by the author, which simulates the ways that the media manufacture political narratives. Like Walter's satire, this strategy removes us from the space of the text when we become aware of its artifice, allowing readers to critique the substance of the novel's narrative and the ways that narratives, themselves, are always caught up in political projects. In this way, Kalfus creates a counter-narrative subtext that challenges the production of state-endorsed narratives like the one we see at the novel's conclusion. Depicting events that had yet to or never would occur, *A Disorder,* in this last chapter, creates a space for the reader that encourages subversive, tactical readings. The divide between our experience of history in the months following 9/11 (the bulk of the novel's historical backdrop) and the manufactured narrative that we see here at the end of the novel disrupts our sense of narrative stability; it furthermore undermines our faith in the narratives that have come to represent the American experience of 9/11.

Reading from this counter-space, then, helps us to process the political commentary that Kalfus makes throughout the novel. Recognizing that 9/11's over-representation has made critical engagement increasingly difficult,[12] Kalfus

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[12] For a comprehensive collection of essays that deal with 9/11 and media representation, see *Media Representations of September 11 Media*

suggests the possibility of re-thinking our investment in narrative—particularly as it is produced by the media and through the power of the image—as the sole means of understanding 9/11. This, perhaps, is why Kalfus chooses the divorce metaphor—the novel's chief narrative vehicle—as his lens for viewing the American political landscape. Through this metaphor, we can move ourselves beyond conventional representations of 9/11 invested in image and narrative, and access alternative positions that provide spaces for tactical movement. Since media saturation has largely made 9/11 an unrepresentable, sacred event,[13] viewing the spectacle through the lens of a mundane divorce narrative allows us to read and represent 9/11 through an alternate discursive set. This allows representation to occur indirectly, from a liminal space, which, as I have shown, is the only way to successfully contest state-endorsed narrative production.

While the reader is able to attain this crucial remove by recognizing the divergent narrative strains in the final chapter, Marshall and Joyce, lacking the tactical counter-space from which to critique the spectacle, cannot successfully produce spaces of political engagement. Unlike Remy in Walter's novel or Spiegelman in *No Towers*, Marshall and Joyce, victims of a world in which their very modes of processing trauma are themselves bound to mediation, are

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Representations of September 11. The book works from the position that our understanding of 9/11 is wholly dependent on the ways that various media have constructed it.

[13] In many ways, 9/11 has followed a trajectory similar to that of the Holocaust, which in recent decades has attained the status of a traumatic event that resists representation. Indeed, as Joyce Carol Oates has remarked, addressing the difficulty of writing 9/11, "September 11 has become a kind of Holocaust subject, hallowed ground to be approached with awe, trepidation, and utmost caution."

incapable of establishing political positions apart from state narratives. For instance, coming to terms with trauma often involves testimonial rituals in which survivors narrativize their personal experiences into more manageable frames of reference.[14] In *A Disorder*, Marshall uses his testimony for ulterior purposes: first, sabotaging Joyce's brother's bachelor party and, second, making advances on Viola's attractive elementary school teacher, Naomi. Each instance cheapens the process of testimony and precludes the opportunity for Marshall to come to terms with his experiences in genuinely productive ways. Furthermore, the book's insistence on mocking Americans' experience with trauma—Afghan ringtones (116), "terror sex" (23), upper-class "hostage situations" (121) children's games that "reenact" the traumatic images of defenestration (115)—suggests that the middle class experience of 9/11 is one that is intensely tied to consumerism, patriotism, and political projects that seek to represent 9/11 as an experience available to all Americans. "It was all very thrilling," Joyce confesses at one point (39). This dilution of trauma affects Marshall in profound ways, as, unable to distinguish his own experiences from the insincere performances of trauma that surround him, he is denied access to the traumatic Real that could potentially help him to process his experience.

This helps to explain his willingness to embrace the jingoistic manufactured narrative at the novel's conclusion, and this general process speaks

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[14] See *Testimony*, by Shoshona Felman and Dori Laub for the most informative study on this subject. Felman and Laub describe the ways that trauma can be communicated to others through testimony, and how this process itself can produce secondary trauma for those who bear the burden of testimony.

to the ways that the spectacle attempts to co-opt discursive spaces—even those traditionally associated with modes of processing trauma—in order to deprive individuals of political agency. Marshall's progression toward this state[15] is not to be read as unique or exceptional; Kalfus suggests that the movement toward political complacency is inevitable for all Americans confronted by the state's machinery of narrative production. He writes, "After years of tantalizing America with the potential of war, Iraq had finally aroused the nation's patriotism, its fighting spirit, and the pleasure it took in the exercise of new technology. Now the nation was ready and even those who opposed the war tasted that longing. To their television screens they whispered, *Let's get it over with*" (223). In this regard, Kalfus' vision is darker and less optimistic than Spiegelman's and Walter's. Whereas the latter two writers reveal the possibility of using trauma as a tactical response to the discourses of the state, Kalfus laments the relationship between national politics and the processing of trauma, recognizing that Americans have lost their political subjectivity as a result of the rhetorical power of national narratives.

If avenues exist for contesting the state, they exist only for the reader in her encounter with narrative, and, like *The Zero* and *In the Shadow of No Towers*, *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* calls into question projects of narrativization that reinforce the politics of the state. Seeing narrative as a spatial encounter

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[15] The narrative trajectory that Marshall follows is similar to Winston Smith's in *1984* and R.P. McMurphy's in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Defeated by the institutional powers that surround them, each character's narrative arc involves a tragic movement toward political submission. The point is that individuals lack the political agency to contest or dismantle these pervasive systems of power.

allows us to create counter-spaces and counter-narratives that generate political

positions that escape institutional authority. This practice furthermore positions

the reader as an active participant in these political processes, and the act of

producing counter-spaces and counter-narratives represents a significant

vindication of reading and the power of fiction. This chapter has described

narrative as a political instrument, one utilized all too often as a means of

disengaging Americans from political discourse. Even as such, its spatial

dimensions offer readers opportunities for establishing themselves against the

politics of the state, and this process suggests the potential for reclaiming political

subjectivity in an age increasingly dominated by institutional power.

The system of narrative production that I have discussed throughout this

chapter would ultimately shape Americans' perception of the chief political

campaigns of both the Bush and Obama administrations: the creation of the

Department of Homeland Security, the opening of the Guantanamo Bay detention

camp, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the eventual killing of Osama bin Laden.

In each case, national narratives shaped public opinion and helped to galvanize

support for costly political projects that dramatically altered America's position in

global politics. The first of these campaigns, the initiation of the "homeland

security state," is the subject of chapter two. In much the same way that the

mediation of trauma that we see in Kalfus' novel dismantles the boundaries of

public and private space in the Harriman household, the rhetoric of an American

"homeland" worked more broadly to blur the distinctions between the state and

the home, thus situating individuals in closer proximity to state biopower. In the following chapter, I explore how the psychological and political dimensions of domestic space worked alongside narratives that positioned America as a fortified, ideologically-pure "home" worth defending, at whatever cost. At the heart of these processes are the same forces that defined our experience of 9/11 and its aftermath: space and narrative.

CHAPTER 2

WRITING HOME: DOMESTIC SPACE AND THE AMERICAN HOMELAND

Homeland security will make America not only stronger, but, in many ways,

better…And as government works to better secure our homeland, America will

continue to depend on the eyes and ears of alert citizens.

> President George W. Bush, "The President's State of the Union
>
> Address, 2002"

Sit in your old rocking chair / You need not worry, you need not care / You can't

go anywhere…Too scared to think about how insecure you are / Life ain't so

happy in your little Shangri-La.

> The Kinks, "Shangri-La"

On September 18th, 2002, as part of the Lannan Foundation's literary

awards ceremony, author and activist Arundhati Roy delivered a moving speech

entitled "Come September" which addressed America's relationship to global

terrorism and our country's involvement in projects of political violence in the

decades leading up to 9/11. Adopting a stance that clearly challenged narratives of

America's political innocence, Roy suggested that 9/11 opened Americans' eyes

to political violence as a very real symptom of globalization. With her speech, she

sought "to share the grief of history. To thin the mists a little. To say to the

citizens of America, in the gentlest, most human way: 'Welcome to the World'"

(Roy 3). Whether Americans have become more savvy critics of global politics as

a result of 9/11 is unclear, but, as Roy points out, the event forced us to consider

the country within a global community, a community with complex economic,

religious, and social dimensions, each equally powerful and each equally capable

of producing violence. As a consequence of 9/11 and of this changing perception

of America's position in a global community, debates on national security gained

newfound urgency as Americans sought to secure the homeland—both

rhetorically and materially—against the threat of the foreign violence.

Underlying these impulses to protect the American homeland is a deeply

rooted psychological attachment to domestic space. From the creation of the

sprawling Department of Homeland Security in November of 2002 to the

increasingly heated debates over illegal immigration and the tightening of the

borders, Americans—contrary to Roy's hopes—have become even more

exclusionary, opting to define America as a "home" only to those who have a

legitimate claim on it, whatever that might mean. Our attachment to domestic

space as the predominant model for understanding the "homeland" and the "home

front" is not particularly surprising, as domestic space on its most basic level

suggests stability and protection, two concepts integral to nationhood. Less

obvious are the ways that narrative and domestic space are intertwined and the

ways that violence may infiltrate domestic space, generating traumatic ruptures

that threaten to dismantle our the ideologically-constructed "homes." Considering

the metonymic relationship between "the home" and "the nation," two concepts

that carry a great deal of cultural, historical, social, and psychological baggage, it

is worth examining how our negotiation of the former bears upon our construction

of the latter.

In her essay, "Homeland Insecurities: Reflections on Language and

Space," Amy Kaplan deconstructs the recent use of the term "homeland,"

designating it as a product of a rapidly mobilizing security state. Examining the

rhetorical dimensions of this new term in American politics, Kaplan argues that

the proliferation of discourse on homeland security in the years following 9/11

reflects a dramatic expansion of state power and a shift in the individual's

relationship to the state. She explains, "the choice of the word puts into play a

history of multiple meanings, connotations, and associations that work, on the one

hand, to convey a sense of unity, security, and stability, but more profoundly, on

the other hand, work to generate forms of radical insecurity by proliferating

threats of the foreign lurking within and without national borders" (90). Donald

Pease's more recent critical work on the term also designates the homeland as a

rhetorical device that, in dislocating U.S. citizens from their imagined "America,"

justifies "the spectacular unsettling of homelands elsewhere" (170). Drawing from

their and others' work on the nation as an imagined space of domesticity, this

chapter suggests that—even if the term "homeland" is new to the American

political vocabulary—many of the post 9/11 discourses on homeland security

were, in fact, embedded in our cultural imagination prior to the attacks on the towers.

The anxieties over homeland security that continue to pervade the American national consciousness in many ways emerge from the processes of narrativization at the heart of domestic space. If political narratives—like those discussed in the previous chapter—are brought to life by and contained within the trope of the house, then our experience and practice of domestic space involves an implicit re-articulation of the politics of the state. Through discourses on Homeland Security, state narratives, in short, embed themselves in the practice of everyday life. James Hay's recent article, "Designing Homes to Be the First Line of Defense: Safe Households, Mobilization, and the New Mobile Privatization" discusses the fashioning of a "moral economy" through the state's intervention in issues of home security and personal safety. He writes, "Homeland Security is not only a matter of *articulating* the domestic sphere to a national and global crisis/threat but of developing and *acting upon* a set of technical strategies from the domestic sphere as a response to this broader crisis as a threat to a Homeland" (352). By practicing the politics of the state in the most intimate of lived spaces, individuals establish themselves as biopolitical agents, activating "technologies of the self" that enable the performance, on individual, private levels, of a national political agenda. Furthermore, internalizing state narratives in this way often results in an implicit endorsement of ideological homogeneity and state violence;

state violence is, in fact, necessary as a means of preserving ideological homogeneity.

This chapter engages two texts—Philip Roth's *American Pastoral* and Michael Haneke's *Funny Games*—to demonstrate how, no matter how exhaustively we fortify our domestic spaces, the political will always intervene and will often do so violently. Roth's novel, written in 1997, in many ways anticipates the fears and anxieties of the post-9/11 world and furthermore attests to the fact that institutional projects of narrative production were by no means initiated by the attacks on the World Trade Center; rather, these processes have been shaping our world since the movement toward globalization and the erosion of the middle class in the latter part of the twentieth century. Both works in various guises offer commentary on an illusory American way of life embodied and articulated through the trope of the house. Here, narratives of political innocence and exceptionalism thrive within the firmly-established institution of domesticity, an institution at the heart of American discourse and identity.[1]

As in the previous chapter, I am here interested in the connections between narrative, politics, and space, and specifically how the contemporary discourse on domestic terrorism and national security helps us to understand the complex workings of political narratives. These texts suggest that narrative violence—i.e. a writer's attempt to challenge our expectations of narrative

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[1] Although much has been written on gender and domestic space, this chapter is more invested in theorizing domesticity in terms of nationalism and the individual's relationship to both the home and the nation as rhetorical constructs. In this regard, one of my aims with this chapter is to suggest new approaches to theorizing domestic space that move outside of the traditional gender paradigm.

through radical formal experiments—functions similarly to an act of domestic terrorism, as both processes seek to dismantle a political infrastructure that sustains dominant discourses of power. Demonstrating the ways that narrative desire renders us complicit in the politics of the state, these texts furthermore require us to problematize our relation to domestic space, narrative violence, and the state. Engaging narrative in both its novelistic and filmic dimensions, the following pages focus on the house as a locus for narrative production, one that, no matter how much faith we put in notions of American domesticity, is always susceptible to acts of political violence.

Domestic Imaginaries

Philip Roth's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *American Pastoral* is at first glance a book about a failed vision of domestic bliss. Its protagonist, the blond-haired, blue-eyed Seymour "The Swede" Levov, "the household Apollo of the Weequahic Jews," from his youth as a star high school sports athlete to his years as a father and a husband, lives out a fantasy life of American domesticity (Roth 4). The Swede grows up in Newark and, later in his life, settles in the idyllic Old Rimrock, where he marries a former Miss New Jersey, Dawn Dwyer, and fathers Merry Levov, a perfectly normal daughter who seems to complete his vision of American domesticity. Seeing himself as a modern-day Johnny Appleseed (315) and maintaining "an unconscious oneness with America" (20), the Swede is a projection of American identity and, specifically, American political innocence. When Merry, at the age of sixteen, finds herself embroiled in the world of radical

anti-Vietnam politics, the Swede's vision of domestic harmony begins to dissolve,

culminating in the horrific realization that his daughter had been responsible for

bombing a post office in Old Rimrock and, in the process, killing a local doctor.

When Merry disappears after the bombing, the Swede is left to reconcile his

fractured existence with his prior visions of domestic harmony.

From the novel's first descriptions of the Swede as a star high school

athlete, we can see his investment in narrative production and how this later

manifests itself in the domestic fantasy he creates in Old Rimrock. Early in the

novel Roth describes the Swede's symbolic role in the community and his

function as an instrument that facilitates political repression.[2] He writes, "through

the Swede, the neighborhood entered into a fantasy about itself and about the

world, the fantasy of sports fans everywhere: almost like Gentiles (as they

imagined Gentiles) our families could forget the way things actually work and

make an athletic performance the repository of all their hopes. Primarily, they

could forget the war" (3-4). Here Roth points out the tendency for individuals to

produce redemptive narratives as a means of repressing the trauma embedded in

narratives of political violence and war. Later Roth explains that the Swede "was

fettered to history, an *instrument* of history," capable of inspiring hope in the

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[2] See Gary Chase Johnson's article, "The Presence of Allegory: The Case of
Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*" for a more complete discussion of the
allegorical dimensions of the novel. Johnson makes the critical distinction
between the representation of allegory, which we see in the community's
perception of the Swede, and the later counternarrative, generated by the novel's
narrator, Nathan Zuckerman, which challenges the values invested in this
allegoresis.

community even in the face of horrific accounts of American deaths at the hands of the Germans (5-6).

The Swede's traumatic relationship to history, of course, has much to do with his Jewish American identity and his attempt, in the following years, to negotiate a post-Holocaust backdrop of violence in America. Here, forgetting "the war" (rather than the culturally-specific "Holocaust") aligns the Swede within a particular American, rather than Jewish, cultural and national experience. Consciously unwilling to confront the reality that his Jewish identity locates him as a target for subtle forms of political violence, he embraces a public persona that ostensibly erases his status as a political other. What he does not seem to realize, however, is that this performance—which he carries out for the rest of his life— deprives him of political engagement; it is no coincidence that his name references Sweden, which adopted a position of political neutrality during World War II. By writing an alternative history through the production of hero-narratives, he furthermore enables the community to repress political discourse and therefore render political violence invisible. More than just disavowing political violence, these narrative processes help the Swede and the community to repress Jewish identity and its traumatic foundations. This process occurs more prominently, and with more deleterious consequences, when, in the postwar years of domestic stability, he uses domestic space to channel his repression of the political.

The Swede's domestic fantasy—the life he manufactures for himself and

his family in Old Rimrock—is itself a form of narrative production, one which,

while aligning him with a postwar generation that embraced visions of domestic

stability, also serves to disengage him from the political. Soon after their

marriage, the Swede purchases their home on the outskirts of Old Rimrock. Over

170 years old, the old stone house represents for the Swede an idyllic, pastoral

way of life, a vision of an antiquated America in which he and his family can

escape the political unrest stemming from the Vietnam War. His anxieties are

similarly attached to the social unrest arising from the country's movement

toward globalization and the resulting transformation of the American economic

landscape. This is evidenced most directly through the repeated descriptions of

the Newark riots and the economic necessities of outsourcing that he faces with

his glove business, Newark Maid. For the Swede, the stone house represents a

space of domestic stability and ideological homogeneity. Roth writes, "He had

been dreaming about that house since he was sixteen years old…It was the first

house built of stone he'd ever seen, and to a city boy it was an architectural

marvel. The random design of the stones *said* "House" to him as not even the

brick house on Keer avenue did" (189). The Swede's search for stability in the

form of domestic space is significant, as the house's stone construction seems to

promise a sense of rootedness and a connection to history.[3] Comparing the

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[3] For an illuminating discussion on home design and its role in defining social and
familial roles through the house's connection to history, see Moira Munro and
Ruth Madigan's "Negotiating Space in the Family Home." They write,
"Architectural historians have drawn our attention to the ways in which the design

Swede's domestic fantasy to the symbolic function of the green light in *The Great Gatsby*, Derek Parker Royal writes, [the Swede's] new rural home becomes for [him] a means to assimilation into 'normal' American society" (189-190). As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, however, this desire for a "normal" America is largely a product of processes of narrativization that define American innocence and security in depoliticized terms that appeal to an American public in search of affirmative modes of national identification. Founded on mistaken notions of an ideologically-pure America, the Swede's projection of domestic stability—in its apparent political neutrality—is itself a political act.

This process is complicated by the Swede's unconscious fears of ideological subversion. Political discourse of any kind threatens to undermine his faith in the imaginary ideal of a historically-static America. Again, Roth's descriptions suggest that the Swede's attraction to the Old Rimrock house owes itself largely to a vision of America as a fortified homeland, one capable of housing, protecting, and fostering narratives of American exceptionalism. He writes, "The stone house was not only engagingly ingenious-looking to his eyes— all that irregularity regularized, a jigsaw puzzle fitted patiently together into this square, solid thing to make a beautiful shelter—but it looked indestructible, an impregnable house that could never burn to the ground and that had probably

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of nineteenth-century housing reflected the ideal of the bourgeois family, with its strictly demarcated boundaries between public and private, masculine and feminine, and rigidly differentiated internal spaces. The ideal of the bourgeois family lived on into the twentieth century as a model of domestic respectability" (107). Considering the Swede's Jewish heritage, his desire to be connected with history is more likely a desire to assimilate to white, American bourgeois culture.

been standing there since the country began" (190). The "indestructible, impregnable" exterior suggests that the Swede's fears of ideological violence are directed toward the outside world, where political unrest threatens to contaminate his fantasy of domestic stability. At one point, Zuckerman, Roth's narrator, tells us, "Something had turned him into a human platitude. Something had warned him: You must not run counter to anything" (23). What is ironic about the Swede's relationship to the old stone house is that, because of his inability to adopt political positions and "run counter to anything," he is incapable of identifying the very ideological threats capable of dismantling his domestic fantasy.

The Swede's deep-rooted psychological attachment to the Old Rimrock house and the pastoral narratives it contains are worth examining through the lens of Gaston Bachelard's theories in *The Poetics of Space*. Taking a phenomenological approach, Bachelard identifies the psychological attachment we all share to domestic space, and the ways that houses, both materially and symbolically, serve as repositories for memory. Furthermore, houses offer us the promise of protection, both physically and psychologically, from the real and imagined threats of the outside world. Describing our encounter with domestic space, he writes, we "see the imagination build 'walls' of impalpable shadows, comfort itself with the illusion of protection—or just the contrary, tremble behind thick walls, mistrust the staunchest ramparts" (Bachelard 5). Beyond the promise of protection, houses provide vehicles for narrative, history, and memory.

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Bachelard explains, "An entire past comes to dwell in a new house…We comfort ourselves by reliving memories of protection. Something closed must retain our memories, while leaving them their original value as images" (5-6). While his comments largely apply to the personal encounter with domestic space—the memories we bring to domestic space through our childhood experiences—Bachelard more broadly speaks to the ways that domestic spaces function as repositories for cultural memory; the narratives of protection and security he identifies with domestic space function in a broader context through symbolic connections to the nation as homeland and the narratives of protection and security that it produces.

Although *The Poetics of Space* almost universally overlooks the political dimensions of space, as containers for memory, narrative, and history, houses—whether or not Bachelard chooses to acknowledge it—are intrinsically political. In his excellent discussion on public policy and housing in postwar Britain, Joe Moran exposes the political dimensions of Bachelard's work. The abstract houses referred to throughout *Poetics*, Moran explains, represent "a particular kind of Euro-American settlement, made of brick or stone, with a rectangular structure which allows it to be divided into separate rooms connected by stairs and hallways" (29). "[They are] clearly reminiscent of the actual houses of a particular historical tradition" (28). Bachelard's conception of the house, therefore, is itself a political projection, one that implicitly endorses a particular Euro-American ethos and one whose political dimensions—white, middle-class, bourgeois—are

inherently inscribed in that space. Moran concludes his commentary:

"Bachelard's discussion of the house shows that the poetics of space are always

unavoidably linked to a politics, whether this is explicitly acknowledged or not"

(31). In this way, the narratives and memories attached to domestic spaces, too,

are unavoidably political, and when domestic space comes to function

symbolically for the homeland, these narratives—like the pastoral fantasy of

protection and security that the Swede produces—can be particularly dangerous.[4]

This process is all the more pertinent in light of recent shifts over the last

several decades in our understanding of an American homeland as a concept

closely linked to discourses of nationalism. Traditionally a term attached to

diasporic cultural and ethnic movement[5], our understanding of the homeland—

with its connotations of cultural origins and foreign national identification—has

more recently become synonymous with the home front, a term marked by

militarism and national defense.[6] Catherine Lutz's book *Homefront: A Military*

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[4] See also Irene Cieraad's "Anthropology at Home" for further commentary on the house as an inherently political spatial locus. She looks at the ways that houses provide crucial sites for political activity, particularly in industrialized countries, like Britain, that have seen dramatic social and labor reform.

[5] For more on the homeland as a term connected to cultural and ethnic diaspora see the collection of essays, *The Call of the Homeland: Diaspora Nationalisms, Past and Present*. In the context of American multiculturalism, this concept functions apart from the more recent trend toward defining America as a homeland in its own right. It is worth noting the ways that our understanding of an American homeland only gained purchase in the postwar years, concurrent with the rise of the military state.

[6] The newness of the term "homeland" in reference to an American domestic presence is remarkable. As Amy Kaplan notes, "Presidents before Bush never used the word to refer to the United States during periods of world crisis" (85).

City and the American Twentieth Century provides a useful analysis of America's movement toward a military state in the decades following World War II, particularly as a consequence of Cold War rhetoric of national defense. Noting the steady erosion of domestic, civilian life under the burgeoning military presence within our national boundaries, she writes, "A tension exists between the impulse to clearly distinguish between two cultures of the military and civilian worlds (often to either celebrate or criticize one of them) and a desire to see a single set of military and civilian values, and a single America" (Lutz 235). According to Lutz, the conflation of these two formerly distinct realms of American life suggests the emergence of a new sense of the American homeland, one defined primarily on military, rather than civilian discourse. This is especially relevant, considering the massive influx in military spending starting in 1946 and continuing to the present day (172).

Marita Sturken further traces this evolution in her analysis of the American military state leading up to and following September 11th. Sturken specifically addresses the ways that consumerism and national politics are increasingly interconnected, and how they have begun to inscribe themselves on domestic space, most notably through the Hummer and other symbols of American military culture (40). The end result of this, Sturken explains, is the dissolution of boundaries between the home and the homeland, a process which inevitably involves the inscription of a new set of national politics on the discourses of domestic space (71). It furthermore encourages an implicit

endorsement of an American military presence, a presence whose purported sole objective is the protection of the home front.[7] Sturken writes, "The militarization of the home is thus not only a means through which public fear of terrorism is mediated but is also a process through which the domestic household is articulated into the policies of the U.S. government. Defending the home and the desire to feel 'at home' are key elements in the imperial policies of the U.S. government after 9/11" (41). Considering the increased militarization of the American homeland not just after 9/11 but in the postwar years as well, it is worth looking at how these concepts help to explain the failures of the Swede's vision of domestic harmony in *American Pastoral*, a vision too closely aligned with manufactured narratives of American political innocence.

The old stone house—in its impregnability and its connection to a particular American pastoral history—functions as a repository for a political narrative of security and an implicit endorsement of a bourgeois American culture of comfort.[8] The Swede's attachment to the house demonstrates his desire to subscribe to this narrative and fortify it against the forces of political discourse circulating around the Vietnam War and the movement toward globalization.

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[7] It is worth noting that America's involvement in foreign wars throughout the twentieth century has consistently been justified under the rhetoric of homeland security and the protection of the American homeland. Endorsing violence in the name of domestic security has been perhaps our nation's most powerful rhetorical tool in terms of its foreign policy.

[8] For a useful discussion on external house aesthetics and their political underpinnings, see John A. Dolan's "I've Always Fancied Owning Me Own Lion," which examines urban housing decor that attempts to recreate the idylls of rural life. Dolan argues that these trends are political by nature and reflect a movement to conservative ideology.

What he fails to realize is that, in Bachelard's language, the house only provides the "illusion of protection," and his blind faith in this illusion prevents him from recognizing the inherently political dimensions of domestic space. The narratives of national security and ideological homogeneity operating within this fantasy are themselves contested political sites which ultimately inspire his sixteen year old daughter, Merry, having gained political agency as an adult, to revolt against him. The Swede correctly identifies the intrusions on domestic space—mainly the presence of television media—that give rise to her increasingly political worldview. As detailed in the previous chapter, television media in recent decades has played an instrumental role in producing and communicating trauma and subsequently forcing viewers to establish positions within or against political discourse. In the novel, the Swede remembers watching the self-immolation of Buddhist monks on television and imagines the traumatic effects these images must have had on his daughter. Roth writes, "No screaming, no writhing, just [the monk's] calmness at the heart of the flames—no pain registering on anyone on camera, only on Merry and the Swede and Dawn, horrified together in their living room. Out of nowhere and into their home, the nimbus of flames, the upright monk, and the sudden liquefaction before he keels over" (153). Here, we see the Swede's discomfort over the evident permeability of domestic boundaries. The television has rendered his "impregnable" house highly susceptible to political intrusion and violence. Later he comments, "Into their home the monk came to stay" (154). Despite his efforts to fortify his domestic existence against

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ideological subversion, modern technology has breached the walls of domesticity and entered from within, attacking the heart of domestic space: the living room.

Merry's symbolic role as the agent responsible for political intrusion on domestic space reveals the ways that the home—and its broader function as a corollary for the politically-defined homeland—is always under threat of ideological subversion. Countering the Swede's impulse to repress the political through his faith in the ostensibly-neutral space of domesticity, Merry tells him, "I don't know what you're talking about. Everything is political. Brushing your *teeth* is political" (Roth 104). Merry is correct. Despite his efforts to envision a life free from political discourse, the Swede's vision of domestic harmony—articulated through the old stone house—is itself a political exercise insofar as it sustains the discourses that bolster the illusion of a stable sense of American identity. Sandra Kumamoto Stanley writes, "In constructing his ideal home, the Swede believes that he has replicated the ideals of America; the family becomes a source not of biological reproduction but also of the reproduction of ideology" (10). Even the house's history—which the Swede selectively represses—is defined by the political. In attempting to dissuade the Swede from purchasing the house, his father tells him, "Let's be candid with each other about this—this is a narrow, bigoted area. The Klan thrived out here in the twenties. Did you know that? The Ku Klux Klan. People had crosses burned on their property out here" (309). Furthermore, as Timothy L. Parrish notes, the entire region of Morris County, with its long history of white inhabitants connected to the American Revolution,

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implicitly rejects ethnic minorities like the Swede and his parents (136-137).

Merry's astute observation regarding the ubiquity of the political applies

particularly to their home and to Old Rimrock, where political violence—though

unacknowledged by the Swede—has long existed.

When Merry sets off the bomb at the post office and kills the local doctor,

the Swede's vision of domestic space as an apolitical domain begins to fall apart.

Roth writes, "The bomb might as well have gone off in their living room. The

violence done to his life was awful" (70). The reference once again to the living

room is significant, as the political violence perpetrated by Merry is itself an

attack on the discourses of domestic space that, she correctly recognizes, are

fundamentally tied to the state. Merry becomes "The daughter who transports him

out of the longed-for American pastoral and into everything that is its antithesis

and its enemy, into the fury, the violence, and the desperation of the

counterpastoral—and into the indigenous American berserk" (86). For the Swede,

the fragmentation of domestic space is traumatic for reasons that go beyond the

loss of his daughter and the death of a member of his community; the intrusion of

the political on domestic space effectively forces him to regard his own existence

as inseparable from the political discourses of the state. In short, Merry's bomb is

an act of political violence against a culture of complacency contained and

perpetuated in the discursive space of the house.

What is most significant about Merry's act of domestic terrorism—both in

its relation to the Swede's fantasy and, more broadly, in our conception of a

secure homeland—is the way it collapses public and private boundaries. Domestic

space inherently depends on a rhetoric of separation; the home is articulated as a

space of safety and stability in response to an outside environment understood to

be threatening, chaotic, and dangerous. As Bachelard has shown, the sense of

security we attach to the home is predicated on boundaries that divide the inside

from the outside. Faced with the reality of political violence arising from *within*

the home/homeland, however, we can see how these boundaries begin to dissolve.

In his reflections on political violence and the homeland in the twenty-first

century, Michael Rothberg explains, "there once were clear differences between

home and away, inside and outside, peace and violence, innocence and

experience, but […] those distinctions have been lost" (151). Amy Kaplan takes

this further, arguing that the collapse of inside/outside boundaries by the threat of

terrorism and the emphasis on homeland security is in fact a rhetorical tactic that

works to justify further political intrusion on private life. She writes,

> Although homeland security may strive to cordon off the nation as
>
> a domestic space from external foreign threats, it is actually about
>
> breaking down the boundaries between inside and outside, about
>
> seeing the homeland in a state of constant emergency from threats
>
> within and without […] If every facet of civilian life is subject to
>
> terrorist attack, if a commercial airliner can be turned into a deadly
>
> bomb, then every facet of domestic life—in the double sense of the
>
> word as private and national—must be both protected and

mobilized against these threats. Homeland security calls for vast

new intrusions of government, military, and intelligence forces, not

just to secure the homeland from external threats, but to become an

integral part of the workings of home, a home in a continual state

of emergency. (90)

The linguistic collapse of public and private boundaries suggests that no space is

free from political intrusion, and that institutional politics are fundamentally tied

to every aspect of American life.

The kind of political intrusion that Kaplan addresses is solely a product of

an institutional presence that attempts to claim the discourses of domestic space to

disengage individuals further from productive political exchange, and the rhetoric

of homeland security is merely another step toward interpellating Americans as

static, politically-complacent subjects. In *American Pastoral*, Merry's act of

political violence and the intrusions of the political that, the Swede believes,

anticipated it certainly work to dismantle the boundaries between the public and

the private, but the Swede is largely unable to gain political agency over the

course of the novel, which, I argue, is a result of the conflation of institutional

politics and domestic space. The novel's final chapter sees the Swede hosting a

dinner party attended by his parents and family "friends" (he discovers during the

dinner party that Bill Orcutt, one of his so-called friends, is having an affair with

his wife and that Shelly Salzman, another friend, had secretly given refuge to

Merry after the bombing). After dinner, the Swede imagines Merry—now

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destitute, emaciated, and incompatible with his stilted worldview—returning to

the house, to the horror of his father and his friends. This scene demonstrates the

Swede's latent fear of domestic subversion, as Merry continually represents a

threat to domestic stability, even here at the novel's conclusion when, one would

think, the Swede would have come to accept the realities of political violence.

Roth writes, "He had made his fantasy and Merry had unmade it for him. It was

not the specific war that she'd had in mind, but it was a war nonetheless, that she

brought home to America—home into her very own house" (418). Two

components of this scene are worth exploring. First, the Swede still appears to

understand his home as a space of inherent stability, which is surprising,

considering the unpleasant political debate that took place over dinner minutes

earlier and the recent discovery of his wife's infidelity. Roth, during this scene,

writes, "The outlaws are everywhere. They're inside the gates" (366), suggesting

that the fortified exterior of the old stone house has been breached by politics and

behavior that the Swede cannot reconcile with his fantasy of domestic stability.

Second, although narrated as an event occurring in real-time, Merry's arrival

proves to be a product of the Swede's imagination (the shriek he heard from his

father was the result of an incident involving one of the intoxicated dinner guests),

and his belief in domestic stability presumably continues after the novel ends.

     The Swede's nightmare-fantasy of his daughter's return reveals that,

although cognizant of the presence of political violence in domestic space, he

cannot bring this knowledge to bear on how he constructs his identity and how he

understands the symbolic function of the Old Rimrock house; he therefore remains incapable of dismantling the bourgeois domestic fantasy we have seen throughout the novel, even in the face of immediate and horrifying political violence. Claire Sigrist-Sutton explains, "In his wish to bring Merry back into the household, Seymour fails to recognize her criticism of that household as bourgeois and therefore complicit in forwarding the aims of the dirty war" (61). Sigrist-Sutton correctly identifies the Swede's failure to adopt a politically-informed perspective, but she and many other critics of the novel are unable to identify the root causes of this phenomenon. Elaine B. Safer's explanation that his tragic fall occurs "partly because of his own innocent self deception, and partly because of an outside world in convulsions, a chaotic world that he never made" (98) does not quite address the more complex machinery behind the Swede's political inflexibility.

In his recent book, *The New American Exceptionalism*, Donald Pease explores the emergence of the homeland security state, claiming that Americans' identification with the American "homeland" occurred as a traumatic response to a dissolving fantasy of American political innocence initiated by the attacks on the towers. The attacks, he explains, distanced Americans rhetorically from their country, requiring them to manufacture a "homeland" in order to reclaim America as "country of origin" stolen from them by the terrorists (170). This process helps to explain why the Swede, even when confronted by political violence, intensifies his faith in domesticity. Instead of embracing a political position after Merry's act

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of violence, he opts to continue believing, even into his old age, in "the illusion of stability" (Roth 37). This impulse, perhaps, reflects the Swede's unacknowledged psychological attachment to the Holocaust as a traumatic event underlying his manufactured American identity. Realizing that his relationship to institutional power is every bit as tenuous as that of Jews in Europe in the years preceding the Holocaust, he retreats to the comforts of domestic space, repressing political trauma with a domestic symbol that promises affiliation with a new American homeland.

The political violence that Merry introduces, indeed, collapses the boundaries between the interior and the exterior, in Kaplan's terminology, but instead of embracing political heterogeneity, the Swede—like the American public responding to the threat of terrorism—retreats to the domestic. After his daughter's death, in an evident attempt to repress the violence of his former life, the Swede remarries and has two children, effectively recreating and perfecting the bourgeois existence Merry had succeeded in exploding. His brother describes a recent dinner outing attended by the Swede and his new family: "Seymour loved it. The whole handsome family there, life just the way it's supposed to be" (71). His desire to reclaim what he sees as his American "country of origin" through the performance of domestic normalcy has not diminished, even in the wake of horrific political violence. Immediately following this idyllic moment, however, the Swede retreats to his car, where he breaks down over the news of Merry's recent death. Again, try as he might to repress the political through continued

faith in the comforts and security of domestic life, which are undone by Merry's

death, the specter of political violence continually intrudes, from within, on his

manufactured fantasy.[9]

If the Swede's political disengagement is a result of his relationship to his

home, how, then, are we to assert political subjectivity in a culture where reality is

largely defined through our experience of domestic space? Roth poses this

question, in so many words, in the novel's final lines. He writes:

> Yes, the breach had been pounded in their fortification, even out
>
> here in secure Old Rimrock, and now that it was opened it would
>
> not be closed again. They'll never recover. Everything is against
>
> them, everyone and everything that does not like their life. All the
>
> voices from without, condemning and rejecting their life!
>
> And what is wrong with their life? What on earth is less
>
> reprehensible than the life of the Levovs? (423)

Here Roth exposes the inherent difficulty of negotiating a world in which

institutional narratives—here, invested in domestic space—have permeated our

most intimate spheres. We feel sympathy for the Swede largely because

discourses of domestic space are so much a part of our own lives, and to divorce

ourselves from these discourses seems as jarring as confronting the political

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[9] For an illuminating essay on the traumatic dimensions of Roth's novel, see
Aimee Pozorski's "*American Pastoral* and the Traumatic Ideals of Democracy."
Pozorski argues that Merry's act of political violence is a form of "acting out"
calling back to the originary trauma of the American Revolution. According to
Pozorski, the political trauma that haunts the Swede in fact stems from a deeper
historical trauma embedded in American identity.

violence that threatens to undermine them. This process also speaks to the ease with which we are able to locate Merry as an outsider and a political deviant, despite her function as an agent of necessary social and political change; even as we critique the Swede's reactionary worldview, we find it difficult to identify with Merry's radical departure from normalcy.

To answer the question, "what is wrong with their life?" requires us, as complicit participants in a culture of domestic politics, to step outside of these discourses and enter a hostile territory of domestic instability. This, again, is facilitated by Roth's depictions of domestic space. Midway through the novel, when the Swede encounters Merry, now a Jain devoted to protecting all forms of life at whatever cost to her own life, he is shocked and appalled first and foremost by her squalid living space. Located in the most run-down part of Newark, Merry's "room was tiny, claustrophobically smaller even than the cell in the juveniles' prison where, when [the Swede] could not sleep, he would imagine visiting her after she was apprehended" (233). Later, Roth writes, "Her room had no window, only a narrow transom over the door that opened onto the unlit hallway, a twenty-foot-long urinal whose decaying plaster walls he wanted to smash apart with his fist the moment he entered the house and smelled it" (237). Confronted by a vision of domestic space that refuses to cohere with his Old Rimrock fantasy and one which incorporates, rather than shirks, the harsh realities of urban life, the Swede proves unable to separate his daughter discursively from the space in which she lives. Imagining his wife's reaction to Merry's house, the

Swede thinks to himself, "How could he bring Dawn here? Driving Dawn down McCarter Highway, turning off McCarter and into this street, the warehouses, the rubble, the garbage, the debris…Dawn seeing this room, smelling this room, her hands touching the walls of this room, let alone the unwashed flesh, the brutally cropped, bedraggled hair…" (239). The Swede's thought process in this passage is revealing, as he seamlessly moves between descriptions of the city, the house, and his daughter, conflating the three separate concepts under a single indictment of what he considers to be deviant modes of living. He is incapable of differentiating his daughter from the place in which she lives; her home and her identity, in the Swede's eyes, are one and the same. Of course, this scene reveals more about the Swede's politically-constructed domestic fantasy—one which projects American identity in domestic terms—than about Merry, whom we only perceive from her father's skewed perspective.

Merry's rejection of her father's bourgeois existence is most clearly established through their divergent visions of domestic space. While the Swede seeks an authentic connection to an American cultural and national heritage, his daughter desires transience; her home, situated amid a section of the city continually ransacked by poverty-stricken inhabitants, is under a state of constant transformation and revision. At one point, the Swede sees the "cornices stolen. Aluminum drainpipes even from the occupied buildings, from standing buildings—stolen. Everything was gone that anybody could get to. Just reach up and take it. Copper tubing in boarded-up factories, pull it out and sell it. Anyplace

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the windows are gone and boarded up tells people immediately, 'Come in and strip it. Whatever's left, strip it, steal it, sell it'" (235). Unlike the 170 year-old stone house which "regularized irregularity," Merry's home is in a state of constant flux: a project of deconstruction. Although she admits to having lived in a room in Newark for the past six months, her domestic experience is one of transience rather than rootedness. Roth writes, "By the time she left Chicago she had discovered she no longer needed a home; she would never again come close to succumbing to the yearning for a family and a home" (258). Her homelessness, admittedly accompanied by the kind of squalor that repulses even the reader,[10] serves as the only viable outlet to an institutional presence that has inscribed itself on and claimed domestic space. Sarah Bylund explains, "Merry is an itinerant wanderer…Merry has no real 'home' and certainly has no desire to claim America as her country. The run-down, stinking building where Merry resides is just a temporary stopping place" (25). Bylund correctly identifies the novel's implicit connections between domesticity and national identity. For the Swede's America, the nomadic lifestyle Merry adopts holds no promise for legitimate national identification. Because of her rejection of bourgeois domesticity, Merry is excluded from an American identity, and this is significant, considering the ways that nationalist discourse has permeated and co-opted domestic space.

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[10] As mentioned earlier, this reaction is important to Roth's commentary on the reader's investment in projects of institutional domesticity. We are threatened by Merry's existence precisely because it undermines a tradition of domestic discourse in which we are all implicated.

Merry's reaction against her father's domestic vision is, of course, a reaction against political narratives embedded in domestic space; her transient existence can be read more specifically as an attempt to produce a counternarrative that contests the fantasy of American normalcy invested in domestic space. I would be remiss, at this point, to ignore the narrative stylistics of *American Pastoral* and the ways that Roth's narrative strategies speak to the very issues at stake in this chapter. The novel's first three chapters establish Roth's frequently-used narrator, Nathan Zuckerman, as the agent of narrative invention. In these early chapters, Zuckerman "writes" in first-person, describing his encounters with the Swede and his brother, Jerry, whom he sees at a high school reunion. During these scenes, Zuckerman, himself a successful novelist, reveals his fascination with the Swede, and the chapters that follow function as his attempt to narrativize the life of a man about whom he knows little. The story of the Swede, therefore, is exposed to be a project of narrative invention, one that calls into question the stability and legitimacy of narratives, and the faith we place in these narratives. Early reviews of the novel largely ignored Zuckerman's frame narrative and instead focused almost exclusively on the Swede's primary narrative. This is not surprising. As readers, the impulse to locate a primary narrative speaks to our desire for familiar, stable narrative production in much the same way we search for familiarity and stability in our domestic spaces.

Once we acknowledge Zuckerman's role in the production of narratives, we can see how the novel's formal mechanics in fact speak to the tensions

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between the Swede and his daughter as they vie over competing visions of

domesticity. Early in the novel, Zuckerman concedes the inherent failures in

representation and narrativization, particularly in reference to understanding

people and interior motivations. He explains that one ought to approach others

> as untanklike as you can be, sans cannon and machine guns and
>
> steel plating half a foot thick; you come at them unmenacingly on
>
> your own ten toes instead of tearing up the turf with your
>
> caterpillar treads, take them on with an open mind, as equals, man
>
> to man, as we used to say, and yet you never fail to get them
>
> wrong. You might as well have the *brain* of a tank. You get them
>
> wrong before you meet them, while you're anticipating meeting
>
> them; you get them wrong while you're with them; and then you
>
> go home to tell somebody else about the meeting and you get them
>
> all wrong again. (35)

Two elements of this passage help to untangle the novel's complex commentary

on narrativization. First, Zuckerman admits that narratives are founded on error.

We channel our misperceptions into narratives in order to make sense of the

world around us. This suggests that the Swede's narrative—a product of

Zuckerman's imagination—is in fact founded on error as well; his narrative, like

all narratives, we are to believe, cannot be taken as truth. This is important to keep

in mind when considering the narratives of stability and protection that the Swede

produces through his Old Rimrock house; Merry seems to realize that the values

embedded in bourgeois domesticity are as much an act of narrative invention as anything else, and that political ideology invariably uses narrative as its mode of transmission. In the Swede's case, the house subtly functions as the locus for ideological transmission.

The other interesting element of the passage above is Zuckerman's repeated appeal to war and violence as two concepts closely linked to representation. He seems to suggest that when we engage in processes of narrativization, we inevitably misrepresent, and in doing so we perpetrate violence on the world around us and produce dangerous fictions that, we can say at this point, are always ideologically founded. In light of these comments on the violent nature of narrative, Zuckerman finds himself between a rock and a hard place; his narrative—his attempt to set the record straight—is constantly being undercut by the violence he is perpetrating on history and on those whom he is attempting to represent. Roth, of course, utilizes Zuckerman in this way in order to dislocate the reader from the familiar space of the primary narrative. If our tendency is to regard the Swede's story as the primary narrative of *American Pastoral*, then the distance generated by the frame story allows us to critique the Swede's worldview, furthermore exposing the violent processes of narrativization involved in the production of narratives. Aliki Varvogli explains that the novel "asks urgent and unsettling questions about the meaning and importance of authorship. More specifically, through its structural complexity, it suggests the figure of the author is linked with that of the terrorist" (103). As the author of the

Swede's narrative, Zuckerman positions himself as the chief agent of narrative violence in a novel heavily invested in both narrative and violence.

It might be best here to revisit the connections between space and narrative, established in the previous chapter, that also inform this reading of Roth's novel. In *The Practice of Everyday Life,* de Certeau explains, "[narratives] traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories" (115). Later, he explains, "*space is a practiced place*…an act of reading is the space produced by the practice of a particular place: a written text, i.e., a place constituted by a system of signs" (117). Although de Certeau's commentary refers specifically to our negotiation of urban space, the spatializing potential of narrative that he describes applies equally well to domestic space; familiar, stable, conventional narrative structures provide textual spaces discursively linked to domesticity. Utilizing Zuckerman as a framing device, Roth destabilizes what the reader would identify as a familiar narrative structure in the Swede's narrative. This process generates what could be called a "domestic textual space" and provides a locus of stability in our otherwise disorienting experience of the novel.

Zuckerman's presence therefore encourages us to critique the machinery that underlies our conceptions of stable narratives. In the same way that Merry's bomb—a symbolic act of narrative violence—seeks to dismantle the political discourses embedded in domestic space, discourses that have been normalized and are therefore largely invisible, Zuckerman's presence encourages us to be

highly suspicious of narratives and the political ideologies that underlie them.[11]

His presence distances us from the familiar space of the primary narrative, a

home, of sorts, causing us to question the processes of narrativization at its heart.

Timothy L. Parrish asks, "Why does Merry throw bombs? A plausible answer

might be another question: Why does Zuckerman write? Although Roth often

assigns possible motivations for the kinds of stories Zuckerman writes—

psychological, sexual, cultural, etc.—the truth is that there is for Zuckerman no

necessary justification other than the desire to create a persona and enact its

possibilities" (139). These answers certainly explain the impulse behind

Zuckerman's narrative inventions, but they do not explain Roth's motives for

framing the Swede's story. When we recognize the limitations of narrative, we,

like Merry, are able to expose the politics that underlie narrative. In the same way

that Merry, in her transience, rejects the illusory stability of domestic space, we,

as readers, embrace the discursive mobility afforded by multiple layers of

narrative, rejecting the illusion of political truth invested in any one narrative

space.

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[11] The consumption and production of narrative fiction, of course, is deeply
involved in the processes by which politics are transmitted through fiction and
narrative. In opening oneself to "the willing suspension of disbelief," readers
often unknowingly invite a political encounter transmitted through what may
appear to be innocuous, politically-neutral narrative forms. The average reader,
"at home" in conventional narrative structures—romance plots, revenge
narratives, against-all-odds success stories, etc.—desires the same story retold,
oblivious to its political dimensions. This is all too often evident in our literature
classes, where students, having read the latest installment of the *Twilight* Saga,
are unaware of the deeply political contours of author Stephanie Meyer's fiction.

Through these complex formal strategies, Roth creates a textual environment that suggests the impossibility of successfully fortifying domestic space against ideological intrusion. If domestic space is inherently a repository for political discourse, then it is similarly founded on narrative production. The discourses of domesticity that Merry rejects stem from the narratives of home life that the Swede espouses, narratives that locate the home and the family within a particular white, bourgeois paradigm. Furthermore, these discourses of domestic space are linked to American institutional politics and the forces of nationalism, which insist on the need for security and stability in order to justify further intrusions on private life; in doing so, they disenfranchise those who choose to adopt alternative visions of domesticity. Merry's act of violence is an attempt to disrupt these discourses, and in recognizing them as social and political constructions, she exposes the deeper connections between domestic space and narrative production. Roth simulates this experience through his formal strategies. By distancing the reader from the Swede's primary narrative, we are able to critique the processes of narrative production at the heart of the novel and recognize the ways that narrative violence is necessary for contesting the deeply-embedded politics of domestic space.

Applying this lens to *American Pastoral* helps us to better understand our relationship to institutional politics and how the state infiltrates, redefines, and ultimately controls narratives produced through domestic space. As the boundaries of public and private space continue to erode under the discourses of

national security and the protection of the homeland, so, too, does our ability to

establish political positions that exist outside the lines of discourse provided by

the state. Approaches to the novel that fail to acknowledge Roth's complex use of

domestic space and narrative cannot adequately explain the Swede's refusal to

modify his worldview in light of his daughter's acts of domestic terrorism. His

mental decline and his inability to confront the realities of political violence are

the consequence of his investment in politically-repressive, state-endorsed

narratives that are communicated through domestic space. Roth's novel has

achieved newfound relevance in post-9/11 America, as, in probing the

connections between domestic space, the homeland, and narrative production, it

speaks directly to a culture increasingly fearful of ideological and political

intrusion. Such fears permeate the frames of Michael Haneke's film, *Funny

Games* (2008), which I discuss in the following section. Unlike Roth's novel,

which suggests that Americans' attachment to domestic space signifies a

repression of the political, Haneke's film suggests that Americans' innate desire

for violence is both contained within the trope of the house and enacted, more

broadly, at home and abroad, through regimes of torture and political violence.

Domestic Violence

Haneke's *Funny Games* is an American remake of the German-language

film by the same name, also directed by Haneke (1997). Known for his

experiments with narrative and his fervent disavowal of Hollywood conventions,

Haneke, particularly in *Funny Games*, invites viewers to enter the narrative space

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of the film, commenting on our desire for violence both in the narratives we consume and in the national policies we implicitly endorse. Although many critics have discussed the self-referential aspects of the film that render viewers complicit in the scenes of torture that Haneke depicts, little has been written on the presence of domesticity in the film and how violence not only intrudes on domestic space, but is, in fact, intrinsically embedded in our notions of domesticity. These processes, as in Roth's novel, reflect Americans' evolving relationship to an imagined American homeland. The scenes that Haneke presents and the formal strategies he incorporates suggest that violence has always been tied up with domestic space and narrative production and that we, as consumers of these kinds of narratives, are ultimately complicit in the state's manipulation of discourses on national security. Using scenes that evoke the images of torture captured at Abu Ghraib, Haneke suggests that Americans' relationship to violence and domestic space enable and in fact encourage participation in national regimes of torture that are founded on cultures of political violence.

Funny Games tells the story of a bourgeois American couple, Ann and George (played by Naomi Watts and Tim Roth), who travel, accompanied by their son and dog, to their impressive, gated, lakefront home in the Hamptons in hopes of spending a few days enjoying the privileges of high society. Upon their arrival, however, they are confronted by Peter and Paul, two youths dressed in white, upper-class summer attire (their striking appearance interestingly bears similarity to George's attire), who almost immediately lay claim to their home and proceed

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to torture the family through a series of sadistic "games." First killing the family

dog, the two intruders proceed to murder all three family members, beginning

with the child, Georgie, and ending with Ann. Much of the film takes place in the

vacation home, where Peter and Paul transform the familiar space of the living

room, the kitchen, and other domestic zones into disturbing scenes of graphic

torture. During these scenes, Paul, the more vocal and articulate of the two

torturers, several times addresses the camera directly, thereby involving the

viewer in the scenes of torture and violence that take place. When Ann is finally

killed aboard the family's sailboat in the nearby lake, Peter and Paul (they use

other generic names—Tom and Jerry, Beavis and Butthead, etc.—over the course

of the film) move on to another nearby lakefront property, presumably with the

intention of carrying out the same set of "games."

Since the American version of *Funny Games* is a shot-for-shot remake of

the earlier European version, and since the two films share almost identical

dialogue, this short synopsis functions equally well for both films. If the two films

are identical, with the exception of actors and language differences, why, then,

would Haneke choose to remake *Funny Games* a decade after its initial release?

In interviews, he has indicated that the 1997 film's relative failure in American

markets—it apparently only reached six thousand American viewers upon its

release—demanded a version of the film that would be more palatable to

American audiences (Wheatley 21). Furthermore, in various interviews Haneke

has expressed his desire to reach specifically American audiences, seeing violence

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as an American cultural phenomenon with respect to its production and

consumption in the entertainment industry. Actors like Roth and Watts, whom

American audiences would recognize from their roles in mainstream Hollywood

films, along with an aggressive marketing campaign that targeted art-house

audiences, made the American version of *Funny Games* a project specifically

devoted to accessing and deconstructing an American culture of violence.[12] I

argue that the film's power resides more specifically in its presentation of

domestic space and narrative, particularly in the context of the debates on national

security and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan following 9/11. In cultural,

political, and national contexts vastly different from those of its predecessor, the

American *Funny Games*, in the vein of *American Pastoral*, makes specific

commentary on domestic space and violence as conditions of an increasingly

invasive institutional presence.

 The lakeside vacation home that dominates the film's *mise-en-scene* bears

some similarities to The Swede's Old Rimrock home in *American Pastoral*. Like

the old stone house, the vacation home in *Funny Games* serves as a repository for

middle-class, bourgeois ideology through its design and its associations with an

idyllic vision of American wealth and tradition. With its expansive lawns and

looming, white exterior, the house immediately reveals its inhabitants to be

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[12] In her review of the film, Catherine Wheatley makes the interesting observation that, complicating Haneke's ostensible desire to comment on Hollywood from an insider's position through the American remake, all of the actors are either foreign-born or have forged their careers in independent films helmed by foreign directors. She asks, "Might the production then serve to undermine the US cultural imperialism Haneke despises by working within its terms while rejecting its models? (21).

invested in a mid-century New England culture of comfort. The interior, too, despite its first-rate kitchen appliances and modern living room furnishings, reveals that the house's owners not only have money, but that they seek a lifestyle removed from the political exigencies of modernity; the wood floors, the French windows, the heavy, wooden chest in the foyer, the antique bookshelves, and the all-white interior are just a few of the features that align their home within an antiquated, postwar tradition of domestic space that emerged as middle class Americans in the postwar years fled inner cities, thereby rejecting the political tensions that continued to plague urban life. The home's appearance may remind readers of the houses Bachelard discusses in *The Poetics of Space,* which, in their apparent neutrality, are themselves political. In embracing an ostensibly neutral political position, the house in *Funny Games* in fact implicitly rejects the messy urban politics of, say, Merry's "home" in the blighted Newark of *American Pastoral.* To repeat Merry's words: "Everything is political."

The film's first scenes overtly establish both the family's identification with a bourgeois aesthetic and the house's role in perpetuating and protecting this ideology. From the start, we see that the domestic space of the house, as a "lived space," allows the family to put into practice the ideology that they, perhaps unconsciously, espouse. In the film's first scene, the family is shown driving their Land Rover along a peaceful wooded highway to their vacation home, with their sailboat in tow. In the car, Ann and George play a simple game that involves guessing classical music compositions from their collection of compact discs in

the center console. When Haneke splices in the signature music from the film—

John Zorn's aggressive death-metal, which we also hear in other crucial moments

throughout the film—we can see that the family's interest in cultivating bourgeois

tastes is always, even if they fail to recognize it, being threatened by the violence

of the Real. As their SUV approaches the house, we see it stop outside a massive

set of security gates, which slowly open and finally close once the car has passed

safely into the protected space of their lakefront property. After the car moves out

of the frame, Haneke lingers on the shot as we watch the gates slowly close, once

again securing the family's ideological safe haven.

Haneke, in these early scenes, is clearly interested in complicating our

relationship to the film's protagonists—Ann and George—by depicting them as

members of a social class often understood to be out of touch with the realities of

urban life. Despite our emotional investment in them as human beings—George,

after all, deals with the intruders as diplomatically as any of us would and Ann is

generous with the eggs she gives to Peter before he makes his true intentions

known—it is difficult to identify whole-heartedly with characters who occupy a

social sphere most of us can only dream about and who take measures to protect

that life from contamination from the outside world. Nonetheless, we might find

ourselves asking of them the same question we asked of the Levovs: "what is

wrong with their life? What on earth is less reprehensible than the life of the

Levovs?" Of course, the answer, as in Roth's novel, is connected to political

ideology. Like the all-white interior of the house and the white attire sported by

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the two youths, who are either parodying or, more disturbing, *belong to* the victims' social set, Ann and George lead what they believe to be a "pure" existence, one free of ideological contamination. This belief, like the Swede's domestic fantasy, only serves to bolster an existence that reinforces dangerous class boundaries.

The security gates—which receive a remarkable amount of screen time— serve to isolate the family from the heterogeneity of the outside world and protect a domestic fantasy free of political conflict. In sustaining this fantasy, they deny what spatial theorists such as Lefebvre, Foucault, and Edward Soja see as a fundamental aspect of contemporary social life. Ann and George fail to recognize, in Soja's words, "that the organization of space is a social product filled with politics and ideology, contradiction and struggle, comparable to the making of history" (243). Refusing to acknowledge our position in social space proves dangerous, as it blinds us from the realities of the outside world and prevents the political friction necessary for social progress. Midway through the film, when young Georgie stages an unsuccessful escape from his torturers, the gate prevents his escape. Peter Brunette writes that "the gate [is] intended to protect and isolate the bourgeoisie from life's terrors, but […] later becomes an obstacle to escape from these very terrors" (53). Here Haneke seems to suggest that our attempts to produce and sustain homogeneous, "pure" ideologies through our domestic spaces are inherently dangerous political practices, as, in attempting to protect us from the perceived dangers of the outside world, they paradoxically make us vulnerable

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to the more subtle mechanics of political violence—namely the invasive politics of surveillance and homeland security—operating on national and institutional levels.

The gates furthermore fail to protect the family from the intrusion of violence. When asked by Ann how he gained access to their home, Peter explains that he entered through a hole in the fence leading to the nearby lake. The family's attempts to fortify their domestic space and their way of life therefore prove ineffectual, as, Haneke seems to suggest, violence will always permeate the boundaries that separate our homes from the chaotic, ideologically-unstable public realm. Despite our attempts to construct domestic space in terms of safety, stability, and security, violence is a fundamental component of our private lives; since domesticity is a product of narrativization which, I have shown above, always does violence to the reality it attempts to represent, domestic space itself is fraught with political violence. Haneke addresses the connections between narrative, violence, and domestic space most directly through the two torturers, but early in the film he gives us subtle clues to the presence of violence even in the behavior of the two protagonists. Before Peter enters the house, Ann is shown preparing food for the night's meal. Wielding a large butcher's knife, she quickly and efficiently carves several cuts of steak from a massive slab of meat, and Haneke utilizes a series of shots to depict this process in detail, alerting the viewer to its significance. Minutes later, reacting to the intruders' violation of their private space, George slaps Paul, initiating the violence that will continue for the

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rest of the film. These scenes, as Haneke has made clear in interviews, are not meant to provide justification for the characters' torture and death, but rather to show that, if we as viewers find ourselves identifying with George and Ann, we must also recognize that they are invested, albeit on different scales, in a culture of violence similar to that of their torturers. In both examples, we see that, although their social position has to a large extent suppressed the presence of violence in their home lives, it very much underlies their routines and their behavior.

The latent presence of violence in domestic space speaks more specifically to the family's erroneous belief in domesticity as a refuge from the political violence of modernity. In our recognition of George and Ann's complicity in this culture of violence, we can more easily identify the breakdown of boundaries that divide the domestic from the urban and the private from the public. In an interview on the film, Haneke explains, "*Funny Games* was meant as a metaphor for a society that has turned inward and excluded the exterior world. Men [sic] today live in prisons they've created for themselves. They can't escape, because they're the ones that built the walls that surround them" (*Michael Haneke* 146-147). Haneke's spatial metaphor is particularly apt. In *Funny Games*, the family's attempt to fortify its lifestyle from the exterior world results in traumatic, violent ruptures that ultimately put a grisly end to their idyllic vision of domesticity. Haneke is careful to point out that, even though the family sets up spatial boundaries to protect their domestic vision, these artificial boundaries only serve

to entrap them within a culture that is heavily invested in violence. The boundaries that traditionally divide the public from the private therefore no longer function as effective instruments for organizing space, as both realms have become saturated by the same dependency on violence. Oliver C. Speck observes, "Not only are the two killers, familiar with their victims' way of life, easily able to turn the gated community into a prison camp, but, as their knowledge of golf and sailing shows, they are not impostors but clearly part of the upper-middle-class that they are murdering" (*Funny Frames* 158). As mentioned above, if the torturers do, indeed, belong to Ann and George's social caste, then the violence that they perpetrate on their victims would appear to be the product of processes of political disavowal that attempt to repress violence for the preservation of ideological purity and domestic stability. Viewers are confronted by the realization that they are not intruders at all, but were in fact created by the politically-pure environment that Ann and George represent and have sought to protect. Therefore, our efforts to delineate inside from outside and public from private through the figures of the torturers ultimately fail, as we realize that these spatial loci are merely constructions designed to create artificial, imagined spaces of ideological purity. Violence is as much a product of, as a threat to, domestic space.

The contemporary debates on homeland security and domestic space that I have detailed above provide the necessary context for Haneke's commentary on domestic space and violence in the American remake of *Funny Games*. Amy

Kaplan's discussion of the encroachment of institutional politics on domestic space demonstrates how, in the interest of national security, Americans have been increasingly willing to authorize the institutional breakdown of boundaries that divide public space from private, domestic space (90). The dissolution of boundaries that we see in *Funny Games* speaks to this phenomenon, and the debates on national security here in the twenty-first century continually haunt the American remake of the film. As agents of violence, Peter and Paul specifically function as figures that illustrate the ways that violence has permeated domestic space, from within and from without. As the discourse on protecting the homeland intensifies, and as we, like Ann and George, seek to protect our American way of life with different kinds of security gates, the threat of institutional violence becomes all the more tangible. Furthermore, the scenes of torture that Haneke depicts—staged, no less, in the living room, the heart of domestic space—render any reading of the film outside of its political context incomplete.

The most striking image from the film that plays on our associations with the political violence of the past decade appears during the disturbing "cat-in-the-bag" scene, during which the torturers pull a pillowcase over Georgie's head while his mother undresses in front of them. Carrying significant rhetorical weight, the visual image of young Georgie, blinded by the hood and placed in a position of absolute physical and mental submission, evokes the now-infamous image of the Iraqi prisoner in Abu Ghraib who was forced to stand on a box for several hours with wires connected to his fingertips and penis, informed by Army

prison guards that if he moved from the box, he would be electrocuted.[13]

Exposing the US government's willingness to engage in acts of torture that clearly violated the Geneva Conventions, this now-iconic image served as a powerful rhetorical tool against the war in Iraq. The image of the helpless Iraqi prisoner specifically spoke to Vice President Dick Cheney's dubious "One-Percent Doctrine," which stated that, if faced with even a one-percent chance that an individual or group posed a threat to the security of the United States, the government had the authority to neutralize that threat using any means necessary.[14] Despite opposition from Senator John McCain and other members of his own political party, Cheney, throughout the war in Iraq, espoused the need to define torture in such a way that would permit new modes of "interrogation" in Iraq, throughout the Middle East, and on US soil in Guantánamo Bay (Zimbardo 434).

Interestingly, national security and defense of the homeland provided the underlying justification for torture during the Iraq war and continuing to the present day; in order to protect the homeland, we, as patriotic Americans, had to be willing to endorse difficult-to-swallow acts of political violence. Philip

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[13] The cover for the German-language *Funny Games* released on DVD in 1999 features a close-up shot of actor Ulrich Mühe staring into the camera. Interestingly, in 2006 the same German-language film was re-released with a new cover design: a close-up shot of the hooded boy. Achieving new meanings after the Abu Ghraib incident, this image has clearly affected the reception of the film. A Google Images search of "Funny Games" yields this image with greater frequency than any other image from either film.

[14] For more on this policy and an informative analysis of the Bush Administration's willingness to violate international law in order to forward its own political agenda, see Ron Suskind's *The One Percent Doctrine*.

Zimbardo, the architect of the Stanford Prison Experiment, writes, "The central premise of [the War on Terror] was that terrorism is the primary threat to 'national security,' and to 'the homeland,' and that it must be opposed by all means necessary. This ideological foundation has been used by virtually all nations as a device for gaining popular and military support for aggression, as well as repression (430). The administration's rhetoric of torture therefore made Americans complicit in institutional violence, all in the name of protecting the homeland. Consistent with Kaplan's analysis, this brand of interpellating Americans as political subjects of the state served to erode the boundaries between the public and the private through new conceptions of domestic space and the homeland; as the administration normalized violence in its campaign of homeland security, it likewise forced Americans to understand violence as an intrinsic component of a symbolic domestic space.

Ten years after the release of the German-language *Funny Games*, Haneke's decision to re-make the film in English, set it in America, and market it to American audiences clearly reveals an interest in exploring the post-9/11 political milieu. This context imbues both films—but particularly the American version—with shades of meaning that could not have existed prior to 9/11.[15]

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[15] It is worth noting that the German-language film, released four years prior to 9/11 and, with the exception of its cast, identical to the American version, anticipates the discourses of the post-9/11 era. Like *American Pastoral*, which was also published in 1997, the German-language *Funny Games* reveals, through its thematic concerns, that institutional projects of narrative production— particularly those linked to domestic space—were, in fact, underway on a global scale well before the attacks on the World Trade Centers. These discourses became more visible after 9/11, and perhaps Haneke saw an opportunity with the

Indeed, in Haneke's own words, the film "has become even more relevant today than it was [in 1997]" (*Sight and Sound* 20). The image of the hooded child, the sadistic torturers, and the domestic space transformed into a prison camp speak directly to an American homeland under siege, not from foreign terrorists but from the very political and institutional forces at the core of American life. Speck points out these connections in his essay, "Self/Aggression: Violence in the Films of Michael Haneke." He writes:

> When we invoke the polite white-gloved killers […] who transform the in-between space of the gated community into a camp and install their own 'law of the threshold' in the form of rigged 'bets' and 'wagers,' it should be clear by now that we are not dealing with the murderous excess of some lawless perverts but with a reenactment of the modern state's conflation of law and politics. (68)

As two-dimensional archetypes of institutional violence, then, Peter and Paul appropriately stand in for the faceless institution behind the American campaign of torture in the name of homeland security. As Zimbardo has pointed out, not one high-ranking official has been tried for the prisoner abuses at Abu Ghraib. The administration's systematic culture of transgression has largely been concealed and rendered amorphous by the rhetoric of homeland security, which positions the

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release of the American *Funny Games* to engage American audiences, who, involved in the debates on torture and national security, would be more receptive to the film's politics.

administration above and outside the law.[16] Instead of acknowledging the chain of

command responsible for endorsing political violence, individual acts of torture

are written off as the work of delinquent soldiers, such as Private Lynddie

England, a prison guard at Abu Ghraib, who, interestingly, called the prisoner

abuses "fun and games" (Zimbardo 328).

The US government's position on torture—and the public's general

willingness to endorse this position—is, of course, a result of political narratives

that have defined America as a nation under attack, a homeland whose survival

depends on redefining our relationship to political violence. Realizing the critical

role narrative production plays in national politics and the shaping of public

opinion, Haneke explicitly comments on narrative as an instrument of power and

violence in *Funny Games*. Throughout the film, Haneke makes overt gestures to

remind us that the story in which we find ourselves invested is a narrative

production. The first instance occurs when Paul leads Ann outside in search of the

dog he has just killed. Giving her instructions as to its whereabouts through a

game of "hot and cold," he suddenly turns to the camera, makes eye contact with

the viewer, and gives a knowing smirk.[17] In the following scenes of torture, Paul

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[16] It is worth noting the measures that have been taken to disown, yet continue to
perpetrate, acts of torture. In many cases, prisoners from Afghanistan and Iraq
have been transported to countries not bound to the Geneva Conventions for
"interrogation" by their governments, of course, under the watchful eye of the
CIA. Though publicly endorsing more flexible definitions of torture, the
administration has been careful not to attach its public image to these kinds of
practices.

[17] In the German-language version of *Funny Games*, instead of smirking, Paul
winks at the viewer. Whether this subtle difference is of any consequence is for

directly addresses the viewer through dialogue. In one scene, he asks, "What do you think? Do you think [Ann and George] have a chance at winning? You're on their side, aren't you? So, who will you bet with?" (*Funny Games*). Later, in response to Ann's question, "Why don't you just kill us right away?" Paul replies, "Don't forget the entertainment value. We'd all be deprived of our pleasure" (*Funny Games*). One critic explains that "these scenes take[ ] viewers out of the temporal-spatial context in which they are anchored…the thinking viewer can recognize that production modes have become themselves an integral part of the world of fiction" (Pillip 355). Haneke forcibly removes us from the space of the primary narrative, making us aware of it as a construction, one capable of manipulating both our emotions and, more importantly, our attitudes toward violence.

A second function of these meta-narrative moments is to implicate us, as viewers of the film, in the scenes of torture that we witness. Haneke has been forthcoming about his intentions to turn the mirror on the audience, particularly American audiences who have come to treat violence as "a sort of consumer product" (Johnston 20). When Paul involves us in the scenes of violence and torture, we must confront our expectations of the film's narrative and, more broadly, of all the narratives we consume for entertainment value. It is worth noting that Haneke patently refuses to satisfy the viewer's desire for narrative fulfillment through violence; when violence occurs in the film, it either never comes to fruition or occurs off-screen, denying the viewer the possibility of

the reader to decide.

fulfillment through violence. For instance, setting us up for what seems to be an inevitable rape scene, Haneke refuses to show Ann's naked body, and, at the expected moment of physical violence, Paul tells her to put her clothes back on. Our encounter with scenes such as this one is complex; we are simultaneously relieved to see Ann spared the horrors of rape and frustrated by Haneke's refusal to fulfill on the film's promises. Here Haneke seems to suggest that Americans' innate appetite for violence ultimately effects an implicit endorsement of the same kind of violence that we see enacted on political prisoners in the name of national security. Violence having permeated the constructed boundaries of domestic space, Americans put faith in narratives of national security to satisfy our desire for violence and bloodshed.[18]

Commenting on viewer expectations is only one part of Haneke's complex agenda in his treatment of narrative. More importantly, he is interested in narrative as a spatial locus that imprisons viewers through architectures of manipulation. Gail K. Hart writes, "it is not so much a potential heightening of viewer aggression that troubles Haneke, but what he perceives as submission to a narrative structure that explains and accommodates violence and the subordination, for profit, of art to pacification" (72). Another critic explains that

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[18] This phenomenon is all the more pertinent in light of the recent influx of ultra-realistic videogames that allow gamers to control American military personnel in horrifically violent battles, some of which take place in American cities in the imagined scenario of foreign invasion. More disturbing, television commercials for these videogames are ubiquitous on all major networks and often depict movie stars, athletes, and other well-known celebrities participating in these ultra-violent scenes of urban warfare. In these commercials we see the horrifying convergence of military force, the familiar rhetoric of homeland security, and our own innate desire for violence.

Haneke "seems interested in the relation between pain and its containment through the generalizing capacity of classical narration" (Price 26). In my analysis of *American Pastoral*, I showed how the novel's primary narrative forms a familiar, domestic space for the reader, and when Roth removes us from this textual space through Zuckerman's frame story, he exposes the strains of political violence embedded in all processes of narrativization. In *Funny Games*, Haneke, too, exposes the machinery of narrative, but, rather than exerting violence *on* classical narrative—as we see Zuckerman do to the Swede's story—he suggests that our conceptions of narrative have been conditioned around the presence of violence to such a degree that narrative cannot exist without violence. These processes are even more pronounced when considering *Funny Games* as both a product of and an intervention into mainstream Hollywood culture. The filmic strategies that Haneke deploys simultaneously engage and subvert the power of the visual image through scenes that both deny the visceral "pleasure" of on-screen violence and, in certain instances, fulfill on the film's promises, presenting violence in horrific detail. Unlike Roth's novel, whose readership would not necessarily require the same degree of narrative propulsion as an average moviegoer would, Haneke's film, always aware, ironically, of its obligation to entertain, is better equipped to stimulate, subvert, and critique readerly expectations.

Haneke's aims become evident midway through the film when, after brutally murdering Georgie, Peter and Paul inexplicably depart, leaving Ann and

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George to deal with the carnage of the murder. The following scene, filmed in an extended nine and a half minute single shot from a stationary camera angle, shows Ann, with her hands and feet bound, struggling to stand up. Once she does so, she unties George and helps him out of the living room, concluding the excruciatingly-long single shot. The following scenes show George attempting to dry their water-damaged cell-phone with a hair dryer and Ann searching for wire-cutters in the nearby greenhouse, again employing extended, single-frame shots. In these scenes in particular, and, in fact, all of the scenes that take place in the absence of the torturers, we are struck by how little action occurs and by how dramatically the "entertainment value" of the film has suffered. Contrasting the quick edits and close-ups that characterize the early part of the film, these scenes mostly employ long, drawn out shots that deprive the viewer of emotional connection to the on-screen action. When the torturers return in the final part of the film, Haneke resorts back to his more conventional filmmaking strategies, and we find ourselves both horrified and, admittedly, pleased to see the film resume its narrative velocity. Through these scenes, Haneke clearly suggests that classical narrative is heavily-dependent on violence as its narrative motor. Without Peter and Paul, the agents of violence in the film, the narrative loses momentum and the film's entertainment value suffers. Paul tells Ann upon his return, "We want to entertain our audience…show them what we can do" (*Funny Games*). Sadly, without these agents of violence, the movie is unable to entertain, and the viewer

cannot help but appreciate the narrative tension generated by scenes of torture and bloodshed.

Haneke's formal experiments come to a head in the film's climax, when Ann, faced with imminent death, grabs the gun from the coffee table and shoots Peter in the chest, launching his body against the far wall. In light of Haneke's general refusal to depict graphic violence throughout the film, this scene's realistic and totally visual rendering of retributive justice is remarkable. Haneke has commented on his desire in this scene to turn the mirror, again, on the audience, critiquing viewers who derive pleasure from witnessing the graphic murder of another human being. Our relationship to narrative, character, and violence at this point might be more complex than Haneke is willing to concede, but it is nonetheless worth considering our relation to violence and retributive justice. What is more remarkable about this scene is what follows Peter's death. Seeing his friend's body splayed against the wall, Paul picks up the television remote from the couch and presses rewind. At this moment, the film we have been watching, too, begins to rewind, simulating the work of a digital video player, and we see the graphic violence played in reverse, up until the point when Ann grabs the gun from the coffee table. When the film resumes, Paul stops Ann's play at the gun, and the torturers reestablish control over their victims.

Apart from removing the viewer from the film's primary narrative and exposing it as a construction, this scene establishes the critical fact that we, as viewers, are prisoners, like Ann and George within their home, within a narrative

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architecture. When Paul presses rewind on the remote, reversing Ann's attempt to claim control of the narrative, he establishes his role as the agent, not only of violence, but of narrative invention. His ability to manipulate the narrative gives him control over both his victims and, more importantly, the viewer, who, teased by Ann's act of aggression, realizes that the narrative will fail to fulfill on its promises of a redemptive conclusion. In every respect, then, our conceptions of narrative as a stable home, protected from the violence of the outside world, have been turned upside down. The agents of narrative invention have exposed classical narrative to be an inherently unstable domain, and their propensity for torture combined with our own desire for violence, demonstrates that the very modes we have of understanding our world, modes founded on narrative stability, are under constant manipulation by forces well beyond our control.

This, of course, speaks more broadly to the presence of institutional violence in our home lives and the narrative control that the state has exerted over our conceptions of the American homeland. As the state increasingly exerts control over private space, articulated here through domestic imaginaries, we likewise relinquish our control over the narratives that we once used to establish positions of political agency that separated us from the discourses of the state. The narratives of violence, torture, and political innocence that the state continues to produce are fueled, I argue, by our own complex relationship to violence. In the same way that we, as viewers, are denied control over the film's narrative of torture and violence, a narrative that uses the domestic space of the house as its

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logical vehicle for production, so, too, do we find ourselves manipulated by an institutional presence that uses the homeland, a slippery rhetorical trope, as the site of narrative production. These narratives, like the ones that imprison us within the textual space of *Funny Games*, ultimately confine Americans within a particular ideological framework that makes it increasingly difficult to find ways of challenging the discourses of the state; the argument to reduce our defense budget and adopt a more politically-responsible foreign policy, for instance, is always met by the maddening and practically watertight contention that doing so would put the safety of the American homeland at risk.

Both *American Pastoral* and *Funny Games*, too very different kinds of texts, help us to better understand our relationship to institutional politics and how the state infiltrates, redefines, and ultimately controls the narratives produced through domestic space. As the boundaries of public and private space continue to erode under the discourses of national security and the protection of the homeland, so, too, does our ability to establish political positions that exist outside the lines of discourse provided by the state. As I have outlined in the previous chapter, this evolving relationship between the individual and the state is inherently traumatic, and much of the state's power resides in generating narratives that are embedded in the fabric of everyday life. By rhetorically situating the American homeland and issues of homeland security in domestic terms, the state has infiltrated the most intimate of private spaces, producing political narratives that, because of their psychic proximity, are difficult to

contest. Embedded in domestic space, these narratives—whether they encourage

political apathy (*American Pastoral*) or the endorsement of political violence

(*Funny Games*)—render individuals complicit agents of American institutional

power. In this way, Americans exercise "technologies of the self," supporting

dubious political initiatives—the Patriot Act, wars in the Middle East, policies of

torture, etc.—that legitimate and extend the state's power and influence.

These processes tend to limit Americans' political agency, and,

confronted by this political reality, individuals enter the arena of political trauma.

Traumatic dislocation occurs, if we revisit Jenny Edkins' writings on political

trauma, when the individual is made aware of her traumatic relation to the state,

recognizing a "radical interconnectedness that has been so shockingly betrayed in

and through the violence of trauma" ("Remembering Relationality" 99). In *Funny*

Games, the lack of agency that we witness in Ann and George's submission to

their torturers and that we experience in our submission to narrative authority

provokes this kind of profound psychological disturbance; it is not surprising that

audience members at Cannes famously walked out during Haneke's screening of

the film, obviously disgusted by the subject matter, but more likely reacting to a

deeper psychological trauma connected to their loss of agency as spectators.

Roth's novel is less interested in provoking these traumatic encounters through its

formal strategies, but the Swede's mental decline is surely the consequence of his

inability to assimilate the dramatic upheaval of his home life and the violence that

has permeated its boundaries.

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I have shown in this chapter how domestic spaces are inherently political and how our conceptions of the homeland and the home front, which are intimately linked to domestic space, serve as repositories for political narratives. In the following chapter, I discuss the first moment of national trauma following the attacks on the World Trade Center: Hurricane Katrina. In the weeks and months following the hurricane, the Department of Homeland Security was instrumental in organizing and disciplining the city space of New Orleans, and many of the critical discourses attached the American homeland came to bear, materially, on the people of New Orleans. Having discussed the ways that institutional power infiltrates our most intimate spaces, in the next chapter I explore how institutional power extends outside of the home and into the city, re-writing our relationship to urban space.

CHAPTER 3

SMOOTHING OUT THE CITY:

HURRICANE KATRINA AND THE POLITICS OF URBAN SPACE

I have one message for these hoodlums… These troops are fresh back from Iraq, well-trained, experienced, battle tested and under my orders to restore order in the streets. They have M-16s and they are locked and loaded. These troops know how to shoot and kill, and they are more than willing to do so if necessary, and I expect they will.

<div style="text-align:center">Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco</div>

We going down to Bedford town / Iko iko unday / We gonna dance / Bout to mess around / Jockomo feena nay.

<div style="text-align:center">"Iko Iko," Mardi Gras Indian Traditional</div>

By now the story of Hurricane Katrina is familiar to most Americans: New Orleans, swallowed by devastating flooding, tens of thousands of people evacuated from the city, entire neighborhoods destroyed. The U.S. government's delayed response, thousands quarantined in the Superdome and the Convention Center, reports of looting, rape, murder. Residents of New Orleans in boats patrolling the city's flooded streets, pulling survivors from their homes. The military, torn between conflicting missions to provide aid and establish order in a

city slipping toward chaos. The American news media producing heavily racialized narratives of African Americans, armed and dangerous, roaming the streets. New Orleans had entered a state of lawlessness, and the federal government was absent. The iconic image to emerge from Hurricane Katrina, ironically enough, in no way depicted the devastation wrought by the hurricane. Nor did it depict a city submerged in water, or the water pouring in through the compromised levees from the surrounding Lake Ponchartrain and the city's canal system. It did not portray the suffering endured by those forced to spend five days in the sweltering heat of the Superdome, desperate for food, water, and medical care. The image most often associated with Hurricane Katrina depicts President George W. Bush gazing out the window of Air Force One, suspended above the chaos, a symbol of the massive disconnect between the US government and the people of the United States.

That this image achieved such symbolic capital owes itself to the ways Americans have since come to regard Hurricane Katrina as a natural disaster and the *aftermath* of Katrina as a decidedly *unnatural* disaster. This latter zone of inquiry is the focus of this chapter. The suffering endured by New Orleanians in the days, weeks, months, and even years following the hurricane and the large-scale restructuring of urban space in New Orleans that continues even today are in many ways a result of an American institutional project that increasingly inscribes itself on the spaces of everyday life, often at the expense of those on society's margins. The discourses of race and class circulating in the news media in the

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days after the hurricane—mostly linked to erroneous reports of rape and murder

in the Superdome and Convention Center, and racially-tinged accounts of looting

in the city—by no means ended as New Orleans struggled to put itself back

together; these discourses (which existed long before anyone had ever heard of

Katrina) continue to play a significant role in the rebuilding of the city. As the

urban space of New Orleans was laid bare by the flooding and the subsequent

destabilization of its various social and political infrastructures, the residents of

New Orleans—both during and after the storm—were exposed to a gross display

of institutional violence, violence stemming from the militarization of the city and

the controversial politics of reconstruction. Therefore, the iconic significance of

the Air Force One photograph reveals how Hurricane Katrina has become

associated with institutional inaction, institutional violence, and, for those people

caught up in the aftermath of the storm, institutional trauma.

      That said, designating the Bush Administration as solely responsible for

the trauma endured by New Orleanians prevents us from exploring the more

complex institutional failures at the heart of Katrina as a political event.

Furthermore this impulse works against one of the central claims of this project:

that in the era of globalization, power is networked and dispersed in such a way as

to eliminate the political significance of individual sovereign entities. Michael

Hardt and Antonio Negri, describing capitalism as the force underlying the recent

movement toward global "Empire," write, "sovereignty has taken a new form,

composed of a series of national and supranational organisms united under a

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single logic of rule…Empire establishes no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is a *decentered* and *deterritorializing* apparatus of rule" (xii). Although, Hardt and Negri here address power in the context of global politics, the increasingly dispersed, networked space of American institutional politics similarly locates power and, thus, responsibility, in the structure itself, rather than in the state actors that comprise it. The institutional failures associated with Katrina, of course, occurred within this network, where separate institutional entities—from the insurance industry to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to the Army Corps of Engineers—contributed jointly to New Orleanians' material and psychological displacement. Lacking a traumatic referent against which to position their anger, fear, and resentment over their treatment as "refugees" in their own country,[1] residents of the city found themselves victims of political trauma.

The federal government's inability to execute a well-orchestrated recovery resulted in a profound destabilization of city space, one that seemingly justified a radical inscription of near-martial law as a means of maintaining order. This chapter is interested in the ways that the urban space of New Orleans was "laid bare" following the storm, how the state quickly imposed itself on this space, and, finally, how individuals would eventually position themselves against the politics

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[1] Douglas Brinkley discusses the contentious debate over the use of the term "refugee" in the days following the hurricane. Many political leaders, most notably Jesse Jackson, claimed that the term positioned the predominantly black survivors of Katrina within a framework of American privilege and, conversely, racism. Refugees were "necessarily foreigners" and were therefore excluded from the benefits of a safe and secure American life (465).

of the state through critical subversive activity in urban space. The two texts of interest to this chapter—Dave Eggers' work of narrative nonfiction, *Zeitoun* and David Simon and Eric Overmyer's HBO series, *Treme*—address this progression and reveal the always-present tension between individuals and the institutions that surround them, particularly in the context of urban spaces. Both texts emphasize the trauma of Hurricane Katrina not as a result of the hurricane itself, but rather as a consequence of institutional politics laying claim to the space of the city, a space once associated with unregimented, free cultural exchange. The characters in these texts, like the residents of New Orleans even today in 2013, seek to overcome the institutional trauma of Katrina by wrestling their city from the grips of regimented, institutional control.

In order to understand how institutional power inscribed itself on the space of the city, it is first necessary to understand the foundations of institutional power in New Orleans, which can be traced through two interrelated infrastructural and cultural phenomena: first, the politics surrounding the construction and maintenance of the levee system protecting New Orleans and, second, the city's long and thorny history of race relations. These two factors contribute to my argument, here, that institutional power, especially in the aftermath of Katrina, must be understood as networked, dispersed, and existing within and between various systems of power. The state is only one of several agents involved in the institutional program of New Orleans.

Douglas Brinkley details the failures of a series of projects over the course of the twentieth century that were designed to protect New Orleans through a complex levee system put in place by the Army Corps of Engineers (8-10). These levees—often engineered to satisfy conflicting desires of federal and state governments—were not only poorly constructed, but they also played a crucial role in the erosion of the wetlands surrounding New Orleans from 1930 to 2005. These wetlands represented the chief means of natural protection against flooding for the people of New Orleans. Furthermore, the levees themselves by 2005 were in a state of disrepair, but, as Spike Lee suggests in his excellent documentary, *When the Levees Broke*, politically-risky propositions to pour money into projects of reconstruction were passionately avoided by politicians concerned with re-election. Those acquainted with the history of levee politics in New Orleans were not surprised when the levees were breached by the city's overflowing canal system and the surrounding Lake Ponchartrain during Katrina, and the institutional failure that allowed this to happen reflects the tendency for politics to jeopardize the safety of civilians.

In addition to the levee politics of New Orleans, the city's place in the national consciousness and its veiled history of racial conflict contributed to the traumatic impact of Katrina and its aftermath. Jeremy I. Levitt and Matthew C. Whitaker note that, despite the city's much-celebrated cultural diversity, "The Pre-Katrina Gulf Coast, especially New Orleans, like many other American regions and cities, was characterized by racism, racial segregation, and acute

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poverty levels well before the storm" (6). In fact, by 2005, New Orleans would claim an astonishing 28 percent general and 35 percent black poverty rate, which represented some of the highest figures in the nation (7). These discourses on race and class similarly play into the spatial segregation of the city; the wealthiest (and therefore whitest) neighborhoods, such as Lakeview—situated on high ground relative to the rest of the city—were mostly unaffected by the flooding, whereas black neighborhoods like the Lower Ninth Ward were devastated by nearby breaches in the levees. Race relations in New Orleans are further complicated by the city's divergent strains of cultural tourism and racism. Lynell L. Thomas writes:

> New Orleans pre-Katrina tourism, then, was part of the
> historically-paradoxical construction of blackness that
> acknowledges and celebrates black cultural contributions while
> simultaneously insisting upon black social and cultural inferiority
> and indicting African Americans for perceived post-bellum and
> post-civil-rights-era social ills of poverty, crime, immorality,
> educational inadequacy, and political corruption. (750-751)

The spirit of racism that became visible in the days following the storm, then, was concealed, but nonetheless present, throughout the twentieth century.[2] Class and, thus, race-based discrimination and segregation therefore played into the

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[2] See also James Edward Ford III's "Mob Rule in New Orleans: Anarchy, Governance, and Media Representation," which discusses racial violence in New Orleans over the course of the twentieth century, and how the representation of African Americans during Katrina fell in line with the city's long history of racial prejudice.

institutional response to Katrina in critical ways, and this chapter addresses how these discourses coincided with larger projects of nationalism and homeland security. In fact, intersecting vectors of institutional racism, state and federal political policies that failed to address the problem of the levees, and a networked federal bureaucracy concerned with combating terrorism ultimately enabled a decidedly man-made catastrophe that would generate a space for political trauma.

What is interesting about *Zeitoun* and *Treme*—and, indeed, about much of the literature dealing with post-Katrina New Orleans—is their interest in producing an accurate record of the events that transpired following the storm. *Zeitoun*, a work of narrative nonfiction and certainly a formal departure for Eggers, whose pared down writing in this text contrasts with the sometimes distracting rhetorical flourish of his prior work, includes an extensive bibliography and a statement on the author's methodology. In addition to the numerous photographs incorporated into the text, the prefatory note makes clear that "dates, times, locations, and other facts have been confirmed by independent sources and the historical record" (Eggers xv). Likewise, much of *Treme*'s cast hails from New Orleans or surrounding areas, and in several instances, survivors of the hurricane, some of whom appear in Spike Lee's documentary, *When the Levees Broke*, receive speaking parts in the script. The project of narrativization connected to Katrina, then, is itself a mode of processing national trauma; although relatively few Americans were directly affected by the hurricane, the

idea that such institutional injustice could be perpetrated against Americans affected the national consciousness in profound ways.

However, unlike the complex processes of narrativization circulating around 9/11, which, as I demonstrated in the first chapter, are continually being absorbed and co-opted by institutional projects of narrative production, the narratives on Katrina exist in a significantly less politically-sensitive rhetorical zone; the government's failures are, to many Americans at this point, common knowledge, so the work of these texts is to expose the more complicated racial discourses operating in the city and to address the ongoing political trauma being experienced by New Orleanians. In this regard, the project of Katrina narratives— especially in the two texts discussed below—is to offer testimony as a means of confronting political trauma. Shoshana Felman explains that testimony is "a discursive *practice*, as opposed to pure *theory*…As a performative speech act, testimony in effect addresses what in history is *action* that exceeds any substantialized significance, and what in happenings is *impact* that dynamically explodes any conceptual reifications and any constative delimitations" (5). In this regard, the practice of testimony, insofar as it represents a "performative speech act," is much like the performative spatial practices that characters turn to in order to reclaim the urban space of New Orleans, a space overwritten by institutional power and, thus, a site of trauma.[3]

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[3] For a companion to the texts under consideration in this chapter, see poet Cynthia Hogue and photographer Rebecca Ross' recent intermedial experiment in photography, poetry, and testimony, *When the Water Came: Evacuees of Hurricane Katrina.* Interviewing a number of Katrina evacuees, many of whom

Zeitoun and *Treme* work in tandem as texts that uncover the dimensions of political trauma immediately after the storm and during the extended rehabilitation of New Orleans. The first part of this chapter investigates *Zeitoun* to examine the ways that institutional power immediately inscribed itself on urban space, and how the intersection of racism and the politics of Homeland Security propelled many inhabitants of New Orleans into a state of "bare life." The regimentation and militarization of urban space represent extreme examples of Foucault's control society and Giorgio Agamben's *homo sacer*, and the task for residents of the city after the hurricane was to reestablish sites of resistance and cultural mobility in order to reclaim the urban spaces that fell under institutional control. Following this thread, over the course of its ten episodes, the first season of *Treme*—taking place three months after the flooding of the city—describes the modes by which New Orleanians attempted to reclaim the city space of New Orleans. The series describes the racial politics of the city, from the recent debates on public housing projects to the policing of urban spaces to the "Disneyfication"

have been permanently displaced by the hurricane, Hogue uses her poetry as a "performative speech act," giving voice to survivors and witnesses through the written word, the performed poem, and the visual image. Hogue's poems are positioned alongside Ross' portraits of survivors and their homes, and these portraits utilize the visual image to resist the spectacular representations of Katrina's aftermath that were broadcast by the news media. By depicting the quotidian, everyday lives of survivors (none of the photographs depict the usual horrors now associated with Katrina), and combining these images with affective, politically-charged testimony through the poems, Ross and Hogue resist mediated, sensational narratives of Katrina, and successfully generate channels for the processing of trauma. Furthermore, the book's overt concern for depicting the urban space of New Orleans through the photographs suggests that the act of testimony provides opportunities for reclaiming—at least on psychological levels—the urban spaces that were lost after the hurricane.

of New Orleans, and suggests critical spatial practices that allow individuals to reclaim spaces of agency and cultural expression in their city. Utilizing the space of the city as a site for embodied performance, characters in *Treme* take positive steps toward reasserting themselves in the urban spaces they inhabit. By applying theoretical approaches equally invested in trauma studies and spatial theory, this chapter demonstrates how the characters in these texts practice space as a means of both confronting trauma and challenging the institutional discourses responsible for provoking it.

Political Floodwaters and the Military City

At one point in Dave Eggers' account of Abdulraham Zeitoun's horrifying experience in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina, Zeitoun, encountering a hostile, possibly violent, cadre of police and National Guardsmen, thinks to himself, "what were they doing in the city, if not helping evacuate people" (134). From this moment forward, this question haunts Eggers' text, compelling readers to reflect on the relationship between civilian life and martial law,[4] and how the events following Katrina serve as a microcosm for the enduring tensions between civilians and the state. Egger's text recounts Zeitoun's experience in the days following the hurricane and the emotional turmoil endured by his wife, Kathy, and their four children, who seek refuge first in Baton Rouge and then Phoenix.

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[4] Although New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin declared a state of martial law on Thursday, September 1, the federal government—barred by Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco's refusal to cede full control of the city to the DHS—would never formally declare martial law in New Orleans. Nonetheless, as Douglas Brinkley writes, "New Orleans was inching toward a state of martial law. It didn't need to be declared" (209).

Choosing to remain in the city during the storm, Zeitoun—marked by his

ethnicity—finds himself powerless against institutional forces that project onto

him a litany of racial prejudices stemming from deeply rooted discourses on 9/11,

terrorism, and the Middle East. Along with three friends, all occupying a house

under his ownership, Zeitoun is arrested by a group of armed soldiers, taken to a

makeshift prison, and finally transported to the Elayn Hunt Correctional Center, a

maximum-security prison outside of New Orleans. Assumed to be al Qaeda,

Zeitoun and his friends spend the next several weeks in captivity, deprived of

communication to the outside world, enduring physical and psychological torture

at the hands of their government. Assuming her husband to be dead, Kathy

eventually learns of his whereabouts and, breaking through layers of institutional

red tape, secures his release.

Eggers' narrative is predominantly concerned with, first, describing the

Zeitouns' traumatic encounter with institutional power, and, second, addressing

the ways in which the city of New Orleans was transformed as a result of the

hurricane. The storm and subsequent flooding destabilized the power dynamics

embedded in the city's urban space, power dynamics present in all urban

environments and responsible for facilitating cultural and economic exchange.

Eggers describes how state power, most directly represented by the military

presence in the city, radically imposed itself on an urban space temporarily freed

from institutional discipline. Deleuze and Guattari's writings on "smooth" and

"striated" space provide a useful starting point for exploring this process and its

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implications on the city of New Orleans. The former concept refers to deterritorializing, democratic, heterogeneous space totally free of discourses of control, while the latter describes planned, regimented, homogeneous space often implemented and disciplined by the state (*A Thousand Plateaus* 371). According to Deleuze and Guattari, these concepts give way to one another as a result of the dynamic relationship between the individual and the state. They write, "we must remind ourselves that the two spaces in fact exist only in mixture: smooth space is constantly being translated, transversed into a striated space; striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space" (474). This process is particularly evident in the aftermath of Katrina, where the destabilized city space of New Orleans quickly became a highly-contested, highly-regimented political zone.

In his first canoe-bound peregrinations into the flooded streets of New Orleans, Zeitoun is confronted by the radically-altered space of the city, a space once responsible for disciplining bodies and facilitating the flow of capitalism, but now completely free of all discourses of control. Eggers writes, "He paddled down Dart Street, the water flat and clear. And strangely, almost immediately, Zeitoun felt at peace. The damage to the neighborhood was extraordinary, but there was an odd calm in his heart. So much had been lost, but there was a stillness to the city that was almost hypnotic" (95). Later, attempting to rescue a man stranded in his own home, Zeitoun thinks to himself, "It was a strange sensation, paddling over a man's yard; the usual barrier that would prevent one

from guiding a vehicle up to the house was gone. He could glide directly from the street, diagonally across the lawn, and appear just a few feet below a second-story window. Zeitoun was just getting accustomed to the new physics of this world" (97). These descriptions of the city immediately following the storm reveal the ways in which the flooding of New Orleans temporarily transformed the landscape of the city, allowing Zeitoun and other survivors to traverse urban space in ways not usually permitted in the regimented space of the city. In his canoe, Zeitoun moves beyond the discourses of control that normally embed themselves in striated space. He enters the homes of his neighbors and moves freely between the public and the private boundaries that traditionally organize and discipline space.

The sense of harmony Zeitoun finds as he negotiates smooth space owes itself to the absence of regimented, institutional power in New Orleans following the storm. It is worth noting the ways that post-Katrina New Orleans perhaps provides a rare outlet from Foucault's theory of panopticism as a ubiquitous presence in contemporary life. Foucault explains that our society functions on the principle of surveillance. He writes, "Under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth; behind the great abstraction of exchange, there continues the meticulous, concrete training of useful forces…[We are] in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of its mechanism" (*Discipline and Punish* 217). Absent of any modes of institutional control and surveillance, the city streets for a brief moment instill in Zeitoun the

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sensation of existence beyond the gaze of the law and the state. This, perhaps, explains his sense of freedom and his self-described elation as he paddles through the city streets, in what he calls the "in-between time—after the storm but before anyone had returned to the city" (Eggers 132). It should be noted, however, that the "smoothing out" of space, even as it offers Zeitoun an outlet from the disciplining forces of city space, conversely enabled the widespread violence and looting that took place after the hurricane, suggesting that a society must necessarily strike a balance between the smooth and the striated.

Ostensibly as a means of bringing order back to the city, the federal government and the Louisiana state government authorized the militarization of New Orleans. Stretched thin by wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, however, the U.S. military could hardly spare the kind of troop presence necessary to regain order in the city. In fact, many of the Army and National Guardsmen who would eventually find their way to New Orleans had recently served in the Middle East and were ill-prepared for dealing with civilian conflict (Lee). The American military, then, seasoned by brutal warfare in the Middle East, was stuck with the job of instilling order in a major American city populated entirely by civilians. To complicate matters, media representations of violence and looting in the city all but authorized the military to utilize force wherever necessary. Clearly influenced by this rhetoric, Governor Blanco at one point stated to the press, "I have one message for these hoodlums… These troops are fresh back from Iraq, well-trained, experienced, battle tested and under my orders to restore order in the

streets. They have M-16s and they are locked and loaded. These troops know how to shoot and kill, and they are more than willing to do so if necessary, and I expect they will" (Dyson 114). Thus, the military had turned into a blunt instrument of force whose prime imperative, rather than saving the lives of those stranded in the city, was to neutralize threats, both real and perceived.

Zeitoun's wrongful imprisonment results directly from the institutional reaction to New Orleans' transformed city space. Lacking its conventional modes of control and discipline,[5] the smooth space of New Orleans opened itself to radical institutional redefinition. Upon his arrest and imprisonment in Camp Greyhound, a makeshift jail constructed on the site of the Greyhound bus-terminal, Zeitoun is alarmed by the state's impulse to imprison, rather than protect, the residents of New Orleans. Eggers writes, "Zeitoun had been brought into the station on September 6, seven and a half days after the hurricane passed through the city. Even under the best of circumstances, building a prison like this would have taken four or five days. That meant that within a day of the storm's eye passing over the region, officials were making plans for the building of a makeshift outdoor prison" (226). Rather than facilitating an evacuation plan and proffering aid to the ailing inhabitants of New Orleans, the federal government set as its primary focus the capture and detention of anyone engaged in suspicious behavior. This, as many studies on Hurricane Katrina have already noted, opened

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[5] The New Orleans Police Department was particularly inept in its response to the ensuing chaos in the city. Some police officers even joined the ranks of looters, while others—emotionally and physically exhausted after several days without relief—simply left the city in their squad cars, permanently abandoning their posts (Brinkley 203).

the door for widespread racial profiling. What has received less attention, though, is the state's immediate effort to discipline urban space as a means of bringing order to the city. Eggers writes, "The parking lot, where a dozen buses might normally be parked, had been transformed into a vast outdoor prison" (218). Urban spaces were now being appropriated as material sites of institutional discipline. Whereas prior spatial analysis might have addressed the parking lot as a site for facilitating commerce and bolstering capitalism, here we see the institution imposing itself on city space in more radical ways; disciplining bodies no longer refers to the abstract socio-economic relationship between the individual and the institution, but rather to the very material imprisonment that many innocent New Orleanians experienced following the storm. In the streets of New Orleans, institutional power, as a disciplining force that had theretofore remained transparent in the city's infrastructure, became temporarily visible.

Foucault's famous study on the machinery of the modern penitentiary system and its political dimensions proves fruitful for this discussion. Indeed, the state's immediate construction of "Camp Greyhound" indicates the reversal or dissolution of the panopticon as the disciplining force in modern life. Foucault describes the evolution of the panoptic prison apparatus, beginning in the 18th century, noting how this model for the modern prison would influence the modes of discipline present in factories, barracks, and other sites of institutional power. In contemporary America, institutional discipline has become naturalized to the extent that—with the exception of rare cases like the one described above—it is

impossible to function beyond the perception of the panoptic gaze. With the

erasure of the modes of control embedded in New Orleans' city space, the state

naturally reverted to more primitive means of establishing order, which we see in

Blanco's virtual declaration of martial law and, more specifically, in the

construction of Camp Greyhound. One of the critical features of incarceration that

Foucault describes is the concept of delinquency. As a means of ensuring their

survival and extending their influence on civilian life, prisons must produce and

encourage delinquency (Foucault, *Discipline* 267).[6] By making visible and

incarcerating those subjects existing *outside* of the law, the prison effectively

controls and disciplines—through the constant threat of incarceration—those

subjects existing *within* the law. In Zeitoun's case, this process manifests itself in

a particularly sinister form, as his delinquency is connected to his ethnicity.

The narratives of institutional racism in the immediate wake of Katrina are

by now well known to many Americans, but these narratives mainly focus on

racism perpetrated against African Americans. Zeitoun's Syrian identity

complicates this discussion, as his ethnic identity engages post-9/11 xenophobic

anxieties and, more specifically, the fear of Muslim men as terrorists. Whereas

African Americans were subject to racist stereotypes amplified by media-

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[6] This practice is immediately evident in the recent debates on illegal immigration and the privatization of the prison system. Privately owned and operated prisons—which have become increasingly prevalent in the past decade—are putting pressure on lawmakers to uphold legislation that criminalizes immigration, both as a means of justifying their existence and, on a broader institutional level, to define American identity as a legal concept. This process, of course, operates on racial and ethnic terrain and projects non-white identity as inherently delinquent.

generated narratives that focused on looting, violence, and a morally-bankrupt

lower-class culture,[7] Zeitoun's identity defines him as an ideological enemy of the

state. Associated with ideological delinquency, his ethnic identity justifies not

only incarceration, but also gross violations of constitutional and, more generally,

human rights. During his month-long captivity, Zeitoun endures strip-searches,

verbal and physical abuse, solitary confinement, deprivation of medical attention,

starvation, and many other subtle forms of torture. Eggers writes, "Zeitoun was in

disbelief. It had been a dizzying series of events—arrested at gunpoint in a home

he owned, brought to an impromptu military base built inside a bus station,

accused of terrorism, and locked in an outdoor cage. It surpassed the most surreal

accounts he'd heard of third-world law enforcement" (218). Of course not the

only ethnic "other" to endure this kind of treatment, Zeitoun's imprisonment

occurs as a result of the state's policies on the defense of the homeland detailed in

the previous chapter. As a Middle-Eastern man, Zeitoun's presence in an

American city perceived to be under imminent threat represents, in the eyes of

institutional power, an intrusion of political violence on the fortified space of the

homeland. In order to neutralize this threat, the state enacts violence from within,

regimenting the city's streets as a means of ideologically cleansing the perceived

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[7] Michael Eric Dyson describes two Associated Press photographs, and their
accompanying captions, that were circulated on the Internet in the first days of the
storm's aftermath. The first photo shows a black man wading through the streets,
clutching items from a grocery store. The caption describes him "looting a
grocery store." Another photo depicts a white couple in the same circumstances,
but, here, the caption describes them "finding bread and soda from a local grocery
store" (164). These subtle framings helped to code black survivors as morally
delinquent, and perhaps played into the institution's sluggish recovery effort.

contagion. Here, again, we see how violence is embedded in and intrinsic to the symbolic locus of the "home."

Paradoxically, Zeitoun's imprisonment justifies itself. Placed in sub-human conditions and forced to "urinate and defecate wherever they could" (251), prisoners were perceived to be guilty by virtue of their incarceration and, more specifically, by the abject conditions produced by it. Suggesting the possibility of Zeitoun proving his innocence to a prison nurse, Eggers writes, "Professing his innocence to her was futile, as professions of innocence were likely all she heard all day. In fact, he knew that his very presence in a maximum-security prison likely proved his guilt in the minds of all who worked at the facility" (254). Applying Foucault's writings, Zeitoun's predicament here can be extended to race as a marker of delinquency; particularly in a post-9/11 environment where the enemy of the state is identified as an outside threat (not only an internal ideological "other," as was the case in the Cold War, but an ethno-religious "other" with identifiable physical characteristics), one's ethnic coding inherently implies guilt. Camp Greyhound, therefore, a physical production of the state situated in the physical place of the city, facilitates the *material* production of institutional discourse; whereas the discourses of marginalization attached to Arab-American identity had obviously existed prior to 2005, the prison demonstrates the enduring ability of the state to discipline bodies in space and thereby bring these discourses to bear on New Orleanians in real, material ways.

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The prison furthermore falls in line with Georgio Agamben's writings on

the modern state as an increasingly invasive presence in American life. In much

the same way that discourses on homeland security served to erode the boundaries

that traditionally separated the public from the private and the state from the

home, the modern state has engrained itself in fundamental aspects of human life

through biopolitics and what Agamben calls "the state of exception." Agamben,

who uses biopolitics as his starting point, sums up Foucault's concept: "at the

threshold of the modern era, natural life begins to be included in the mechanisms

and calculations of State power, and politics turns to *biopolitics*" (3). As the

modern state increasingly exerts itself over fundamental issues of life and human

existence, it likewise politicizes these concepts, rendering them susceptible to the

manipulations of the state. From this position, Agamben describes the state of

exception, a modern apparatus that creates a condition of "bare life" in which

civilians are perpetually in a position of political vulnerability and are therefore

susceptible to the most violent and egregious offenses perpetrated by the state.

Agamben goes on to say, "The paradox of sovereignty consists in the fact the

sovereign is, at the same time, outside and inside the juridical order." This

paradox, he explains, is at the heart of "the structure of the exception" (15), in

which the state, by virtue of its absolute sovereignty, is authorized to transcend

the very laws that it creates. The intersection of biopolitics and the state of

exception, of course, generates a very precarious political position for civilian

subjects. Agamben writes, "There is no clearer way to say that the first foundation

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of political life is a life that may be killed, which is politicized through its very capacity to be killed" (89). Exposed to "bare life," civilians (Agamben uses the term *homo sacer*) are deprived of basic human rights, which exist only as an illusion for the preservation of social and political stability.

The radical politicization of urban space in New Orleans illustrates the precarious, traumatic relationship between the civilian and the state here in the twenty-first century and the ways that this discourse has embedded itself in city space, transforming the urban—traditionally figured as a post-Marxist site of production—into an extension of a highly-politicized, highly-policed, state apparatus. Zeitoun frequently compares Camp Greyhound to Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib, two military prisons operating both "outside and inside the juridical order" of the United States. To be sure, his imprisonment by the state demonstrates gross violations of constitutional rights here in America and, more broadly, violations of human rights endorsed by the international community. Describing the state of exception in terms more specific to our post-9/11 environment, Eggers writes, "Usually the story was similar: a Muslim man came to be suspected by the U.S. government, and, under the president's current powers, U.S. agents were allowed to seize the man from anywhere in the world, and bring him anywhere in the world, without ever having to charge him with a crime" (255). What Eggers describes here is the foundation of a modern political apparatus that can justify all manner of human rights violations in the name of national security; in fact, justification—however it is rhetorically-figured—might

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be understood more appropriately as a red-herring created to divert attention from the fact that the state of exception needs no justification for its transgressions.

Examining this phenomenon through the lens of urban space helps to explain the traumatic dimensions of Katrina for the people directly affected by the storm and by the subsequent militarization of the city. Zeitoun's imprisonment, though atypical to the average New Orleanian's experience, helps to demonstrate the complex political relationship between the "bare life" of the modern political subject and the state of exception. His traumatic relationship to the state furthermore illustrates Jenny Edkins' concept of "radical relationality" discussed in the previous chapter, in which individuals, during moments of state violence, are made aware of their precarious position in relation to state power ("Radical Relationality" 99). In much the same way that the state utilizes Camp Greyhound in an attempt to define Zeitoun as politically delinquent, the state policed the urban space of New Orleans and, in doing so, interpellated residents of the city—most of whom were lower-class and black—as intruders in their own home, displaced refugees who lacked a country and therefore did not deserve the protections afforded to Americans. In utilizing a military apparatus to restore order to New Orleans, the state produced rhetorically-powerful images that, relayed by the news media, generated a public perception, first, that New Orleans had slipped into a state of lawlessness that required state intervention and, second, that black people—savages in the absence of government—were to blame. Furthermore, these political narratives framed the military, and by extension the

state, as necessary for the restoration of law and order, thereby stitching military force and institutional power into the fabric of everyday life.

In *Zeitoun*, Eggers notes how the media represented the stranded survivors of the flooding as refugees in their own country (109), but that, in fact, political "othering" of marginalized groups, particularly in terms of the definition of an American identity, has been part of American discourse throughout the country's history. Kathy, Zeitoun's wife, distraught by anti-Muslim sentiment circulating in the wake of 9/11, at one point recalls seeing a fellow Muslim woman in a Walgreen's in the weeks following the attacks. Eggers writes, "The woman, a doctor studying at Tulane, had been feeling the same way, like an exile in her own country, and they laughed at how delirious they were to see each other" (46). By cordoning residents of the city into particular city spaces—the Superdome, the Convention Center, the Crescent City Connection—and in many instances denying the evacuation of survivors,[8] the state effectively defined the city as a war zone requiring institutional intervention.[9] By rhetorically constructing the city in

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[8] The Gretna Bridge Incident provides a particularly pertinent example here. On Thursday, September 1, a group of evacuees, desperate to leave the squalid conditions in the city and in search of food and water, attempted to walk across U.S. Route 90 to the neighboring Gretna, a predominantly white suburb mostly unaffected by the flooding. Met by a group of armed police officers from Gretna, the evacuees were prevented from leaving the city, and were assumed to be criminals and looters in search of more fertile territory. Douglas Brinkley writes, "The refugees inside the city could see lights and dry land across the river, but the guards were keeping them from attempting to leave. As the days passed and the week wore on, many believed that they were being held prisoner and that the government was trying to kill them" (473).

[9] The state's single-minded interest in militarizing the city before tending to the safety of those New Orleanians still trapped in their homes or the thousands of

this way, and by controlling the pathways to freedom, the state—whether

intentionally or not—interpellated the stranded survivors of Hurricane Katrina as

enemies of the state. These enemies of the state were black men and women on

the lower rungs of society, people who, because of Mayor Nagin's inability to

procure enough buses for evacuation, were left to fend for themselves during and

after the storm. Likewise, and in line with not-so-thinly-veiled pre-existing

prejudices linked to race and class, these victims of the hurricane were enemies of

an American way of life.

To sum up this process, by imposing itself on urban space—traditionally a

space defined by lower class residents who do not own automobiles[10] and, in their

material *use* of the city, *produce* urban space—the state, by way of the military,

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survivors in the Super Dome and the Convention Center reveals the more subtle
anxieties of the modern state. Primarily concerned with disciplining space through
military occupation, the state all but disregarded the more pressing humanitarian
issues at hand. Michael Eric Dyson observes that FEMA and the DHS both
blocked the Red Cross, an organization specifically designed to deal with such
emergencies, from providing aid to the survivors trapped in the city. The official
reason for this rejection of aid was "that it was too dangerous and that it might
encourage people to believe it was safe to remain" (122). While there might be
some truth to this, it is worth noting the efforts made by the state to keep the city
space of New Orleans regimented and entirely under its control.

[10] 27 percent of New Orleans residents did not own an automobile when the storm
hit in late August of 2005 (Ignatieff). The city's much-celebrated cultural scene in
part, at least, owes itself to the ways that New Orleans—for better or for worse—
has failed to adapt, alongside so-called postmodern metropolises such as Los
Angeles and Phoenix, to the culture of the automobile. "Walkers of the street"
(*Wandersmänner*), in Michel de Certeau's writings, are responsible for producing
culture and thereby challenging the structures of power embedded in the city (93).
See also Charles R.P. Pouncy's essay on race and economics in New Orleans,
"Hurricane Katrina and the 'Market' for Survival," which gives lengthy
discussion to automobile culture and its economic implications on the black
population of the city.

interpellated the survivors of the hurricane as ideological enemies of America. By reversing the paradigm of a user-defined urban space (in the spirit of Lefebvre's theories on "the urban"), the state reconfigured urban space in such a way as to cast out the very social groups most responsible for producing the discourses of city life. The trauma of Katrina emerges as survivors begin to understand that the very government created to protect them had not only failed to fulfill its promises, but furthermore had excluded them from sharing an American identity. In a *New York Times* article appearing weeks after Katrina, Michael Ignatieff explains:

> So it is not—as some commentators claimed—that the catastrophe laid bare the deep inequalities of American society. These inequalities may have been news to some, but they were not news to the displaced people in the convention center and elsewhere. What was bitter news to them was that their claims of citizenship mattered so little to the institutions charged with their protection…it was no longer possible to believe in the contract that binds Americans together.

In an even more intimate betrayal, perhaps, the state had redefined New Orleanians' relationship to their city, a hub of American culture renowned for its diversity and vibrant, democratic street-life.

The psychological effects of this literal and figurative occupation of the city are complex and profound. D'ann R. Penner's excellent study on the traumatic experiences of Katrina survivors reveals the deep psychological impact

of the Katrina experience, on notions of both local and national identity. Penner writes, "For many African Americans trapped in the city after the storm, the trauma of Katrina was experienced as the product of human beings, mainly armed law enforcement personnel and soldiers, brandishing assault rifles, acting disdainfully, and separating families" (583). Penner's article is structured around testimony given by a number of Katrina survivors. In each account, survivors describe the physical and psychological violence perpetrated on them by the military, consistently noting the ways that this violence affected their sense of identity as African Americans, New Orleanians, and, of course, Americans. What seems to be most shocking to these survivors is the brazen manner by which the military assumed control over urban space, regimenting and colonizing it with brutal force instead of providing aid to those in need. One survivor recounts:

> Them people didn't come down there to help nobody. *Them people came to straighten the streets out…Running up the streets like it's Afghanistan*, that's how it looked to me. Soldiers getting off helicopters, backing up behind each other, and covering each other. I'm looking at this like, man, they wasting their time doing that dumb ass shit…*They looked how a nigger look on the street*, like I am ready to do you something. If you get out of line any kind of way with me or if I feel like you're a threat, I'm going to take you out. That's all. You ain't got to say no words. *I've been on the street. They got the same eyes*. (Penner 589-590; my emphasis)

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This account, like many others, situates trauma in the physical place of the city, and, specifically, in the streets, the site of the military's reconfiguration of power. Whatever sense of empowerment this African American youth had located in the streets prior to the storm had been stripped of him by the military, whose bold display of force turned the heterogeneous, culturally-defined space of the streets to a space of institutional discipline.

Reading this process through *Zeitoun* demonstrates how the disciplining of New Orleans' urban space in fact transcends the conventional narratives of racism and classism commonly attached to Katrina. For Zeitoun, the political violence he endures supersedes both the trauma of the hurricane's impact on the city and the racial violence experienced by black New Orleanians. His experience, unlike most that of other residents of the city, is intimately linked to large-scale political projects that, in the interest of national security, place Americans in positions of political vagrancy, thereby exposing their precarious relationship to institutional power. Zeitoun's imprisonment reveals the more penetrating anxieties linked to terrorism and homeland security and the ways that these anxieties inscribed themselves on the streets of New Orleans, inspiring racial violence against Arab-Americans who were perceived as the more threatening ideological enemy of the state. Therefore, what should have been a unified relief effort by the federal and state governments turned into an anti-terrorism sweep based on a policy of blatant racial profiling. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), formerly committed to disaster prevention and relief, fell under the jurisdiction of the

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Department of Homeland Security in November of 2002. In the following months, the DHS would take drastic measures to strip FEMA of its role in relation to emergency management, at times doling out those responsibilities to privately-run business. For instance, in February of 2003, Tom Ridge, the Secretary of Homeland Security, assigned the RAND Corporation, a think tank historically contracted to deal with military affairs and anti-terrorism, to the task of developing a National Response Plan for emergency management. Christopher Cooper and Robert Block note how "In the wake of the frustrating NRP process, local disaster managers complained that the Department of Homeland Security was becoming too obsessed with terrorism, to the exclusion of natural disasters" (83). Over the next two years, FEMA was increasingly silenced in the conversation on emergency management, as the myopic DHS seemed unable to conceive of natural disasters and terrorism as different animals requiring different strategic approaches.

The events that transpired in the wake of the hurricane therefore return us to the concept of the American homeland as a rhetorical invention shaped, in part, by the state's fear of terrorism. As the streets of New Orleans were laid bare by the hurricane, the state inscribed itself on the space of the city, justifying its military presence and its transgressions of basic human rights on the basis of national security. As described above, residents of the city felt traumatized by the military's presence, but this psychological response is complicated, specifically in Zeitoun's case, by the discourses of homeland security and, as addressed in the

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previous chapter, the concept of the home as a symbolic locus of security.

Thousands of New Orleanians lost their homes in the flooding. Even years after

the hurricane, residents—both those living in FEMA trailers and those who had

evacuated the city—could not return to their homes and were left homeless.[11] The

occupation of the city, therefore, as a mission of homeland security first, and only

secondarily one of humanitarian aid, was in fact another traumatic invasion of

private space; the psychological impact of losing one's home to natural disaster

and then experiencing institutional violence connected to this loss is profound.

Because of his politically-deviant ethnicity, Zeitoun's experience of

homelessness—both literal and symbolic—is particularly disturbing. It is

significant that the arrest of Zeitoun and his three friends occurs within the

domestic space of one of the rental properties he owns, and Eggers' description of

the event is unnerving, partly due to the manner in which the six armed guards

infiltrate the interior of the house. He writes, "The men met Zeitoun in the foyer.

They were wearing mismatched police and military uniforms. Fatigues.

Bulletproof vests. Most were wearing sunglasses. All had M-16s and pistols. They

quickly filled the hallway. There were at least ten guns visible" (206). Eggers'

terse sentences here underscore the violent, unwelcome presence of the military in

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[11] Spike Lee explores the psychological impact of homelessness on the people of
New Orleans in his film *When the Levees Broke*. Residents who had lost their
homes display outrage, grief, and exasperation at the federal government's
apparent lack of concern for rebuilding the areas of the city most affected by the
storm, areas predominantly inhabited by African Americans and the poor. To
make matters worse, insurance companies consistently refused to honor their
obligations by defining much of the destruction as a result of the flooding and not
the hurricane.

domestic space, and, following an almost idyllic description of Zeitoun's first shower in weeks and a conversation with Kathy, the scene emphasizes the traumatic implications of the state's command over domestic space. Later, Zeitoun reflects, "He recounted their arrest, and the hours and days before it, countless times, trying to figure out what had brought such attention to them. Was it simply that four men were occupying one house?" (252). Their arrest, of course, is a result of converging anxieties over homeland security and fear of Muslims, and that the soldiers invade the house should not be surprising, as the occupation of the homeland by ideological enemies—from the state's perspective—poses the greatest threat to the nation.

After removing Zeitoun from the house, the state takes more radical measures to sever any connections he might have to America as a homeland. Here it might be useful to turn once again to Agamben's writings on the state of exception and, specifically, how the logic of the prison camp depends upon the "ordering of space" (19). Exploring the distinctions between prisons and camps (the latter facilitates the state of exception), Agamben writes, "As the absolute space of exception, the camp is topologically different from a simple space of confinement. And it is this space of exception, in which the link between localization and ordering is broken, that has determined the crisis of the old [law of the earth]" (20). Deprived of his rights as an American, Zeitoun, who is more or less homeless, himself, after the flooding (his own house was badly damaged, but not irreparably so), is removed from the space of American juridical law and

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held in a liminal space produced by the state of exception.[12] As mentioned above, Eggers repeatedly compares Camp Greyhound and the Hunt Correctional Facility to Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib, two prisons physically removed from the American homeland and therefore existing in a liminal juridical zone in which constitutional guarantees do not apply. In detaining Americans within these slippery inter-legal spaces, the state effectively deprives them not only of the rights guaranteed by the Constitution, but more generally precludes their identification with America as a home.

The point, here, is that Zeitoun (as well as, in less pronounced ways, the thousands of New Orleanians confined in the Convention Center, the Superdome, and on the highway overpasses) was a prisoner of a state apparatus that, in disciplining the city and interpellating survivors as refugees and political prisoners, created a psychology of homelessness.[13] Particularly in Zeitoun's case, his relation to the state became traumatic. It might be useful here to reiterate

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[12] In Foucault's language, Camp Greyhound could be seen as a heterotopia, or an "other space" outside of the social order, constituted by discourses that exist apart from, here, the juridical law of the United States. Heterotopias usually challenge the concept of a homogenous, institutional space, but, in this case, Camp Greyhound is itself an extension of the institution, so its existence only serves to expand the scope of state power.

[13] As I will address in my discussion on *Treme*, the federal government has been heavily involved in the plans to rebuild housing projects in New Orleans in the years since Hurricane Katrina. The political dimensions of this process are complex, and, in many cases, critics of the government's plans contend that the Bush Administration was deliberately preventing poor, democratic-voting African Americans from returning home in order to preserve a more conservative New Orleans population. For those affected by these plans, the "psychology of homelessness" barely begins to describe the material effects of institutional politics on their lives.

Jenny Edkins' commentary on political trauma. She explains, "What we call trauma takes place when the very powers that we are convinced will protect us and give us security become our tormentors: when the community of which we considered ourselves members turns against us or when our family is no longer a source of refuge but a site of danger" (4), and later, "[trauma] is experienced as a betrayal" (11). Zeitoun and his family very much find themselves victims of this kind of political trauma. Kathy, in particular, suffers mental lapses that would eventually be diagnosed as post-traumatic stress syndrome (301). For Kathy, the most traumatic event occurs when, informed of her husband's whereabouts, she is denied the right to "see him or even know where a court hearing might be held." She felt "cracked open…it broke [her]" (319). What is most difficult for Kathy to comprehend is how the woman on the other end of the phone during this exchange could—even as an extension of the institution—display such a disturbing lack of empathy. Eggers writes, "That this woman, a stranger, could know her despair and desperation and simply deny her. That there could be trials without witnesses, that her government could make people disappear" (319). Eggers' phrasing in this passage is revealing. By setting the individual and the institution side by side, and by emphasizing the traumatic impact this event had on Kathy, he suggests that what is most disturbing about institutional trauma is the fact that it is ultimately enacted by people operating within systems of power: soldiers, desk clerks, prison guards, and more broadly *all* Americans exercising technologies of the self.

By narrativizing the traumatic experience endured by the Zeitouns, and by designating the state as the perpetrator of political trauma, Eggers clearly aims to challenge both state-endorsed narratives that attempt to clear the government of blame and popular narratives—such as Spike Lee's documentary—that position the event as primarily affecting African Americans and the poor. By addressing the discourses of homeland security at the heart of Katrina, he uncovers the political machinery underlying Zeitoun's imprisonment, providing the groundwork for a more involved critique of the government's political agenda in the war on terror. Eggers' utilitarian tone, attention to historical accounts and survivor testimony, and frequent use of photographs reveal his interest in "setting the record straight" and, more specifically, giving voice to a traumatic experience that, by definition, defies representation. For those readers familiar with Eggers' writing, encountering these formal strategies can be jarring. In the absence of visible rhetorical flourish, and simulating the structure of testimony, the text invites readers into close psychological and emotional proximity to Zeitoun's experience. Regardless, we must admit to ourselves that no matter how horrified we feel at the state's violations of its own laws, we, as outsiders to a traumatic event, cannot fully understand Zeitoun's plight as a Syrian-American and as a prisoner of war.

Eggers complements his pared-down prose with photographic images, which he incorporates into the book's textual apparatus. Rather than representing the graphic horrors of post-Katrina New Orleans through images that depict

suffering and destruction, Eggers uses photography to depict the quotidian,

everyday lives of Zeitoun and his family. For instance, in one photograph we see

Zeitoun posing for the camera with his children, and others depict his family

home in Jableh, Syria. More than just humanizing Eggers' characters and

confirming the factual details of the narrative, these photographs frame Zeitoun's

experience in ways that resist popular narratives about Katrina, which, caught up

in processes of production and consumption, tended to commodify the visual

image. These processes even play out in Spike Lee's documentary, an otherwise

emotionally powerful film that exposes the political dimensions of Katrina;

through the use of photographs and testimony, certainly unintentionally, the film

positions viewers as spectators to natural disaster and institutional violence and,

therefore, consumers of the visual image. Its cathartic moments leave us fulfilled,

as the film, in both educating *and* entertaining, has come through on its promises.

Zeitoun's use of photographic image, however, resists the processes of production

and consumption of visual images, requiring us to reflect on our desires and

motivations for reading a work of nonfiction dealing with natural disaster.

More than just problematizing our relationship to narrative production and

moments of national trauma, *Zeitoun* asks readers to consider how the discourses

of homeland security have come to bear on our lives in the twenty-first century

and how, in the state of exception, anyone is potentially vulnerable to political

violence perpetrated by the state. So far, this chapter has shown how these

discourses embedded themselves in the city space of New Orleans following the

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hurricane. The state transformed what was temporarily a smooth space free of discursive control into a highly-regimented prison camp operating outside of American juridical law. The following section on David Simon and Eric Overmyer's HBO series, *Treme*, picks up where *Zeitoun* leaves off, addressing how the people of New Orleans would employ spatial tactics to reclaim their city streets from the grips of institutional power. Here, I am interested in what opportunities remain for individuals who wish to utilize urban space as a site that facilitates political action and the performance of cultural memory. Understanding how these processes function is critical to how we understand trauma and the politics of space in contemporary America.

Rehabilitating the City

In the ten episodes that comprise the first season of *Treme*, Overmyer and Simon confront institutional trauma—as a result of both invasive public policies and the enduring presence of the military—which New Orleanians experienced in the months following Katrina. The show centers on the disappearance of David Brooks (Daryl Williams), an African American resident of New Orleans who was arrested for a traffic violation and held in prison in the hours before the storm hit. Beginning three months after the hurricane, the series' central narrative focuses on his sister, Ladonna (Khandi Alexander), and her attempts to track down David in a prison system that has lost track of its own inmates. In the final episodes, Ladonna learns of David's death, her brother a victim of an institutional failure that not only led to his wrongful imprisonment, but also his eventual murder.

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Many of the show's central characters are in some way linked to David, and his disappearance functions as the traumatic absence that the people of New Orleans are unable to confront directly. Confronting David's death involves accepting a betrayal by the state, one that abolishes the fantasy of a politically-responsible American institution. Furthermore, this process erodes the foundations of American identity, suggesting that one's citizenship or national affiliation does not preclude political trauma perpetrated by one's own country. *Treme* takes the form of a trauma narrative; all of its action occurs in the present, three months after the hurricane, and characters seem unwilling to reflect on their individual experience of the hurricane or the evacuation. Only in the final episode, during David's funeral, does the narrative move back in time and depict his arrest and imprisonment, an event that serves as the traumatic core around which the series revolves.[14] Adopting the structure of a trauma narrative here in the season finale, *Treme* underscores the processes by which victims of political trauma repress traumatic experiences, seeking to preserve what they imagine to be an intact relationship to institutional power.

More than merely exploring the political trauma generated by David's disappearance, the show focuses on the rehabilitation of New Orleans' urban space and the modes by which residents attempt to wrest their city from the grips of institutional power. Whereas *Zeitoun* demonstrates the immediate regimenting

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[14] Matt Zoller Seitz's article, "'Treme' Untangles the Lessons of Trauma," gives some attention to the traumatic dimensions of the series, but, written for a popular audience, the article does not fully unpack the show's complex treatment of political trauma.

of city space following the hurricane, *Treme* depicts the lasting presence of military in the city and the public policies that continue to disenfranchise poor, predominantly African American residents. *Treme* is keenly aware that the project of rebuilding New Orleans involves re-invigorating urban space through cultural practices that challenge the state and establish zones of cultural heterogeneity. Therefore, the presence of the institution and its concomitant modes of discipline reveals the ongoing experience of trauma in the city; in order to confront this presence, the characters of *Treme* must utilize their urban environment as a space of performance, where embodying cultural traditions—often grounded in music and dance—and engaging in political protest offer ways of coming to terms with institutional trauma.

From its first scenes, *Treme* establishes the fundamental tensions between the institution and the people of New Orleans, and particularly how they manifest themselves in the city's streets. Continuing where *Zeitoun* leaves off, the first scenes depict soldiers and police officers monitoring the streets as New Orleanians prepare for their first second-line parade after Katrina. As the musicians and dancers in the appropriately-named Rebirth Brass Band prepare for the parade and begin to infiltrate the streets, almost every shot is framed by a symbol of institutional authority: a line of uniformed soldiers, a stoic police officer, a police motorcycle, etc. Absorbed in the rhythms of the performance and the relentless forward movement of the parade, the predominantly African American participants generally ignore the disciplining forces around them,

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opting instead to claim the city streets as a space of cultural performance, one that connects them to history and a sense of local identity. Nonetheless, in these opening scenes Overmyer and Simon immediately underscore the series' chief thematic concern: the tension between institutional power and street-level cultural performance.[15]

The series begins and ends with second line parades, establishing this distinctly New Orleans cultural tradition as a practice of great significance both to the characters in the show and to the people of New Orleans. Second lining, which occurs every Sunday, nine months out of the year, involves a hired brass band and hundreds of dancers from the community—historically African Americans from impoverished neighborhoods but certainly not exclusive to that group—moving through the streets, stopping at designated neighborhood locales for food and alcohol, and generally "rolling" to the rhythm of the music. Joel Dinerstein calls it "a rolling block party, a cultural institution, a community event that carnivalizes and colonizes the public sphere, a weekly celebration of neighborhood or clan, a walkabout for urbanites" (618). An outgrowth of the Congo Square dances of the nineteenth century, where slaves were permitted to play music, dance, and perform cultural traditions, second line parades are a part

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[15] Although the police and the military in these scenes are represented as instruments of institutional discipline, Simon and Overmyer are careful throughout the series to highlight the ways that institutions demand that otherwise conscientious and empathetic men and women fulfill their role as instruments of the state. Police officer Terry Colson (David Morse), for instance, is deeply affected by Creighton Bernette's suicide and is clearly concerned with balancing his dual role as a civilian and a figure of institutional authority. Like the desk clerk in *Zeitoun*, Colson demonstrates the ways that institutional power affects all individuals, regardless of their station or their relation to institutional power.

of a long, rich tradition of African American history in New Orleans. Even though

parades require a permit costing as much as $2000 for a single day, police,

especially in the parades following Katrina, have been known to harass

participants.[16] Nonetheless, second liners, as *Treme* depicts, took to the streets

despite the presence of Army personnel and police officers attempting to maintain

order and discipline the streets. Addressing the political necessity of second

lining, Dinerstein writes, "the politics of the parade were in staking a claim on the

streets themselves, to literally represent ownership and intent" (631). For the

people of New Orleans, reclaiming the streets in the face of institutional power

was as much a cultural tradition as it was an act of political protest.

Second lining is only one of many street-level cultural practices that

Treme depicts. The anticipation, celebration, and aftermath of Mardi Gras plays a

significant role in the show's narrative, as several characters see in "carnival" the

possibility of political redemption for the city and for the people traumatized by

the government's presence in their lives. Carnival offers New Orleanians the

opportunity to make subversive political commentary within the space of the city.

This practice is particularly significant in *Treme* and, more generally, for the

people of New Orleans, as the institution's modes of discipline—as I have shown

above—are very much dependent on how they function within and manipulate

urban space. In the show, Creighton Bernette (John Goodman), an English

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[16] Dinerstein discusses the attempts on the part of the city to curtail second line
parades, at times raising permits to as much as $4,000 for a single day. Many New
Orleanians interpreted this as yet another attempt to disenfranchise poor, black
residents of the city (633).

professor at Tulane equally traumatized by and irate over the government's gross

mismanagement of New Orleans' reconstruction, participates in the Krewe du

Vieux, a Mardi Gras parade famous for scathing satire and political critique.

Bernette's float, which features a papier-mâché rendition of Mayor Ray Nagin

masturbating, offers subversive political commentary on Nagin's administration

and its perceived ineptitude in the rebuilding of the city.

Likewise, the eighth episode, "All on a Mardi Gras Day," is entirely

devoted to depicting the performative and subversive dimensions of Mardi Gras;

all of the show's characters dress in costume and take to the streets, transforming

the city from a space of discipline into a space of play and performance. Despite

the affirmative, celebratory atmosphere of the carnival, Simon and Overmyer are

clear to point out that these forms of political subversion—though critical to

reclaiming urban space—are temporary and that the institutional structure in place

cannot be dismantled through any single act of resistance.[17] Davis (Steve Zahn)

and Annie (Lucia Micarelli), both of whom are involved in destructive romantic

relationships, spend the day together and share a poignant moment at the night's

end. Likewise, Antoine (Wendell Pierce) and Ladonna, formerly married to one

another but now divorced and in separate relationships, reunite in the waning

hours of the carnival. In each case, Mardi Gras—as a performative cultural

tradition that encourages participants to challenge, critique, and dismantle

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[17] That Mardi Gras offers only temporary relief from the forces of discipline in the
city suggests that urban space—or, perhaps, our imagined relationship to urban
space—in the present day has all but disappeared. The following chapter on
postmetropolitan space explores this phenomenon in greater detail.

hierarchies of power—provides temporary relief from the realities of the post-Katrina environment, represented here through the characters' problematic relationships in the real world. As the night comes to an end, police clear the streets, once again exerting discipline on the temporarily dynamic space of performance provided by the carnival, and characters are forced to return to reality.[18]

Even if *Treme* suggests that these performative practices only offer temporary relief from institutional power, it is worth exploring how these spatial tactics function, as Overmyer and Simon are continually interested in addressing how characters utilize urban space to reclaim cultural traditions and thereby carve out spaces of political agency. Mikhail Bahktin's writings on the Rabelaisian carnival offer a logical starting point for this discussion. Bahktin explains, "carnival celebrate[s] temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it mark[s] the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival [is] the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It [is] hostile to all that [is] immortalized and completed" (10). Carnival democratizes space, challenging static ("immortalized and

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[18] It should be noted that, in recent decades, Mardi Gras has become increasingly involved in processes of production and consumption, particularly in terms of cultural tourism. In 2009, Mardi Gras brought an estimated $145,723,918 to the New Orleans economy, accounting for 1.61% of the city's GDP (Spindt 3). This certainly undercuts the subversive value of Mardi Gras as an event that destabilizes institutional structures, and perhaps speaks to the processes by which all cultural performances in the age of the spectacle eventually get co-opted for consumption. The same could be said for Simon and Overmyer's series, which, though politically-subversive, is certainly an object for mainstream cultural consumption.

completed") institutional discourses responsible for maintaining an oppressive *status quo*. In using the city streets to temporarily suspend state power, carnival transforms "the city" (the regimented space of institutional discipline) into "the urban" (the free space of cultural performance), where a multiplicity of voices and subject positions democratically coexist. As individuals inhabit city space and perform cultural identity, they produce social space, dismantling, even if only temporarily, the structures that have overlaid urban space.

"The city" and "the urban," are important to Lefebvre's writings on the production of space. Unlike "the smooth" and "the striated" in Deleuze and Guattari's writings, these terms emphasize the individual's role in *producing* space. City space, Lefebvre explains, describes the city as a physical place whose primary function is to discipline and control bodies in order to ensure the uninterrupted flow of capitalism. Urban space refers to the city as defined by its inhabitants, who democratically and creatively produce the space of the city through their movements and interactions within it. In short, city space refers to the city as a product of institutional regimentation, while urban space refers to the city as a product of user interaction (*Writings on Cities* 103). By regimenting lived spaces and defining public and private boundaries in our neighborhoods, city streets materially organize and discipline urban space. Nonetheless, individuals may use these infrastructural channels for subversive political activity and for the production of social space.

Recognizing the urban as a dynamic, heterogeneous space of creativity

and play is also central to the theories espoused by the Situationists, a group of

radical post-Marxist philosophers and activists emerging from Paris in the 1950s

and 60s. The Situationists were interested in challenging the ways that capitalism

had inscribed itself on the modern city, transforming it from a lived space defined

by inhabitants to a highly-structured space designed to facilitate the flow of

commerce and labor. To counter this impulse, the Situationists insisted on the

need to create "situations," or "moment[s] of life concretely and deliberately

constructed by the collective organization of a unitary ambiance and a game of

events" ("Internationale Situationniste #1"). These spontaneous events "activate"

city space by removing individuals from the mundane routines of everyday life,

routines often disciplined by work and consumption. Through situations,

individuals transform the city from a space of work to a space of play. Sadie Plant

writes, "It is in the play born of desire that individuals should now be able to

recognise themselves, progressing with a new and chosen set of relations no

longer dictated by the ethos of labour and struggle but governed by the free and

playful construction of situations, of which the revolutionary moment is the first

and the best" (22). Producing situations and challenging the institution's

ownership of city space is therefore nothing short of a revolutionary act.

Confronted by a nearly ubiquitous police and military presence in the city,

and continually harassed by these figures of institutional authority in public space

(Antoine's wrongful arrest in episode three is the best example), the characters of

Treme look to urban space as a means for cultivating political agency and physical sites of resistance.[19] The simple act of an impromptu street performance, which Annie and the other musicians initiate throughout the series, is significant as a symbolic and material reclamation of urban space, as the musicians both "play" music and provide free entertainment (outside of regulated processes of production and consumption) for passersby. These "situations" operate similarly, albeit on a smaller scale, to the Mardi Gras carnival. The underlying logic to Mardi Gras and second lining is, in fact, the production of situations and, if we follow this thread, the production of heterogeneous, smooth space. From the garish costumes to the "rolling" dances to the rhythmic music to the radical political commentary to the uncontained exhibitionism, Mardi Gras and second lining provide a space that serves to counter the regimented, disciplined space of the modern metropolis and, more specifically for *Treme*, the post-Katrina militarized zone of New Orleans. Engaging these "spatial tactics," in de Certeau's words, allows the characters, if only temporarily, to symbolically and materially reclaim city space from institutional control, transforming it into a zone of creativity, spontaneity, and performance, and, equally important, a space for fostering marginalized discourse. De Certeau writes, "The space of the tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and within a terrain imposed on it and

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[19] Zada N. Johnson's dissertation, *Walking the Post-Disaster City: Race, Space and the Politics of Tradition in the African American Parading Practices of Post-Katrina New Orleans*, provides the most in-depth examination of the New Orleans black traditions as spatial practices. She correctly designates the second line parades following Katrina as intensely political events staged in social space, but she does not fully explore the theoretical implications of these practices, and particularly how they help individuals to "work through" trauma.

organized by the law of a foreign power. It does not have the means to keep to itself, at a distance, in a position of withdrawal, foresight, and self-collection: it is a maneuver…within enemy territory" (37). Both of these cultural practices, insofar as they arose out of New Orleans' long, complex history of cultural and racial heterogeneity and are immediately linked to the Rabelaisian carnival, certainly encourage dialogism and, more specifically, the beatification of the other. As a "situation" and a "tactic," then, the carnivalesque performances that *Treme* depicts have great political significance; occurring within the regimented space of the city, they reveal the potential for individuals to position themselves within and against institutional power, materially (occupying physical place) and symbolically (asserting their claim to the city).[20]

Part of the symbolic power of these practices rests in their temporal distancing from institutional time. Connected to tradition, these embodied performances locate meaning outside of the rigid framework of linear history and challenge the institution's attempts to discipline bodies through temporal manipulation.[21] Second lining and, particularly Mardi Gras parades, whose origins

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[20] Lefebvre's famous essay "The Right to the City" articulates the fundamental relationship between the individual and the city. Discussing this essay, David Harvey writes, "The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization" (23).

[21] Foucault explains, "The disciplines, which analyse space, break up an rearrange activities, must also be understood as machinery for adding up and capitalizing time" (157). The state disciplines bodies by regimenting time, which can be seen most clearly through the operations of the factory, the barracks, etc.

in New Orleans date back to the seventeenth century, are part of a cyclical

tradition reenacted every year by residents of the city that challenges these notions

of institutional time. Mardi Gras Indians, in perhaps more immediate ways, reflect

this concern for tradition and modes of labor that reject linear time. An integral

part of New Orleans culture in the twentieth century, Mardi Gras Indians are

African Americans who, in appropriating Native American, Creole, and African

American traditions, have created a subculture defined by its tribal costumes and

its elaborated performances, which include specific songs and dances. In *Treme*,

Big Chief Albert Lambreaux (Clarke Peters), leader of the Guardians of the

Flame, a Mardi Gras Indian Tribe, best represents this desire to uphold tradition.

Upon his return to New Orleans, Lambreaux's chief motivation is to reassemble

the Guardians of the Flame in time for St. Joseph's Night, when, every year,

Mardi Gras Indians take to the streets, wearing the elaborate costumes they

created over the past year. Obsessed with finishing their costumes on time,

Lambreaux and his tribe work feverishly to uphold the tradition of the Mardi Gras

Indians.[22] Unlike his son, Delmond Lambreaux (Rob Brown), a successful Jazz

musician who is torn between his career in New York and his obligations at

home, Big Chief rejects all forms of institutional progress, only concerning

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[22] In his essay, "Mardi Gras Indians: Carnival and Counter-Narrative in Black
New Orleans," George Lipsitz explores the traditions at the heart of Indian
culture. The process of assembling one's costume is a crucial component of this
culture. Lipsitz writes, "Designing and sewing Indian suits is a year-round
endeavor; as soon as one carnival ends, the Indians begin to prepare for the next
one. No one wears the same suit two years in a row" (108). Joseph Roach
explains, "The costumes should not be thought of as artifacts, but as performances
in themselves" (477) and "part of a cyclical spirit that lasts year round"
(VanSpanckeren 42).

himself with rebuilding his tribe and piecing together his community. For

Lambreaux, the future of New Orleans resides in rebuilding the community, not

the institutional infrastructure of the city; the culture of the Mardi Gras Indians, in

its reliance on cyclical traditions and its emphasis on process rather than

outcomes, helps to accomplish this.

Equally important is the Mardi Gras Indians' interest in asserting their

presence in urban space. As mentioned above, once a year, on St. Joseph's Night,

the Mardi Gras Indians infiltrate city space, moving through neighborhoods as a

tribal procession, chanting and playing traditional music. Like the parades

discussed earlier, this spatial practice generates dynamic situations in an

otherwise static city space. However, unlike second line parades, the Mardi Gras

Indians—upholding the Indian mantra "won't bow, don't know how"—refuse to

purchase permits, rendering their movements through urban space at odds with

institutional discipline and, therefore, politically delinquent.[23] In this regard, the

Indians' very presence in urban space is a challenge to institutional authority.

Indeed, this position of resistance is fundamental to Indian culture. George Lipsitz

explains, "The Mardi Gras Indian narrative takes many forms, but its central

theme is the story of heroic warriors resisting domination" (103), and their

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[23] In recent years, the NOPD—under pressure from city councilmembers
interested in cultivating Indian traditions—has made efforts to accommodate
tribes on St. Joseph's Night, turning a blind eye to 6 pm curfew laws designed to
stop the Indians from taking to the streets after dark (Reckdahl). These
conciliatory efforts on the part of the police are certainly encouraging, but they
tend to undercut the politically-subversive potential of the Indians' spatial
practices; once deviant behavior is licensed by the state, it ceases to be deviant.

costumes "bring out into the open the dimensions of repression that the dominant culture generally tries to render invisible" (104). By taking to the streets, then, the Indians of *Treme* make visible the highly political dimensions of urban space and race relations. Creating situations challenges the modes of discipline embedded in the city, and this is occurs in particularly powerful ways when these traditions are temporally disconnected from institutional power.

Music is also integral to Indian performances, and indeed to all of the spatial practices discussed above. Pulsating through almost every scene in every episode, music—from Jazz to Hip Hop to traditional Indian songs—plays a central role in Simon and Overmyer's representation of New Orleans street culture. One of *Treme's* central conceits is that music serves as the lifeblood of New Orleans and holds the potential for cultural redemption. From its first scenes, the show demonstrates its infatuation with New Orleans music: following the second line parade through the streets of New Orleans, Simon and Overmyer pay little attention to dialogue. Instead, we are treated to several minutes of street music, which ends, with the parade, at Ladonna's bar. When Antoine sits with his fellow musicians at the bar, their dialogue is barely audible above the music blaring from the jukebox. Likewise, Big Chief Lambreaux's first impulse upon returning to New Orleans is to set up a practice space for his tribe. When he finally coerces his friends to reunite the Guardians of the Flame, they play percussion and chant Indian songs in The Tavern, an abandoned bar that Lambreaux converts into a home for his tribe. Each of the characters in *Treme* is

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in some way connected to the music of New Orleans, and David Simon has been

forthcoming in interviews about wanting to create "a show about music" (Simon).

As a visual and aural medium, television affords Simon the opportunity to use

music not only as dressing for his episodes or as a transitional device to segue

between scenes, but as a structural component of the narrative. Several characters'

narrative arcs—from Lambreaux's attempts to reunite the tribe to Antoine's

efforts to find work as a trombone player to Davis' recording and promotion of

his anti-government anthem, "Shame, Shame, Shame"—involve bringing music

back to the city. Like the rhythmic pulse of New Orleans that Simon and

Overmyer try to capture, the music in each episode is the narrative pulse of the

series, moving the plot forward while inviting viewers to experience each episode

outside of conventional modes of visual consumption.

On its most basic level, the music in *Treme* encourages characters to

dismantle barriers of race, class, and gender, offering them important

opportunities for cultural exchange. Music brings diverse social groups together,

functioning as a force that works against the divisive policies of racial profiling

discussed earlier in this chapter. More importantly, though, music, and,

specifically, rhythm, is intricately involved in the experience of urban space. Late

in his life, Henri Lefebvre began to explore a concept he introduced in his earlier

writings called "rhythmanalysis." At the heart of this theory is the idea that both

bodies and cities operate on rhythms; bodies function on natural rhythms

(respiration, the heart, hunger and thirst, etc.), while cities—which, for Lefebvre,

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are inherently sites of political strife—are made up of rational, quantitative

rhythms: the rhythms of the factory (*Rhythmanalysis* 9). By inscribing natural

rhythms on urban space, individuals have the power to transform that space—the

very lived space of the city—into an organic extension of the body. The city could

therefore be seen as dynamic and alive, operating in perpetual motion and defined

by the people who negotiate and inhabit its streets.

    Treme's interest in representing the diverse styles of New Orleans

music—many of which are products of the Congo Square convergence of African

and Western music in the nineteenth century and are therefore heavily rhythmic—

and how these concepts work their way into the fabric of the city is worth

exploring through this lens. Several episodes feature Lambreux and his tribe

performing traditional Indian songs, which are played with tambourines

accompanied by call and response vocals.[24] With the procession of dancers

following the tribe on St. Joseph's Night, the music is meant to inspire the natural

rhythms of the body. When musicians and dancers take to the streets, they bring

these natural rhythms to bear on the organized rhythms of institutional power

inscribed on city space. Furthermore, Indian music relies on "a cycle of traditional

songs, of which there are fewer than twenty" (VanSpanckeren 44). By performing

these traditional songs as part of a cycle, and by infiltrating the streets with

natural rhythms, the Mardi Gras Indians suggest ways of challenging the

institution's control over time and space. Simon and Overmyer give significant

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[24] For a more detailed discussion on Mardi Gras Indian music, see Kathryn
VanSpanckeren's essay, "The Mardi Gras Indian Song Cycle: A Heroic
Tradition."

attention to representing these practices as modes capable of challenging institutional authority. When the Guardians of the Flame are stopped by police on St. Joseph's Night, Lambreaux stands his ground, and the police, commanded by the community liaison officer, retreat to their vehicles and leave the Indians to continue their rituals. In an earlier episode, a tour bus approaches the Indians as they perform a sacred funeral ritual. Recognizing that the tourists—with their cameras and video recorders—threaten to co-opt their rituals into the spectacle of Katrina tourism, Lambreaux curtly tells the bus driver to move on.[25] In each case, the communal power of Indian rituals trumps the institution, and this process owes itself largely to the ways that the Indians are able to inscribe themselves on urban spaces through song and dance, creating enclaves of communal agency.

Lambreaux is particularly adamant and vocal about establishing these sites of agency that resist institutional power and perhaps understands this process better than any character in the series. One of Lambreaux's sub-narratives concerns the federal government's plans to raze the public housing projects in New Orleans. Experiencing only minimal damage during the flooding (Browne-Dianis), these buildings were habitable by January of 2006 and were considered by architecture critics to be "some of the best public housing built in the United States" (Ouroussoff). Nonetheless, the federal government, claiming that the projects were hotbeds of crime and drug-use, decided to tear them down and build

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[25] I again call attention to *Treme's* investment in the same culture of disaster tourism that Simon and Overmyer critique in this scene. Try as it might, the series cannot totally separate itself from the processes of consumption and production that are fundamental to popular culture texts.

new government-subsidized apartments, which are only now, in 2013, accepting

their first inhabitants. After construction is completed, these apartments will

house 3,500 fewer inhabitants than the original projects (Jervis). Many New

Orleanians were outraged over these plans, claiming that the federal government

was deliberately preventing the predominantly-black inhabitants of the projects

from returning to the city in an attempt to decrease the percentage of democratic

voters in the city and, more generally, scale back the city's "deviant" black

population.

Lambreaux, concerned with both preserving the projects and making

immediate housing available to New Orleanians in exile from the city, stages a

media stunt by occupying one of the condemned units in the Calliope housing

project. Inviting the media to broadcast his occupation, Lambreaux remains in the

unit, even as police, sensitive to the political ramifications of violently removing

him from the premises, wait outside. Lambreaux's occupation of public domestic

space in these scenes is significant. Owned by the federal government but

nonetheless a site of street-level cultural production, the projects represent a

critical site of political contestation; by claiming the authority—under somewhat

dubious pretenses—to raze the housing projects, the state seeks to impose itself

on the private lives of American citizens. Lambreaux understands the symbolic

implications of the standoff, and, remaining in the unit, he compels the police to

use force for his removal. By peacefully occupying public domestic space,

Lambreaux embraces a position of delinquency in relation to the state. Taking to

the streets on St. Joseph's Night without a public permit represents a similar transgression of state authority, and in each case, Lambreaux's body becomes politically-subversive tool; his presence in space requires the state to enact physical violence in order to ensure his removal. Combined with his ability to use rhythm and music to colonize urban space, this ability to claim agency over space through embodiment is important to Simon and Overmyer's commentary on how power is articulated in space.

The political dimensions of urban housing that *Treme* addresses in this episode also appear elsewhere in the series. One of the chief visual metaphors Simon and Overmyer employ throughout the series is the repeated image of a house rotting from the inside as a result of the flooding. On their most basic level, these images—which appear in the opening credits and elsewhere in the series as characters return to their damaged homes—reflect the devastation wrought on the private lives of New Orleanians in the wake of the hurricane. More specifically, though, these images speak to the dissolution of American privacy and domesticity as a result of institutional power. Just as the federal government executed plans to permanently remove African Americans from their homes, it equally failed to provide for those New Orleanians still in the city, living either in temporary housing or in the squalor of their flood-damaged homes. Antoine Batiste, even by the final episode, has yet to receive his FEMA trailer and Janette Desautel (Kim Dickens) is living in a home in a state of total disrepair. The state's failure to provide for these characters—combined with its aggressive, politically-

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motivated plans for urban renewal—suggest that the institution's presence in domestic space does more harm than good. The image of the rotting interior implies that the American homeland—rhetorically figured as an extension of institutional power—is rotting from the inside out.

Lambreaux, again, takes productive steps to situate cultural practices within this political milieu and thereby reclaim spaces of agency. In the first episode, he converts the flood-damaged neighborhood bar, The Tavern, into a practice space for his tribe, and, with nowhere else to go, eventually makes it his home. As a safe harbor for Indian traditions, The Tavern functions as a heterotopic space that exists within and challenges the forces of discipline that have claimed much of the urban space of New Orleans. Simon and Overmyer emphasize the bar's function as a site of resistance throughout the show. In his first attempts to clean out the damaged interior, Lambreaux toils in the bar while military helicopters hover outside, shining lights through the windows and reminding the viewer of the enduring presence of discipline in the city. In the ninth episode, "Wish Someone Would Care," when the police enter The Tavern to advise Lambreaux against the use of violence on St. Joseph's Night, he promptly ushers them outside and into the street, recognizing that The Tavern must remain free of institutional discipline. By fostering marginalized discourse and building community through the material place of The Tavern, Lambreaux offers important new ways of articulating private space in relation to institutional power. Simon and Overmyer here seem to suggest that producing private spaces that exist

apart from the institution is not only possible but necessary for reclaiming cultural traditions and building communities. Where the institutional response to Katrina disenfranchised, and, indeed, traumatized many New Orleanians who had lost their homes, Lambreaux's vision of community, culture, and tradition seems particularly attractive.

In addition to offering a new vision of de-institutionalized domestic space, The Tavern provides the Indians with a performative space in which to embody their traditions. In several episodes, Simon and Overmyer depict the Indians performing their songs in the manner described above. When they finally take to the streets on St. Joseph's Night, they symbolically move these practices to the public space of the city, colonizing it and disseminating the discourses of resistance into the public sphere. What is significant about this act—as well the culture of second lining and Mardi Gras—is that embodied performance provides a medium through which to confront trauma. In *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Diana Taylor describes the potential for embodied performance to "generate, record, and transmit knowledge" in ways that resist institutional power, which is vested in the written archive (21). Enacted in the space of the city, performance involves embodied spatial practices that cannot be recorded into archival history. Furthermore, embodied performance facilitates a culturally-ameliorating confrontation with trauma. Taylor writes, "Performance protest helps survivors cope with individual and collective trauma by using it to animate political denunciation" (165). Later, she explains, "In performance, behaviors and actions

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can be separated from the social actors performing them. These actions can be learned, enacted, and passed on to others. The transmission of traumatic experience more closely resembles 'contagion": one 'catches' and embodies the burden, pain, and responsibility of past behaviors/events" (167-168). Through this lens, the spatial tactics described over the course of this chapter—producing situations, embodying rhythms, etc.—achieve new political dimensions in their relation to trauma theory.

The characters of *Treme* are united in their experience of political trauma. When Ladonna dances in the second line for her brother's funeral in the final episode, her dramatic, jerky movements are an attempt to express a sense of despair that exists outside of language. Traumatized by the news of David's death and the circumstances surrounding it, she cannot bring herself to uncover the full dimensions of the state's role in the tragedy, but dancing in the second line, Simon and Overmyer seem to suggest, provides her with a personally productive sense of closure. Aware of the politically-traumatic circumstances under which David died, the audience recognizes the dance as more than an expression of grief; it functions as a performance—one shared by her community of second liners—that confronts her betrayal by the state through modes that exist outside of language. Likewise, Creighton Bernette's political satire during Mardi Gras is an embodied act that, despite its humorous dimensions, reveals a deep frustration with the institution's response to Katrina. Concealing his experience with trauma

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from his family, he commits suicide in the penultimate episode.[26] Lambreaux embodies Indian traditions as a means of reasserting his political subjectivity, but performing these rituals in the space of the city allows him to act out the traumatic loss of New Orleans—in ways that exist beyond institutional language— alongside those equally traumatized by the military's disciplining of urban space. If these tactics are situated as attempts to confront political trauma attached to Katrina, then not only are they politically-empowering, but they furthermore provide New Orleanians with important avenues for working through trauma.

Political trauma is unique in that its psychological impact derives from the realization that the state and the systems of power that support it have placed its victims in an untenable position of political subjection. The "bare life" created and sustained by the state of exception seemingly renders individuals politically impotent, and the idea that political agency is a hollow abstraction can be psychologically devastating for victims, such as those living in New Orleans in the aftermath of Katrina. In its dual role, embodied performance provides individuals with the ideal means of confronting political trauma; it provides a medium for physically acting out trauma and, situated in material place, it claims and colonizes spaces, thereby carving out temporary positions of political agency. Embodied performance, then, offers valuable means of challenging an institutional presence that operates beyond the law and therefore represents a perpetual source of political trauma.

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[26] Bernette's suicide stands in for a disheartening trend developing from Katrina's aftermath; the suicide rate in New Orleans tripled in the year after the hurricane (Greene 216).

Through these spatial practices, *Treme* demonstrates the potential for New Orleanians to reestablish themselves in their city by confronting the trauma they experienced and by challenging institutional power. To be sure, Simon and Overmyer are realistic in their representation of this process: even though she half-heartedly participates in the second line during David's funeral, Bernette's wife, Toni (Melissa Leo), clearly traumatized by the events that have transpired, refuses to give her dead husband his own funeral, regarding his suicide as an act of cowardice. Nonetheless, *Treme* suggests spatial practices that, through the processes described above, help to rebuild communities in the urban space of New Orleans. In fact, reclaiming the city as a democratic space involves claiming power from the institution and dispersing it among communities. In *Zeitoun*, Eggers early on establishes his protagonist as an upstanding, well-liked member of his community. Through his painting business, he brings the community together, leaving his mark on the houses that he paints. After the hurricane, the state disciplines the city in such a way as to abolish Zeitoun's membership in this community; as a Muslim, his identity is politically-linked to the enemy, not to the citizenry of the United States, much less the people of New Orleans. The question that Eggers asks at the book's end is how to rebuild a democratic, heterogeneous New Orleans in the wake of such divisive policies of discrimination.

Treme begins to answer this question. Through their concern for representing spatial practices, Simon and Overmyer suggest that communities are rebuilt by uniting people in urban space and that embodied performance facilitates

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productive exchanges, both in terms of trauma and politics. This chapter has demonstrated how Deleuze and Guattari's terms, smooth space and striated space, operated in the days and months following Katrina and how these terms are important to our understanding of the individual's relationship to the state. For a brief moment after the hurricane, the streets of New Orleans, for better or for worse, were stripped of institutional discipline. When the state clumsily, but with presumably good intentions, attempted to establish order in the city through military force, it imposed radical modes of discipline that revealed deeply rooted institutional prejudices; the city of New Orleans was rapidly being transformed into an intensely striated space. *Treme* is the story of how the people of New Orleans would gradually reclaim their city, transforming it, through trying spatial practices, into a democratic, heterogeneous, demilitarized smooth space, once again. Of course, as Deleuze and Guattari are quick to point out, these concepts always exist in relation to one another, expanding and contracting in tandem with the individual's dynamic relation to the state. Post-Katrina New Orleans provides fertile ground for this brand of spatial analysis, and these two texts demonstrate the traumatic dimensions embedded in the reconfiguration of urban space.

As valuable as these spatial practices were to the people of New Orleans, the extent to which they provide opportunities for engaging memorial practices and exercising political subjectivity in the broader arena of metropolitan life is still up for debate. As I discuss in the following chapter on the new American metropolis, cities experiencing dramatic growth in the postwar period in many

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ways preclude the opportunities for productive discursive exchange that we

witness in the post-traumatic, post-Katrina environment of New Orleans.

CHAPTER 4

TRAUMATIC DISLOCATION: THE NEW AMERICAN METROPOLIS

In this city, where suburb, strip, and urban center have merged indistinguishably into a series of states of mind and which is marked by no systematic map that might be carried in the memory, we wander, like Freud in Genoa, surprised but not shocked by the continuous repetition of the same, the continuous movement across already vanished thresholds that leave only traces of their former status as places. Amidst the ruins of monuments no longer significant because deprived of their systematic status, and often of their corporeality, walking on the dust of inscriptions no longer decipherable because lacking so many words, whether carved in stone or shaped in neon, we cross nothing to go nowhere.

Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*

How does a city 'house' the memory of a people no longer at 'home' there?

James E. Young, *At Memory's Edge*

I went back to Ohio / But my city was gone / There was no train station / There was no downtown / South Howard had disappeared / All my favorite places / My city had been pulled down / Reduced to parking spaces / A, O, way to go, Ohio.

The Pretenders, "My City Was Gone"

The street-level narratives of post-Katrina New Orleans—haunted, as they were, by political trauma and institutional oppression—suggest the possibility of urban renewal and, along with it, cultural redemption in times of political instability. This spirit of optimism, as detailed in the previous chapter, articulates itself in urban space, as individuals utilize dynamic spatial practices and revitalize traditional cultural practices in order to reestablish themselves in the space of their city, which was and still is very much the site of institutional discipline. Part of what made this redemptive narrative possible was the rich cultural history of New Orleans and, more specifically, the city's urban design, with its local districts, dense concentration of lived space, multiracial communities, and relatively liberal policies regarding public space. Even in the face of institutional discipline, the city's physical and cultural makeup facilitated performative cultural practices that helped its residents come to terms with political trauma.

In many respects, however, New Orleans cannot serve as the representative American metropolis. Urban planning in the postwar years has ventured far from conceptions of metropolitan space that insist on centralized city planning, where closely-situated downtown districts serve as hubs for commerce, housing, and social interaction. Moving away from these turn-of-the-century urban models, the contemporary metropolis favors policies of decentralization and privatization, which lead to so-called suburban sprawl and, concomitantly, the loss of local, tightly-knit cultural communities that arise out of concentrated urban life. Beginning with the publication of Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great*

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American Cities (1961) and Lewis Mumford's *The City in History* (1962) two hugely-influential texts that described the social consequences of urban renewal, social critics and urban planners alike have grappled with the powerful forces that are increasingly altering the shape and complexion of our cities. Mumford describes the relationship between individuals and a rapidly changing urban environment that, he argues, deprives city-dwellers of their organic connection to the city. Recognizing the erosion of local communities as a result of urban expansion, Mumford was vocal in his criticism of urban sprawl. Jacobs, who was more closely linked to grassroots programs and social activism, was equally influential in her critique of institutional programs for urban renewal, calling for urban models that rejected freeway development, particularly in New York City.

More recent theorists of urban space working with the American metropolis of the late-twentieth century have been successful in describing the forces of growth and expansion that had yet to fully develop in Mumford's and Jacobs' era. Edward Soja, the preeminent spatial theorist of what he has termed the "postmetropolis," designates "mass suburbanization, the rise of an automobile-based culture of consumerism, metropolitan political fragmentation, the decline of the inner city, increasing segregation and ghettoization, [and] changing labor" as the chief features of the postmodern city, of which Los Angeles serves as the best example (*Postmetropolis* 98). Insofar as New Orleans' city space made it possible for its residents to band together to enact regenerative, performative practices, the dispersed city space of the postmetropolis in many

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ways precludes the possibility of community-based spatial resistance. Describing

the evolution of this new kind of urban space, Soja goes on to write:

> well-off Angelenos atomistically constructed far-flung networks of
>
> contacts and activities centered around increasingly protected
>
> homespaces rather than in well-defined neighborhood
>
> communities. The unlisted telephone number and the gated and
>
> walled-in residence symbolized this most privatized of urban
>
> landscapes. Truly public spaces were few and far between, as what
>
> the social theorists call "civil society" seemed to melt into the
>
> airwaves and freeways and other circuitries of the sprawling urban
>
> scene. (137)

Soja here captures the effects of privatized urban planning on street-level, lived

culture; isolated in protected suburban enclaves or, for those less fortunate, stuck

in disadvantaged inner-city neighborhoods, residents of the postmetropolis rarely

interact with those outside their socioeconomic and ethnic communities. This

ability to isolate oneself from undesired social interaction is made possible in part

by the complex postmetropolitan freeway system and ubiquitous automobile

culture,[1] which, when combined, tend to preclude the important street-level social

encounters central to the theories of de Certeau, Lefebvre, and their followers.

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[1] Genevieve Giulano's article, "Transporting Los Angeles," provides a
comprehensive overview of Los Angeles' evolving culture of transportation.
Between 1950 and 1990, the period of greatest economic prosperity in the city
and in the country, automobile registrations per individual more than doubled.
Clearly not just a result of the city's burgeoning urban population, automobile
ownership accelerated dramatically during these years, revealing the movement

The point of these observations is to highlight the social and psychological

impact of postmetropolitan space and, more specifically, to confront the ways that

the new American metropolis prevents individuals from successfully engaging the

central tenets of post-Marxist spatial theory. As freeway networks increasingly

remove individuals from street-level spatial practices, and as our cities—most

visibly via the automobile—make it possible for individuals to traverse vast

swathes of urban space without engaging in any real social interaction, we lose

our ability to inscribe ourselves, politically, in the city's urban spaces. Much of

this chapter concerns the individual's relationship to the freeway system and the

ways that this feature of the postmetropolis has both traumatized city-dwellers

and precluded the possibility of psychologically and politically productive spatial

practices. Describing the institutional discipline exerted by the freeway system in

Los Angeles, D.J. Hopkins writes, "The freeways are designed to be

comprehensible: these spaces are strictly partitioned, legible from

above…Freeways in Los Angeles constitute a new form of closure, by controlling

the movement between neighborhoods and even access to the city itself." Later,

addressing the difficulty of "walking the city," which de Certeau sees as a tactic

against the disciplining of urban space, Hopkins writes, "Driving is not an

antidisciplinary practice in Los Angeles; it is the practice most closely aligned

with the city's spatial disciplines" (277). Indeed, Hopkins' observations echo Jean

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toward a culture dependent on freeway transit. Giulano is quick to point out that
"Although the private vehicle and the highway system provide unparalleled
mobility, persons who do not drive or have access to private vehicles are greatly
disadvantaged" (237).

Baudrillard's earlier reflections on his time in Los Angeles. Baudrillard writes, "If

you get out of your car in this centrifugal metropolis, you immediately become a

delinquent; as soon as you start walking, you are a threat to public order, like a

dog wandering in the road" (58). Delinquency, as I demonstrated in the previous

chapter, can be politically-subversive, but the problem here, of course, is that

walking gets you nowhere in Los Angeles. Whereas the urban space of New

Orleans, for instance, is conducive to a pedestrian economy and therefore

conducive to street-level spatial practices, the postmetropolis at every turn

discourages walkers from establishing themselves in the space of the city.[2]

Instead, city-dwellers function in a space of movement, isolation, and

institutional discipline, all generated and sustained by a complex freeway system

that regulates and dictates our experience of the city. In opposition to urban

models that force individuals to move *through* communities and therefore expose

them to the encounter with the racial or economic other, freeways move drivers

over communities, rendering those communities and their inhabitants invisible.[3]

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[2] In their essay, "Clean and Safe? Property Development, Public Space, and
Homelessness in Downtown San Diego," Don Mitchell and Lynn A. Staeheli
argue that private interests are increasingly inscribing themselves in public
spaces, creating "pseudo-public space" (153), where, in the interest of keeping the
streets "clean and safe" for the middle classes, cities are "promoting private
means of controlling homelessness on public property" (161). These programs
police and discipline individuals in what should be nonhegemonic, smooth urban
spaces.

[3] Thomas Pynchon's 1966 article for the New York Times, "A Journey into the
Mind of Watts," addresses how racial tensions in the city are in part a product of
the freeway system. Rarely journeying into racially-homogeneous neighborhoods
like Watts, white Angelenos lack the opportunity to deconstruct harmful racial
stereotypes. To build upon Pynchon's commentary, many postmetropolitan

Consequently, freeways enable privileged drivers—anyone wealthy enough to

own an automobile—to reside in a suspended state of political innocence. In

blinding city-dwellers to the realities of poverty and urban decay, freeways

depoliticize urban space, and the effects of such depoliticization are significant for

those residing in under-privileged neighborhoods.[4] As long as city-dwellers are

forced onto freeways and into the program of the city, they remain passive

instruments of institutional power rather than political agents inhabiting urban

space.

Los Angeles serves as the spatial locus of this chapter. The two texts of

interest in the coming pages, Helena María Viramontes' *Their Dogs Came with*

Them and Robert Altman's *Short Cuts*, each offer commentary on the ways that

the urban space of the postmetropolis affects individuals and forces them to

deconstruct and confront their traumatic relationship to the city. Much has been

written on Los Angeles as the postmodern metropolis *par excellance*, and social

critics from Fredric Jameson to Soja to Baudrillard have described the city as a

hyperreal environment in which every trace of the Real has been subsumed by

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freeways now utilize "noise barriers," giant walls that separate the freeway from
the community around it. Ostensibly erected to decrease noise pollution generated
from the freeway, these barriers also serve as blinders to unsuspecting drivers
traveling over blighted inner-city neighborhoods.

[4] See also Eric Mann's essay, "Los Angeles Bus Riders Derail the MTA," which
describes the politics of mass transit in the city and the ways in which institutional
racism permeates important decisions on transportation. Here, the Metropolitan
Transportation Authority was accused of cutting funds from subsidized bus routes
that serviced low-income neighborhoods in order to build an expensive rail
system that would benefit more affluent communities. Freeway construction
similarly tends to benefit the wealthy at the expense of the poor.

layers of simulation. What is left, they argue, is a city without history, an urban milieu lacking depth and substance. Hollywood and Disneyland, not surprisingly, figure as important points of reference for their analyses. Much of the critical attention directed at Los Angeles, however, emerged in the 1990s and has waned in recent years, and this decline in critical attention perhaps owes itself to the increasingly prevalent—and somewhat disturbing—admission that Los Angeles is unexceptional as a metropolis. Indeed, Joel Garreau's prophetic observation in 1992 has become a reality: "Every single American city that is growing, is growing in the fashion of Los Angeles, with multiple urban cores" (3). Furthermore, one could argue that the most compelling and forward-thinking aspects of these analyses—which center around notions of hyperreality, simulation, and the loss of the center, all touchstones of postmodernism—have been normalized, and are therefore all but invisible, in the cities of the twenty-first century. In his groundbreaking essay, "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," Jameson argues that the experience of Los Angeles is jarring precisely because it articulates a very specific postmodern vision of the world and of the future of capitalism, a "radical break or *coupure*" from modernity (*Postmodernism* 1). However, here in 2013, the very features that made Los Angeles appear radical to Jameson and other postmodern theorists have been normalized and engrained in everyday life to the extent that achieving critical distance is increasingly difficult.

One of the core features of the postmetropolis is the disappearance of an urban center, or a downtown district that functions as a hub for commerce,

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housing, and cultural production for the city, at large. In Los Angeles, for instance, the city's organizational structure depends on the interconnectivity of cities within the vast county network, not on their relation to a city center, as is the case with Chicago or New York and their European predecessors. Even so, downtown city centers have certainly not ceased to exist, and the recent revitalization of downtown Los Angeles reflects the enduring desire for a center, even if its function is purely symbolic. According to Dieter Lesage, "the suburbanite currently feels a need for 'the city'…[but his/her] current desire for the city is not answered by the city so much as by the simulacra of urban culture, some of which might still be in the city (pedestrian shopping streets) but most of which no longer are (the amusement park, the shopping center)" (GUST 27). While they might appear to provide an authentic urban experience, these hyperreal simulations of urban space underscore the latent desires of city-dwellers, who, deprived of an organic urban core, no longer have access to the Real.

In place of this "lost center," Los Angeles introduces the freeway. Martin Wachs writes, "The freeway is a tangible facility that is also a flexible path through a maze. It is a pathway that encourages purposeful interaction between far-flung but interconnected communities; yet it contributes to the sense of placelessness noted by so many critics of this region" (106). This sense of placelessness—a consequence of decentered urban existence—is intimately involved with the pervasive sense of loss and absence that haunts both

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Viramontes' novel and Altman's film. This presence, I argue, offers a glimpse of the traumatic Real that underlies the postmetropolis, and the characters' interactions with their city, and with each other, reveal the profound anxieties that have become symptomatic of urban life in the twenty-first century. This chapter opens with a discussion of Viramontes' novel, which describes the dramatic transformation of East Los Angeles that occurred during a ten-year period, between 1960 and 1970, when freeway construction carved its way through predominantly Mexican-American neighborhoods, permanently dividing what were once tightly-knit ethnic communities. Viramontes emphasizes the traumatic effects of this construction, both on the individuals in the text and on the communities that make up East Los Angeles. *Short Cuts,* taking place in the 1990s, offers a very different vision of the city, one which emphasizes the quotidian, everyday experience of life in a decentered, suburban environment: the end result of the metropolitan transformation depicted in *Their Dogs*. For the characters of Altman's film, the institutional trauma experienced by Viramontes' characters has been repressed, and the fragmented urban environment of Los Angeles continually intrudes, traumatically at times, on characters' personal lives.

First and foremost, the aim of this chapter is to uncover the discourses of power at work in the postmetropolis and to determine what opportunities remain for individuals who wish to claim sites of resistance against institutional power. Exploring the institutional processes that altered the shape and complexion of American cities, I discuss how the loss of and desire for a symbolic center dictates

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city dwellers' traumatic relationship to the decentered urban spaces they inhabit. This chapter also addresses the role that literature plays in representing, simulating, and confronting these new iterations of urban space and trauma. Consistent with my commentary from previous chapters, narrative production— and the spatial practices involved therein—serves as the vital entry point for discussions on how trauma is experienced and represented in urban space. Both texts under consideration in this chapter simulate postmetropolitan space through complex narrative structures that involve the reader in the negotiation of textual space. Commenting on the postmetropolitan freeway system, which sends city-dwellers along predetermined urban pathways that preclude productive human exchange, Viramontes and Altman utilize fragmented, decentered narratives that both reflect the loss of empathy in the postmodern city and, at times, provide us with the critical distance necessary to understand and confront these new iterations of urban space.

Trauma and the 710

Postmetropolitan space, in its capacity to transform and absorb communities, is constantly in a state of growth and transition. Preplanned communities stretch the boundaries of urban space, and "edge cities," Joel Garreau's term for self-sustaining suburban zones on the fringes of the city, are incorporated into the metropolitan area at a rapid pace. Inner-city freeway systems facilitate this growth, and as quickly as these systems are built, the neighborhoods and communities that they carve their way through are transformed and forgotten.

Their Dogs Came with Them describes the transformation of an East L.A. barrio in the 1960s, when the construction of the 710 and 60 freeway interchange displaced residents of the community and perpetrated devastating institutional violence on the Mexican American families who lived there. Viramontes follows several characters within the novel's ten-year frame, revealing how the freeway construction contributes to the dissolution of the neighborhood and places residents in positions of psychological and physical vagrancy. *Their Dogs* probes the traumatic effects of the loss of community and, more broadly, addresses the widespread material, social, and psychological impact of urban growth on individuals living in the postmetropolis.

One of the chief concerns for Viramontes and her characters is the possibility of confronting trauma in a city under constant transformation, where construction and growth is continually erasing important sites of cultural and social production. As many critics have noted, postmetropolitan cities, unlike their European predecessors, do not lay claim to history as a defining component of their identity (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 16). Rather, growth, transformation, and adaptability prove more vital to accommodating large populations and facilitating the flow of labor and consumption. Perpetually in a state of erasure, then, history has difficulty locating itself in posturban zones, and city-dwellers, therefore, lack access to spaces that facilitate the processing of trauma; the traumatic event occurs, paradoxically, as postmetropolitan growth erases sites of memory, and, in this erasure, precludes the very possibility for confronting

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trauma—through urban space—on personal or collective levels. These sites of

memory, or what Pierre Nora has termed "*lieux de memoire*," function as critical

repositories for individual and cultural memory, and, more importantly, provide

sites in which to contest institutional, archival history. In *Their Dogs*, memory is

invested in the physical sites of the barrio, which connect its residents to their

Mexican American heritage. Erasing these sites of memory and co-opting the

channels necessary for psychological and spatial production, the city enacts

subtle, but powerful, institutional violence.

For Viramontes and her characters, these *lieux de memoire* are, from the

novel's first pages, under threat of erasure. She writes, "In a few weeks,

Chavela's side of the neighborhood, the dead side of the street, would disappear

forever. The earthmovers had anchored, their tarps whipping like banging sails,

their bellies petroleum-readied to bite trenches wider than rivers. In a few weeks

the blue house and all the other houses would vanish just like Chavela and all the

other neighbors" (12).[5] In this opening chapter, the unnamed "Zumaya child" (5),

later revealed to be the orphaned Ermila, confronts the realities of urban erasure,

as her grandmother, Chavela, is forced to evacuate her home to make way for the

freeway construction. Viramontes here establishes the house's critical role as a

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[5] Viramontes' descriptions of the destruction being wrought by the
"earthmovers," which appear throughout the novel, hearken back to Steinbeck's
description of the bulldozers churning the Oklahoma landscape in *The Grapes of
Wrath*. Like Steinbeck's bulldozers, Viramontes' earthmovers are symbols of
institutional power. If one were to take this further, the intertextual resonances
between the two works could position *Their Dogs*, itself, as a kind of textual *lieu
de memoire*, insofar as it provides a site for a particular, discursively-defined set
of memory practices.

lieu de memoire, albeit one whose materiality will not survive the impending

transformation of the community. Chavela seems to realize the importance of

preserving the memory of the blue house and its symbolic role within the

community. Viramontes writes, "A pair of wooden beams held up the ceiling and

the child tried to memorize them because Chavela told her it was important not to

forget" (14). Of course, the radical erasure of the blue house and the other houses

in the neighborhood will deprive Ermila and the rest of the community from

appropriating this site as a *lieu de memoire*; instead, the community must find

ways of confronting trauma in the absence of physical sites that enable memory

production.[6]

By frequently shifting narrative perspective and introducing jarring

temporal leaps, Viramontes explores the deep psychological impact of this

process on the various characters in *Their Dogs*. For each character, the post-

construction, post-traumatic neighborhood of the present denies any real sense of

mobility or opportunities for productive social exchange. The androgynous Turtle,

one of the novel's central characters, is homeless in the final chapters, and, in the

climactic scene, is shot to death by the police after fatally stabbing Ermila's

cousin, Nacho. In her essay on the novel, Hsu L. Hsuan observes that Turtle's

"name references the slowdown or 'space-time expansion' that freeways imposed

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[6] Obviously operating on different scales, the problem faced by Viramontes' East
L.A. is similar, in kind, to projects of memorialization circulating around post-
Holocaust Europe, where important sites of Jewish heritage were permanently
erased from the city during World War II. James E. Young offers an illuminating
discussion on Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum Extension to the Berlin
Museum and the difficulties Libeskind encountered housing "the memory of a
people no longer at 'home' there."

on inner-city residents who lacked automobiles" (154). Other urban theorists have

noted how postmetropolitan space "disempowers the tactile body" and creates

urban zones that "can barely be experienced any longer in physical terms" (GUST

128). Turtle, in this regard, is a relic of a bygone urban era. Perpetually moving

through neighborhoods on foot in spatial practices that should allow her—

drawing from de Certeau's writings—to establish social connections and establish

herself politically in space, Turtle cannot locate a sense of community in her

neighborhood, largely because the freeways have erased sites of social exchange

and likewise eradicated the culture of empathy that once existed in the barrio. For

instance, the Japanese-American convenience store owner, Ray, whose store is

ironically named "The Friendly Shop," is immediately suspicious of Turtle; even

after a moment of empathy during which he offers her a job at the store, he

remains obsessed with cleaning his body and his hands from the perceived

contagion. Turtle left "microbes and germ contagion on everything," Viramontes

writes. "No matter how much Ray washed his hands, no matter how hard he

wiped and rubbed the sweat off his palms, his hands couldn't forget [Turtle's]

stink" (262). Even though Ray recognizes Turtle as a fixture in the community,

the culture of the barrio—no longer a place where street-level social production

occurs—prevents healthy social exchange.

The tragedy of Turtle's narrative stems from her inability to locate stable,

grounded, material sites that connect her to memory and community, two

mutually dependent concepts in the novel. Pierre Nora explains:

>*lieux de memoire* are fundamentally remains, the ultimate
>
>embodiments of a memorial consciousness that has barely survived
>
>in a historical age that calls out for memory because it has
>
>abandoned it. They make their appearance by virtue of the
>
>deritualization of our world—producing, manifesting, establishing,
>
>constructing, decreeing, and maintaining by artifice and by will a
>
>society deeply absorbed in its own transformation and renewal, one
>
>that inherently values the new over the ancient, the young over the
>
>old, the future over the past. (12)

Turtle spends much of the novel traversing urban space in an attempt to locate

physical sites that link her to history and allow her to confront the traumatic

erasure of community that occurred in her youth. The postmetropolis, constantly

in a state of "transformation and renewal," all too often overwrites these

potentially productive spatial loci which, as Nora suggests, serve as

"embodiments of memorial consciousness" that are vital to community and

cultural memory.

Unfortunately, as noted above, these sites in the barrio have been erased

and overwritten by the freeway system, leaving only traces of the productive

social spaces that once existed. Aimlessly wandering the neighborhood looking

for an adequate place to sleep, Turtle recalls Chavela's blue house, the symbolic

locus of community and her psychological connection to the past. Viramontes

writes:

Under a willow, Turtle sat dead tired on a marble bench to rest and

thought about how hurtful bad flowers can be and then she thought

of Chavela and the potted ferns and her hibiscus

flowers…Chavela's warm towel carried the fragrance of Dove

soap. She wiped Turtle's face and the moist cleansing made her

feel refreshed, lovely. For some reason, the viejita liked Turtle and

tweaked her chin and gave her lemonade because as far back as

Turtle could remember, she always had an unquenchable thirst.

(235)

Apart from establishing Turtle's visceral connection to her environment, which

allows her to access memory in more involved ways than other characters and,

perhaps, speaks to her inability to adapt to her postmetropolitan environment, this

passage reveals the dramatic transformation she has witnessed in the barrio. Once

a place of comfort and trust, the neighborhood—now a place of "prickly barbs"

and "bad flowers"—fosters social encounters tinged by suspicion and distrust. In

a corollary scene, Ray later likens Turtle's smell to "flowers left way too long in a

vase of putrid water" (262). The transformation of the neighborhood, Viramontes

seems to suggest, affects the social mindset of all members of the community.

More importantly, though, this passage designates Chavela's blue house as a

critical site of memory, albeit one stripped of its materiality and therefore stripped

of its productive spatial potential; for Turtle, and for the rest of the barrio, the lack

of material sites for memory production prevents the community from solidifying

itself under the aegis of shared, collective trauma. As quickly as Turtle comes

upon this fleeting memory, she "left the bench, not caring to avoid the puddles on

the gravel trail" (236).

Turtle's abortive journey through Eastside reveals the few opportunities

for memory production that still exist in the barrio. Revisiting the street where she

grew up, she is forced to confront the fact that "their old house was hardly

recognizable" (221), reinforcing her actual and symbolic homelessness. Lacking

any connection to her past, Turtle finally seeks shelter in cemeteries, physical

sites that here function as *lieux de memoire* insofar as they situate her within a

historical narrative. Located "right below the Interstate ramps" (219), the

cemeteries she visits—first Serbian, then Chinese, and finally what appears to be

an Anglo-American mausoleum—are the last physical sites of memory capable of

connecting the community to the past. Although she finds temporary shelter in

these spaces, it is significant that each cemetery is ethnically "other" to Turtle;

even though they offer a connection to communal memory, they do so in

exclusionary ethnic terms which undermine their productive potential for the

Mexican American community. Before she falls asleep in a crypt, "Turtle

wondered what possessed this old white man named Ross to die so far from

home" (236). At the culmination of Turtle's search, this *lieu de memoire*, rather

than connecting her to communal memory rooted in the barrio, reinforces her

social and ethnic isolation while furthermore reminding her of the traumatic

erasure of *her* home.

Through these failed attempts to access physical sites of memory production, Viramontes laments the loss of *lieux de memoire* as a result of postmetropolitan expansion. Early in the novel, Ermila attempts to rationalize processes of erasure, which, she begins to realize, affect memory production in critical ways. Viramontes writes, "Who was it that told [Ermila] all she had to do was look up at the heavens to see the shapes of things missing? Was it Mrs. M. of the Child Services or any one of the three foster parents? Everything went up into thin air but didn't go away" (14). Later, as an adult, she makes the same observation: "Who was it who told her that everything went up into thin air but never quite disappeared? Something always remained behind, like the photograph of her parents, like the formidable mass of oil on the asphalt where the van had once been parked" (295). These passages are significant for two reasons: first, Ermila observes that individuals may access moments of erasure through memory practices. The things that "didn't go away" or "never quite disappeared" endure, for better or for worse, through memory. In her neighborhood, however, physical sites that might facilitate this exchange are themselves the objects of erasure. This leads to the second point: even by the novel's conclusion, Ermila is unable to recall the source or the origin of this insight. Her memory—significant in its thematic relation to the text's central concerns—is haunted by the traumatic loss of its core, the loss of an originary moment of conception. Like her old neighborhood, which functioned as a cultural core for the community but has since experienced erasure, the origin of this memory remains beyond her grasp,

suggesting that even if things "never quite disappear," their traces cannot facilitate a productive confrontation of trauma. If all we have are immaterial traces of an originary moment, how can we with any confidence access the traumatic Real at the heart of the postmetropolitan existence?

This question haunts *Their Dogs*, moving characters inexorably to the climactic scene where Tranquilina, challenging the Quarantine Authority officers who have just fatally shot Turtle, supernaturally levitates as a means of escaping institutional violence. Viramontes writes, "Shouting voices ordered her not to move, stay immobile, but she lifted one foot forward, then another, refusing to halt. Two inches, four, six, eight, riding the currents of the wilding wind. Riding it beyond the borders, past the cesarean scars of the earth, out to limitless space where everything was possible if she believed" (325). These elements of magical realism here at the novel's conclusion, of course, suggest the inescapability of oppressive urban space, disciplined now by institutional power and overlaid by the fabric of the postmetropolis. The only viable solution—not a real solution at all, really—is to magically fly away and escape urban spaces that deny the production of memory. Juxtaposed with the novel's overwhelmingly realist impulses prior to this point, the novel's miraculous conclusion can only be read ironically, with Tranquilina serving as a mythical figure in a world that, the reader well knows, is experienced only through the realities of urban life.

Viramontes' concern for representing these realities and for situating herself within the city's history is significant and worth exploring through the lens

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of urban trauma. Aside from her presentation of the Quarantine Authority, a fictional presence she manufactured for the book and modeled after "public safety" curfew laws imposed on Chicanos from 1969 to 1971 (Hsu 155),[7] Viramontes is careful to represent Los Angeles with historical accuracy. This, perhaps, signals an attempt to align the East L.A. freeway construction of the 1960s with the two better known moments of urban erasure in Los Angeles' history: the razing of Bunker Hill and the infamous Chavez Ravine episode. Soja examines these historical precedents through the lens of the palimpsest, a theoretical concept that helps to explain processes of erasure and urban trauma. Bunker Hill, settled in Los Angeles in 1870 in what would later become the New Downtown, was one of the first Anglo settlements in the area. When this collection of over 400 Victorian homes fell into disrepair in the 1940s and 50s, the city decided to tear down the buildings, flatten the hill, and begin a massive construction project intended as a new urban center for Los Angeles, which was already expanding outward at a feverish pace. The construction of the New Downtown, begun in 1959, would eventually demolish 396 historic buildings and forcibly displace 11,000 residents (Soja, *Postmetropolis* 214).

The second traumatic urban erasure in Los Angeles' history—the razing of Chavez Ravine and the construction of Dodger Stadium—occurred simultaneous to the Bunker Hill episode in the late 1950s. After years of resistance from the

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[7] Viramontes' presentation of the Quarantine Authority acquires new meanings when positioned alongside historical immigration policies that quarantined immigrants upon arrival to the United States. In this light, the term "Quarantine Authority" carries with it significant rhetorical baggage, particularly in regard to the issues citizenship and belonging that thematically undergird the novel.

Mexican-American community of Chavez Ravine, a barrio settled in the

nineteenth century, the city moved forward with the construction of the stadium

and, in some cases, utilized police force to physically remove inhabitants from

their homes (Schrank 280). Analyzing these moments of urban erasure within the

context of an ongoing process of metropolitan transformation, Soja utilizes the

palimpsest as a theoretical concept to explain the historical processes of

displacement and urban renewal in Los Angeles. First used in ancient Egypt,

palimpsests are scrolls or tablets whose original text has been erased and later

over-written with a second layer of text. Traces of the original text often remain

inscribed on the tablet, signifying the processes of erasure involved in the

generation of new texts. Calling all the way back to the city's originary moment—

the settlement of La Nuestra Señora la Reina de Los Angeles—Soja argues that

Los Angeles' metropolitan space is palimpsestuous insofar as it continually

overwrites urban spaces to facilitate the flow of capitalism and to accommodate

growing populations (*Postmetropolis* 228). The erasure of Chavez Ravine and

Bunker Hill are merely two examples of much larger institutional projects that

prioritize urban growth over cultural history.[8]

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[8] From this perspective, it could be argued that city growth—from eighteenth-century Venice to turn of the century New York City to postmetropolitan Los Angeles—has always involved palimpsestuous processes of erasure and reconstruction. In the postmetropolis, however, urban infrastructure—such as the freeway system, whose function is to facilitate movement, not social production—often overlays public, communal space without providing necessary sites for human exchange. Historically, urban growth, even when involved in processes of erasure, has replaced aging infrastructure with street-level sites that encourage social interaction.

The above examples, along with Viramontes' commentary on freeway construction on the Eastside, signify the existence of urban spaces that are palimpsestuous by nature: their historical foundations have been erased and overwritten by layers of postmetropolitan space. Bunker Hill offers an interesting example, as Downtown, the very heart of the city (if one could be said to exist in the postmetropolis), is revealed to be just another depthless, ahistorical postmodern surface; its "history," unlike the metropolis of the modern period whose growth was the result of gradual processes of urban development, is linked to the erasure of communities grounded in actual zones of cultural history.[9] Using the palimpsest as a theoretical tool reveals the traumatic absence that underlies postmetropolitan space. Cultural sites that have been overwritten by new development—more often than not for the sake of facilitating commerce and the movement of labor—function symbolically as spatial zones that have been repressed by institutional power; they are overwritten, immaterial, culturally-repressed sites that reflect Pierre Nora's claim that modern space has all but precluded the possibility of memory practices.

Because these spaces have undergone erasure and no longer have material existence to facilitate memory practices in space, individuals cannot "work

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[9] Even these American cities of the modern period have, beginning in the postwar years, been victims of postmetropolitan urban expansion. Robert Moses' radical transformation of New York City is the most well-known example of this. In gestures equal in scale to Los Angeles freeway development, Moses transformed the entire cityscape of New York, often cutting through long-established neighborhoods and displacing their residents who, more often than not, were ethnic minorities and economically disadvantaged. See *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York* for further reading.

through" the institutional trauma that has been enacted on them. This is the reason Turtle flounders in the novel's final pages; the palimpsestuous environment imposed on her community—looming, even, over the cemeteries, the last-remaining *lieux de memoire*—prevents residents of the community from accessing trauma through spatial practices. This is even more significant considering the nature of urban transformation. With Chavez Ravine and Bunker Hill, fixed, stable sites (Dodger Stadium and downtown high-rises), presumably capable of serving new symbolic functions in the community, were erected atop pre-existing ethnic communities. In Viramontes' Eastside, however, the freeway system—a site of movement, transition, and disassociation—replaces the situated community of the barrio. Lacking, even, the situated, physical sites that replaced Bunker Hill and Chavez Ravine, the barrio is overwritten by a system that offers little opportunity for spatial practices or social interaction, and therefore little opportunity for working through trauma.

Furthermore, freeways disconnect drivers—suspended above the community—from the urban spaces through which they move. Kathryn Milun discusses the psychological and social implications of postmetropolitan freeways. She writes, "freeways created gigantic urban pathways by razing older neighborhoods, often creating even deeper spatial boundaries along lines of entrenched segregation. Connecting the city's neighborhoods in this way allowed a driver to experience the expanding metropolis as a functional whole, 'as a totality,' even if the experience was *en passant* rather than *in vivo*" (132). Later,

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she links this commentary on social segregation to trauma and the psychological implications of freeway culture. She explains, "The urban freeway is the zone of roaring white noise within which the 'normal' citizen must learn to be comfortable. Becoming normal in this road film is to become increasingly desensitized to the feeling and effects of both personal trauma and public space" (133). Overwriting communities with freeway space, then, represents the most dramatic case of urban erasure; members of the community are not only deprived of crucial *lieux de memoire*, but the very spaces that replace these sites offer no opportunities for social interaction or community reinvention.

Viramontes is explicit in her condemnation of postmetropolitan freeway culture, continually noting its role in perpetuating the trauma endured by the residents of the barrio. Once a cohesive urban space connected organically to the rest of the city, the neighborhood has since been cut off spatially, through the artificial boundaries imposed by the freeway, and socially, through the psychological distance existing between the residents of the community and the people moving on the freeways above, who are oblivious to the social blight around them. Viramontes comments on both of these concepts. She writes:

> Whole residential blocks had been gutted…The streets Mama
> remembered had once connected to other arteries of the city,
> rolling up and down hills and in and out of neighborhoods where
> neighbors of different nationalities intersected with one
> another…now the freeways amputated the streets into stumped

dead ends, and the lives of the neighbors itched like phantom limbs

in Mama's memory. (32-33)

More than just affecting the characters' relationship to their neighborhood, the

freeways institute a social space that discourages empathy and generates political

invisibility. Describing Turtle's near rape at the hands of a grocery clerk, which

occurs on the side of the freeway, Viramontes writes, "Not one driver from all

those cars zooming on the new freeway bridge, not one driver driving the

overpass of the 710 freeway construction, not one stopped to protest, to scream,

What the hell do you think you're doing, motherfucker, pinche puto, get your

fingers off her tits, baboso!" (25). Homeless and every day a victim of this kind of

social blindness, Turtle realizes "that to render someone invisible was more

painful than a cracked skull" (21). Each instance reveals how freeway culture

does more than merely alter the landscape of a neighborhood; it creates artificial,

institutional boundaries around urban space, it severs the organic, street-level

connective pathways between neighborhoods, and it institutes a psychology of

political apathy for under-privileged communities.[10]

The traumatic erasure of community described above is certainly

complicated by these effects of freeway culture. Indeed, *Their Dogs* is willing to

acknowledge the paradoxical relationship between freeway construction and the

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[10] Viramontes, in interviews, has been vocal about the effects of freeway
construction on her own childhood. She explains, "it was an apocalypto, a real
transformation of the neighborhood. Not only do you become an island unto
yourself, a quarantine, but you're amputated from the rest of the city. The only
way that you even know that you exist is when people pass you. You see this
constant motion, but you're completely immobile. It's horrendous" ("You Carry
the Border with You" 85).

communities it affects. In a tangential, but thematically central, scene, Viramontes describes the origin of the gang member, Lucho's, stutter. Victim to an abusive father, Lucho as a youth is held against his will on the edge of a freeway overpass. Viramontes writes, "The screams that Lucho screamed that night were distinct and everywhere. His pleas to be released rose up from the borderless mass of confusion between safety and harm, between fun and terror, between hatred and love, and the shrill sounds escaped from his throat but caught on his two buckteeth" (231). From this episode, Lucho develops a debilitating stutter that plagues him, presumably, for the rest of his life. Viramontes' curious description of the scene—presenting a traumatic, life-altering moment as an ambiguous, affective experience—reflects the fundamental paradox of freeway culture faced by every postmetropolis: while freeways offer mobility and opportunity for most residents of the city, they tend to corrode the spatial infrastructure of the neighborhood, an infrastructure that many urban theorists believe is central to establishing and exercising political agency and voice. Furthermore, by situating this traumatic event on the freeway overpass, Viramontes explicitly links freeway culture to a culture of sadism. It is significant that this moment—the visceral, traumatic exposure to the freeway in its incipient form—ends with Lucho being silenced. His loss of voice reflects the loss of political agency experienced by the community in the years following the construction. Lacking the avenues necessary for the processing of institutional trauma, the characters float in "the

borderless mass of confusion," victims of the forces of discipline enacted through the city.

What is lost in freeway construction—cohesive neighborhoods, community "safe spaces," street-level spatial practices, etc.—cannot be replaced by the freeway systems that overwrite these urban zones. Even as they provide mobility for the people that utilize them, freeways limit our ability to exercise what Lefebvre and David Harvey designate as our "right to the city." In this regard, rather than functioning in the street-level political sense suggested by de Certeau, freeway mobility moves drivers along predetermined channels, denying the possibility of subversive spatial tactics, which, in *Their Dogs*, are linked to the cultivation of political voice.[11] Seeing the automobile as a kind of capsule that isolates drivers from the outside world, Lieven de Cauter describes the increasing privatization of the American cultural landscape as a result of automobile culture and transportation. He writes, "A society of mobility is unthinkable without omnipresent control…Transport becomes to an increasing degree the transit between controlled and closed-off zones. The generic city is obsessed by closing-off, safety, and control" (275). The result of this "capsularization" of culture is the privatization and depoliticization of urban space. If individuals no longer have to encounter political resistance in their lived environment (because of their ability to isolate themselves from it), then the spatial practices engaged by those living

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[11] One could develop this thread by looking, again, to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of smooth space and striated space. Freeway systems, in disciplining drivers along predetermined pathways, function as quintessential striated spaces. In contrast, the less disciplined, more democratically-defined space of the barrio may be understood as a smooth space.

in, for instance, the barrio lose their political power. In short, establishing oneself in urban space may no longer hold the same opportunities for cultivating political voice as once was believed. When lived, communal spaces give way to freeway culture, one is left to wonder what value remains in the subversive spatial tactics described by de Certeau and Lefebvre, who both see the lived space of the city as a site of political strife.

Despite this changing urban landscape, the characters in *Their Dogs* attempt to carve out spaces of agency that may prove capable of harboring new forms of community. This is most immediately evident in the war over gang turf being waged throughout the novel. Turtle and her brother, Luis Lil Lizard, belong to the McBride Boys, rivals to the Lote M gang. Continually staking out turf in the barrio, these two gangs seek "dominance of the boulevard" (298) and "ownership of those precious city blocks" (20). The subversive tactics employed by these gangs gives some indication that spatial practices may still offer productive means of challenging the institution. As children, Luis Lil Lizard and Turtle attempt to sabotage the bulldozers waiting in the neighborhood and, later, they perpetrate another symbolic act of resistance by removing the marking flags that designate the construction dimensions for the coming freeway. Unfortunately, these spatial tactics directed against the institution are secondary to turf warfare, and these gangs, rather than using spatial practices to reinvigorate community, use space as a means of perpetrating violence on one another. In one scene, the rival Lote M gang defaces graffiti on McBride turf, etching out the names of the

McBride Boys and overwriting it with their own insignia. Viramontes writes,

"That's exactly what the Maravilla vatos planned to do on the bridge, send a

dispatch announcing erasure" (217). Perhaps subconsciously recognizing their

impotent relationship to institutional power, the gangs misdirect their frustrations

against one another, perpetrating acts of erasure that simulate what has happened

to their barrio.

Although they do not realize it at the time, the gangs' attempts to stake out

turf through graffiti are ineffectual. The above scene takes place on the bridge of a

freeway overpass, a popular site for graffiti in most major cities. Viramontes

seems to suggest, however, that, perhaps because of the depoliticizing power of

freeways in urban space, these efforts to claim space through graffiti are

retrogressive; gangs too often claim turf as a means of establishing themselves

against one another instead of using space to challenge institutional power. In an

earlier scene, the McBride Boys engrave their names in the freshly-laid cement of

the overpass, believing themselves to be immortalizing their presence in urban

space. However, Viramontes explains that time, even just a few decades, will

make "the boys' eternal bonds look worn and forgotten" (164). The point here is

that the rapidly evolving postmetropolis—in its endless accumulation of new

surfaces designed to better accommodate population growth and the movement of

labor—cannot serve as a repository for memory. Whatever attempts the boys

make to memorialize themselves (through the spatial practices involved in

marking their territory) are immediately undermined by the changing complexion

of the city. From a Lefebvrian perspective, this idea undercuts the political value of claiming turf, which, although it creates temporary spaces of agency, is haunted by the realization that the city provides "no solid tierra firme to stand on, nothing to hold on to" (247). Lacking stable urban sites in the postmetropolis, characters can only make symbolic gestures toward claiming spaces of agency.

While the residents of the barrio are unable to utilize space productively, the institution—represented most directly by the Quarantine Authority—is very effective at organizing and disciplining the community. Ostensibly in place to rid the neighborhood of rabid dogs, the QA disciplines the neighborhood by setting up boundaries and monitoring the movement of residents through ID checks and curfews. Viramontes writes, "The girlfriends lived within the shaded boundaries of the map printed in English only and distributed by the city. From First Street to Boyle to Whittier and back to Pacific Boulevard, the roadblocks enforced a quarantine to contain a potential outbreak of rabies" (54). The efficiency with which the QA organizes and disciplines space is worth noting here, and Viramontes is quick to point out the racial discourses underlying the quarantine. Despite its physical presence in the barrio, the QA merely functions as a symbolic embodiment of institutional discipline, as the real agents of discipline and spatial organization are the freeways and their ability to transform the community and institute new, artificial boundaries on urban space. Describing the effects of freeway construction on Alfonso, Ermila's boyfriend, Viramontes writes, "At first, when the Caltrans people unfurled the freeways, he had whole abandoned

blocks to get lost in. But after the freeways were completed, Alfonso opted to sit on his father's couch the greater part of the day" (303). In organizing the smooth space of the barrio, the freeways function similarly to the QA; both modes of institutional discipline limit the mobility of the underprivileged and deprive the community of its organic presence within the city.

Viramontes seems well aware of the political and traumatic dimensions of postmetropolitan expansion, and, as other critics have noted, she utilizes narrative strategies to develop her critique of these issues. Lacking the means to reestablish themselves in the barrio and regenerate community, her characters spiral into violence and gang warfare, fulfilling a tragic narrative sequence that ends with the death of Turtle and Nacho. Over several chapters, Viramontes plots out the various narrative threads that lead, seemingly inexorably, to the novel's tragic conclusion, and her formal stylistics here suggest that the narrative of postmetropolitan growth in contemporary cities is irreversible and ultimately catastrophic. In this way, Viramontes has fashioned her novel as a simulation of postmetropolitan space, sending readers along narrative conduits that, when they intersect, produce violence and reinforce social divisions. Addressing the novel's narrative structure, Viramontes has remarked, "It's impossible for me to tell just one story. I had to tell all these different stories and, like the freeways, have them all intersect" ("You Carry the Border with You" 82). Despite these intersections, the novel's textual space, like the urban space of the postmetropolis, cannot foster empathy. Whereas another novel may have optimistically commented on the

possibility for cultural growth springing from new modes of social interaction in the postmetropolis, Viramontes seems resigned to the destructive social and psychological effects of urban expansion. Like the gangs, who cultivate insular, exclusive groups prone to violence, the narratives of *Their Dogs* are violently incompatible with one another and cannot converge in meaningful ways.

Commenting on what she calls the "fatal contiguities" in the novel's narration, Hsuan L. Hsu writes, "As the novel progresses, these subplots begin to intersect like freeway interchanges" (152-153). Although Hsu correctly points out the formal strategies at play in the novel, she does not adequately explore the implications of this process on the reader or on Viramontes' larger commentary on urban trauma. Throughout the novel, readers follow the chief narratives as they approach their point of intersection. Foreshadowing the traumatic conclusion, Viramontes does not attempt to conceal the impending death of her central characters. For instance, she begins the penultimate chapter with a police report that outlines the events to come and at one point makes a temporal leap forward, revealing Ray's reaction to Turtle's death. These moments of foreshadowing, combined with her fragmented narration, entrap readers in a textual program that challenges conventional narrative structures of progress, growth, and mobility. Disrupting readers' desires for narrative tension and expectations of narrative closure, Viramontes creates narrative freeways, so to speak, that highlight the inescapability from the postmetropolitan narrative of expansion and, consequently, social dissolution.

Enclosed in this textual space, readers move inexorably toward the moment of intersection. Unlike Spiegelman, for instance, who encourages readers to creatively "practice" textual spaces, a process that offers readers a sense of interpretive agency, Viramontes, by revealing the horrific conclusion early on and playing out every excruciating step, prohibits readers from creatively engaging the textual space of the novel. Rather, we remain trapped in a series of claustrophobic narratives that, we are well aware, will intersect and end in violence. Through this process, Viramontes denies the possibility of engaging textual space in productive, reader-centric ways. This, of course, builds into her commentary on postmetropolitan urban spaces, which, as I have shown, deny the possibility of important spatial practices central to establishing positions of political agency. Furthermore, Viramontes' narrative structure denies the possibility of memory practices and, more specifically, the processing of trauma. Lacking a denouement, a narrative strategy that provides a space for the reader to reflect on the action that occurred in the climax, *Their Dogs* simply ends with the death of Nacho and Turtle, immediately followed by Tranquilina's magical apotheosis. The final sentences describe this traumatic scene, and the reader is given no opportunity, via narrative, to confront the violence enacted on these characters. Here, again, like the postmetropolitan erasure of *lieux de memoire*, Viramontes denies us a textual space in which to process trauma and, lacking resolution, we remain, even after the novel's end, trapped in the space of the narrative.

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Viramontes' narrative strategies directly involve the reader in the traumatic erasure of memory and the silencing of political voice that the novel describes. Part of the reason that the characters in her novel are incapable of reclaiming their community is that they lack the traumatic referent against which to direct their frustration. How, exactly, does one challenge an institutional presence that is dispersed in the very reality that we experience and understand as "the city?" The ineffability of the institution, particularly as it manifests itself in urban space, is central to its political power. The following section takes on this issue, discussing Robert Altman's film, *Short Cuts*, which depicts Los Angeles three decades removed from Viramontes' Eastside of the 1960s. Living in urban and suburban spaces created by the residue of unbridled freeway expansion, Altman's characters must locate spaces of social production in an environment that seems to discourage it at every turn.

Where Did Our Love Go?

Released in 1993, Robert Altman's career-defining film emerges at the height of postmetropolitan critical attention. Soja's seminal book, *Postmodern Geographies*, with its lengthy critique of Los Angeles city space, was published in 1989, followed two years later by Jameson's hugely-influential *Postmodernism, or Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Both texts see urban space and, specifically, the emergence of the postmodern city as the site through which to track the evolution of capitalism, politics, and the human encounter with institutional power. Adapted from the short stories of Raymond Carver, all of which are set in

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the Pacific Northwest, *Short Cuts* is a meditation on life in the postmetropolis. Setting Carver's stories in contemporary Los Angeles, Altman comments on personal and institutional trauma as a result of postmetropolitan urban life, where, as I have shown through Viramontes' novel, the traumatic erasure of urban space haunts individuals as they attempt to foster healthy personal relationships and engage authentic moments of empathetic, human connection.

Like Viramontes, Altman does more than represent the trauma of living in the postmetropolis; his formal strategies simulate the experience of this new urban space. Utilizing narrative vectors that imitate the vast network of freeways in the postmodern city, Altman uses formal stylistics to examine the problematic social dimensions of postmetropolitan space. Unlike Carver's stories, which, after the release of the film were compiled in a collection also entitled *Short Cuts*, Altman is interested in describing the encounter with the repressed Real, which continually intrudes on the characters in the film as they attempt to establish meaningful connections with one another. Disconnected from any sense of community and often lacking the ability to empathize with those around them, Altman's characters exist in a capsularized social milieu—the end result of the freeway expansion that Viramontes depicts—that often fails to provide necessary avenues for meaningful social interaction. In *Short Cuts*, Los Angeles is depicted as a placeless place, a hyperreal urban environment in which city-dwellers are dislocated from their material environment and dislocated from one another as a result of their inability to produce social space. To simulate this phenomenon,

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Altman, through the film's ten chief narratives, involves viewers in the fragmented, socially-disconnected world that *Short Cuts* represents. Unlike the narrative experience of *Their Dogs*, which concedes to the pervasiveness of institutional power, Altman's narrative strategies suggest the possibility of understanding the postmetropolis in ways that encourage, rather than deny, empathetic human interaction.

Altman's film follows roughly ten different narrative trajectories that overlap and intersect at various moments in the film, each of the narratives depicting the lives of white, middle-class Angelenos in the midst of personal or marital turmoil. Although the sources of these personal conflicts can often be traced to specific events or patterns of behavior exhibited by the characters, Altman, from the film's first frames, is interested in exploring the deeper, institutional causes for the social malaise that seemingly lingers over Los Angeles. During the opening credit sequence, Altman follows a group of five helicopters spraying pesticide over the city at night, apparently as a means of eradicating the "medfly," which, according to local television reporter, Howard Finnegan (Bruce Davidson), is "a potentially devastating insect that has chosen to make California its home." These images are accompanied by an extended shot of a sign that reads "Medfly Quarantine: No Homegrown Fruits or Vegetables to Leave Area," alerting us immediately to the forces of institutional discipline already operating in Los Angeles at the film's opening. Altman tracks the helicopters, in formation, over the glittering expanse of Los Angeles' nighttime

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cityscape, depicting their ominous neon red and green appendages through frontal shots that suggest imminent threat and confrontation. Finnegan likens the effort to eradicate the medfly to a war, asking "Is this a war that can be won?" and later stating that Angelenos must "Destroy the medfly before it has a chance to destroy us."

Soon after these statements, however, Sherri Shepard (Madeleine Stowe), one of the film's female characters embroiled in an emotionally abusive marriage, expresses fear that the pesticide poses long-term health risks, suggesting that the war on the medfly might be more destructive to Angelenos than supposed by the government, a sentiment that characters share throughout the film. Altman's decision to open the film with these portentous images and their accompanying commentary is significant, especially since they have little direct bearing on the action that occurs over the course of the film. Similar to the rabies quarantine in *Their Dogs* and, perhaps even more so, DeLillo's "airborne toxic event," the medfly quarantine, serving as the contextual backdrop for each of the film's narratives, represents the subtle and ever-present forms of institutional violence afflicting residents of the postmetropolis. Whereas Viramontes' quarantine materially grids and organizes urban space, and thereby disciplines the residents of the barrio, the medfly quarantine functions transparently; the pesticide, invisible to the people it affects, operates on more subtle psychological levels. Like Foucault's panoptic gaze, which city dwellers had internalized by the

twentieth century, the characters in *Short Cuts*—dissociated from the lived space

of the city—can only confront institutional power in highly abstract terms.

Short Cuts begins and ends with visual meditations on the city. The

opening scene, as described above, shows the helicopters traversing the city at

night, followed immediately by Earl Piggot's (Tom Waits) limousine driving

along the freeway. Altman closes the film with an extended, panoramic shot of

the city from Ralph (Matthew Modine) and Marian (Julianne Moore) Wyman's

balcony, which, giving way to the end credits, fades to a map of the city. The

camera moves across the map for the remaining duration of the film, over three

minutes altogether. From these overt visual cues, it is clear that Altman seeks to

comment on the ways that postmetropolitan life has been molded by the urban

spaces that surround us. Whereas *Their Dogs* depicts Los Angeles' transformation

from an urban space capable of fostering community to a postmetropolitan site of

erasure, Altman's Los Angeles bears no connection to the past, and its residents,

victims of a now fully-developed culture of privatization and capsularization,

seem either unable or unwilling to foster empathetic human relationships with

those around them.[12]

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[12] Robert Putnam's illuminating study, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, details the disappearance of social life in American cities. Americans living in major cities are statistically far less likely to hold group memberships and involve themselves in local affairs than those living in small towns and rural areas. With proportionately more Americans living in major cities than ever before, the decline of civic engagement is significant as a widespread cultural phenomenon. Putnam attributes this social trend to suburban sprawl and the changing complexion of American cities in the postwar period, specifically designating commuting time, social segregation in suburbia, and lack of community "boundedness" as the chief causes of social dislocation (214).

Each of the narratives features characters experiencing personal turmoil as a result of their inability to penetrate the barriers that socially isolate residents of contemporary cities. The city's urban layout has something to do with this. Never depicting Los Angeles as an urban space—in Lefebvre's use of the term—with a focused urban center where social production occurs, Altman instead represents the city as a disconnected suburban field, showing isolated shots of the suburban domiciles where his characters live. With the exception of the Finnigans and the Trainers, who live next to each other, the viewer has no idea how these homes are spatially situated, and this lack of spatial orientation reflects the general sense of dislocation that both we and Altman's characters experience throughout the film. Lacking an urban center or street-oriented neighborhoods that might offer a sense of connectivity, characters cannot successfully utilize the city as a symbolic or material site of social production.

This process is evident in the characters' complicated relationships. Bill (Robert Downey, Jr.) and Honey Piggot Bush (Lili Taylor), for instance, are asked to house-sit for their neighbors—who appear to be perfectly normal and quite friendly—during their one month absence from the city. Bill, lacking the social mechanisms to empathize with this couple, can only say to Honey, in a strange, unprovoked diatribe against the couple, "These people are creepy. They're creepy."[13] Ralph and Marian, in another narrative, seem incapable of righting

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[13] Bill and Honey's neighbors are, with the exception of the jazz club patrons, the only African Americans depicted in *Short Cuts*. Figured as the racial other, these characters disturb the racially homogeneous landscape of suburban Los Angeles, and Bill's unprovoked outburst could be read as a rupture in a social code that has

their capsized marriage; instead of directly confronting Marian's history of infidelity, they share an empty night of suburban social bonding with Stuart (Fred Ward) and Claire Kane (Anne Archer), two relative strangers they met a few days earlier at a concert. Incidentally, the Kane's marriage, too, is in jeopardy; Claire cannot understand how Stuart could have concealed the discovery of a dead woman's body floating in a river during his most recent hunting trip. Fueled by alcohol, the night turns into an impromptu costume party, in which all four characters dress up as clowns, ostensibly unable to confront directly the problems at the heart of their marriages. In another narrative, Sherri—married and trapped in a suburban, domestic fantasy with her three children and dog—cannot bring herself to confront her husband, Gene's (Tim Robbins), infidelities. In these narratives, and in others as well, characters, disconnected from their urban surroundings, cannot locate the source of their anxiety. As one critic notes, "*Short Cuts* is a film about psychic numbing" (Guthman). At one point, Marian, explaining the teachings of her former art instructor, who forced his students to paint with "sticks and rocks," remarks, "He never allowed brushes, or pencils, or real paint—the paint you could buy, anyway. [He did this] just to get you to feel, or something" (*Short Cuts*). The characters of *Short Cuts*, as a result of

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simultaneously perpetuated (through socially-segregating urban models) and repressed (through the politically-correct avowal of "colorblindness") racism. Like the barrio in *Their Dogs,* which has been isolated from the otherwise heterogeneous space of the city, white, suburban Los Angeles is a space in which non-white neighbors, beneath the surface, are read as "creepy" and potentially violent. The absence of people of color in Altman's film suggests that whiteness, like the culture of privacy that discourages the production of social space, is transparent and built into the fabric of an imagined suburban reality.

postmetropolitan social disconnection, have, so to speak, forgotten how to feel, and this prevents them from successfully cultivating or understanding their social relationships.

Although the film initially received overwhelmingly positive critical attention and is now recognized, alongside *Nashville*, as Altman's masterpiece, one of the complaints about *Short Cuts* concerned Altman's inability to channel his social commentary in productive directions. One critic writes, "There's a sense of something important going on, some sort of statement about the American experience. But it's indistinct. That indistinction leads us to believe we are watching something telling and profound" (Howe). Indeed, Altman has difficulty locating a specific cause for Los Angeles' social dysfunction, and this is precisely because institutional trauma, especially as it manifests itself in urban space, is, like the medfly pesticide, invisible and indistinct. Unlike the characters in Viramontes' novel, who, to a certain degree, are aware that the transformation of the neighborhood has put the community (and therefore their social existence) in peril, the characters of *Short Cuts* cannot locate the source of their unease, and instead retreat to alcohol and sex as coping mechanisms. Compared to *Their Dogs*, the transparency of institutional power in Altman's film is worth framing as a symptom of postmodernity and, specifically, privatized urban development that eroded the social space of American cities in the latter part of the century.

The social malaise, then, affecting Altman's characters is rooted in institutional trauma; the postmetropolitan urban experience that Viramontes

explores in its incipient phase has come to maturity and has been normalized by city dwellers, rendering it invisible and "indistinct." Lacking *lieux de memoire* through which to confront the erasure of community, the trauma of the city has been repressed, buried deep under the surfaces of the postmetropolis. Nonetheless, Altman's Los Angeles is an urban space that, in its utter unremarkability—suburban homes, nondescript diners, neighborhood jazz clubs—communicates what architect Peter Eisenman has termed "the presence of absence" (180). Following Derrida, Eisenman argues that postmodern architecture is *rhetorical* in that it exists materially and, at the same time, attempts to represent or reference something in its absence. Postmodern architecture, like the postmodern city, has this referential dimension; many Las Vegas casinos, for instance, simulate exotic environments—from the canals of Venice to the Egyptian pyramids—and, in so doing, are always haunted by what is *not* represented. Embedded in these casinos is the presence of absence: the physical reality of the building (its presence) and the absence contained therein (the residue of the postmodern crisis of representation). Establishing the connection between this crisis of representation and trauma, Ana Douglass and Thomas Vogler write, "The traumatic event bears a striking similarity to the always absent signified or referent of the poststructuralist discourse, an object that can by definition only be constructed retroactively, never observed directly" (5). Working from a psychoanalytic perspective, Eisenman's theories reveal the traumatic dimensions of architecture and, by extension, urban space, both of which are always haunted

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by loss. Particularly applicable to cities like Los Angeles, which, as I have shown, are palimpsestuous sites of erasure haunted by the loss of a functional (rather than symbolic) city center, the "presence of absence" helps to explain how the experience of the Real in urban space has been repressed under the surfaces of the postmetropolis, whose superficial facades are more representational and referential than material.

The traumatic presence of absence haunts *Short Cuts*, from the first scene to the last, and characters are offered brief glimpses of the repressed Real over the course of the film. The most significant example appears in Stuart Kane's narrative. When Stuart and his two friends go on a fly-fishing trip, which takes them four hours outside of the city, they come upon a female corpse floating in the river, seemingly lodged in between rocks and submerged in the water. The characters are faced with a dilemma: hike back to civilization immediately and report the incident, which would effectively end their fishing trip, or tie the body to the rocks, spend their time fishing as planned, and report the body when they return. Choosing the latter option, Stuart spends the remainder of the film justifying his decision to his wife, Claire, who is devastated by her husband's lack of empathy. Before returning to the city, the three friends spend their time fishing and drinking, pretending to be oblivious to the undesired presence of the nearby corpse. Already, we see these characters beginning, in Freud's words, "a process of 'shutting out'" (*Beyond* 34) events that they cannot assimilate into their insulated psyches. Altman repeatedly returns *us* to the dead body, however,

capturing its horrifying materiality through a series of aerial shots that create a traumatic visual cue for viewers. Through this traumatic repetition, Altman refuses to the let the competing narratives overlay the visual image of the corpse; it serves as the jarring encounter with the Real that the viewers—like Stuart and Claire—cannot strike from their memory.

The visual effect of the corpse on viewers likewise plays into its function as the traumatic referent for what was lost and, subsequently, repressed by postmetropolitan urban growth and development; the corpse is our link to the visceral experience of reality. Operating in a capsularized suburban hyperreality, Stuart and, indeed, all of the characters in the film have lost their sense of community and their ability to empathize with those around them. In accordance with Lieven de Cauter's theories on this topic, individuals operate in a privatized urban environment that has prevented the generation of community, and they therefore have no means of assimilating the "other" into meaningful frames of reference. More than just serving as a jarring visual cue, the corpse functions as a traumatic rupture in an institutional urban fabric that denies opportunities for community and empathy. That the body is found four hours outside of the city is significant, as the postmetropolis, Altman seems to suggest, could not have given access to this encounter with the Real. Only beyond the scope of institutional power, in the unassimilated natural space that surrounds the city, can one confront what is no longer visible in the city.[14]

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[14] The presence of the body as a traumatic referent in *Short Cuts* calls to mind the frequent reference to cemeteries and the bones of the deceased in Viramontes'

Stuart's reaction to the body, and the effect that this reaction has on his

marriage, is worth exploring. Instead of immediately reporting the event to the

authorities—which would have legitimized his human connection to the dead

woman, a complete stranger—he and his pals continue fishing, demonstrating an

inability or an unwillingness to identify outside of their highly exclusive social

spheres. Altman makes this glaringly clear in the scene depicting the discovery of

the body, where Vern (Huey Lewis), urinating in the river, looks down to see the

dead body directly below him. Although loaded with misogynistic undertones, as

poet Tess Gallagher, Raymond Carver's wife, has noted (Zuckoff 428), it would

be difficult to imagine the three men acting any differently if it were a man's body

floating in the river. Rather, their reaction to the corpse speaks to a general apathy

for the "other," or anyone outside of their immediate social network. When Stuart

finally, after returning home, showering, and having sex with his wife, fesses up

to the incident, Claire cannot believe her husband's lack of empathy; she is sent

into a personal crisis that leads her, eventually, to attend the woman's wake, days

later, seeking affirmation of her own ability to connect with those around her.

Explaining Claire's reaction, Anne Archer states in an interview, "So this woman

novel. If cemeteries are the last remaining link to communal history in *Their Dogs*, then the emergence of the body in Altman's film could be read as a return to history, which has been repressed by the postmetropolitan imagination. If, in Jameson's words, "history is what hurts," then the return of the body as historical referent is, indeed, a rehistoricization of the city. Ill-equipped for this traumatic rupture, the city and its inhabitants (Stuart and his pals) refuse to process the body, leaving it in the river—well outside the city's boundaries—for the authorities to find. Expelled from the city, the body is a bi-product of a culture unable to process reality or history in meaningful ways.

lying in the river could have been her, this woman who was treated as a piece of meat. It took all the love out of the relationship because it could never be undone" (Zuckoff 427). Illustrating Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman's theory that "the encounter with the real leads to the experience of an existential crisis in all those involved" (xvi), Stuart's experience with the dead body's visceral reality is the very cause for the rupture in their marriage. Now aware of her husband's social and emotional detachment, she begins to doubt what she believed to be the connective, human foundations of her marriage. The refusal to confront the Real—the body's constant presence underwater indicates that the trauma remains unprocessed, submerged, and beneath the surface—permeates their marriage. In Eisenman's terms, it becomes the "presence of absence" that will haunt their relationship.

In this way, then, Altman traces the ways that the characters' traumatic relationship to their city bears on and erodes their personal relationships. Rarely given access to the visceral encounter with the Real that Stuart and, through testimony, Claire achieve, most of Altman's characters fail to locate the source of their social disconnection. To complement the lingering presence of the dead body and to provide another opportunity to engage the Real, Altman introduces a peripheral narrative—through Tess (Annie Ross) and Zoe Trainer (Lori Singer), the mother-daughter musician duo—which helps to expand his commentary on repressed institutional trauma. The only narrative not adapted from Carver's oeuvre, this storyline—in addition to providing musical interludes and tonal

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contours for the film—allows Altman to explore the traumatic dimensions of posturban existence. From the start, we know that Zoe is deeply troubled and emotionally-distressed. Conversations with her mother reveal a traumatic childhood: her father, whom she cannot remember, "wasn't around that much," and apparently cheated on Tess with other musicians. After one of these conversations, Zoe, while making a bloody Mary for her mother, masochistically breaks the glass with her hand in the kitchen sink. Ostensibly an attempt at self-mutilation, this scene has deeper implications considering Zoe's relationship to her cello, which she plays incessantly and utilizes throughout the film as her only means of communicating with those around her. During pivotal conversations with her mother, rather than speaking verbally, she plays her cello, leaving Tess to deliver long, emotional monologues. Her self-mutilation therefore represents an attempt to further socially isolate herself from those around her; had her injury been more serious, it would have severed her from her only means of communication and verbal testimony: her music.

Zoe's dilemma, then, concerns the recognition that she can neither access her traumatic past (perhaps due to the city's lack of *lieux de memoire*, as discussed in the previous section), nor can she successfully connect and empathize with those around her. When she hears of the death of young Casey Finnigan (Zane Cassidy), her next-door neighbor, she immediately drives to the neighborhood jazz bar, where her mother is rehearsing with the band. Distraught and in need of emotional connection, she tells her mother about Casey, hoping for

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a moment of empathy that would reaffirm her ability to make human connections. Instead, upon hearing the news, Tess, emotionally-desensitized, gives her daughter well-rehearsed platitudes: "It's a cryin' shame, baby. She must feel like shit." Devastated by this encounter, Zoe returns home and commits suicide by closing the garage door and inhaling the exhaust fumes from her running automobile. When Tess returns home to find her daughter dead, she plunges into despair; she is last seen singing to herself, alone in her suburban home, absolutely disconnected from the world around her. Zoe's death is a traumatic rupture in an otherwise idyllic suburban existence. It is significant that she kills herself in the isolation of her suburban home, and, no less, by the exhaust of her automobile, itself the agent of postmetropolitan transformation that gave rise to suburbia. The discovery of Zoe's body is particularly traumatic for her mother because it generates an affective experience, one that exists outside the frames of reference provided by the capsular, socially-fragmented postmetropolis in which she lives.

Few characters in *Short Cuts* gain access to these visceral, intensely affective moments. Altman seems to suggest that life in the city has been diluted (not intending to invoke David Harvey's seminal book) by the condition of postmodernity. Casey Finnigan's parents, Howard (Bruce Davison) and Ann (Andie McDowell), however, having to confront the unexpected and sudden death of their son, arguably experience one of these affective ruptures. In bed the first night after Casey's death, Ann sits up abruptly, realizing the identity of the man harassing them over the phone for the last several days. When Howard attempts to

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comfort her, she violently pushes him aside and retreats to her side of the bed, where she repeats the gesture to counter the second of his well-intentioned advances. Clearly, the trauma of losing her son has driven a wedge in their marriage. What is interesting, though, is Altman's treatment of the following scene in this narrative, where Howard and Ann confront the baker, Mr. Bitkower (Lyle Lovett) in his shop. What promises to be a violent scene transforms, rather, into a moment of empathy, where Mr. Bitkower, the man responsible for the menacing late-night phone calls, comforts Ann, letting her rest her head against his chest and later offering her some of his baked goods, while her husband looks on. Juxtaposing this scene with the previous one, which revealed the deleterious effects of Casey's death on the marriage, Altman demonstrates that the processing of trauma has two faces: it can reveal the emotional distance between individuals, as we see in the failing marriages, but it can also generate social connections with those outside of our insulated social groups and, perhaps, begin the work of rebuilding community, even if on the smallest of scales.

This redemptive scene is significant for Altman's commentary on trauma in the city, and exposing the diverging vectors of disconnection and social regeneration involved in the processing of trauma equips us to confront the film's final scenes in productive ways. Easily written off as a cheap narrative device employed to bring closure to the film, the earthquake that rocks Los Angeles at the end of *Short Cuts* in fact simultaneously resolves and complicates Altman's commentary on trauma and the postmetropolis. Altman brings us to this pivotal

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event via Jerry Kaiser (Chris Penn) and Bill, who, on a family picnic in what appears to be Griffith Park just outside of Hollywood, pursue two pretty girls through the canyons on the park's perimeter. Just as Jerry, sexually-frustrated and visibly troubled throughout the film, bludgeons one of the girls with a rock, the earthquake hits. Altman shows us a close up of Jerry, now in a fugue state, with blood splattered on his face. Over the next two minutes, Altman revisits each of the narratives, depicting characters huddling together, clearly sharing the terror of what could be "the big one."

The earthquake here represents the ultimate traumatic rupture in the fabric of postmetropolitan existence. Introduced in the first frames of the film through the invisible chemical threat of the medfly pesticide, the repressed anxieties of Angelenos here emerge, violently, through the earthquake, which renders every character powerless in its visceral reality. Altman ingeniously utilizes Los Angeles' precarious position on the San Andreas Fault to comment on the repressed Real underlying the artificially-inscribed physical and psychical terrain of the postmetropolis. Lacking the *lieux de memoire* that could potentially connect city dwellers to their past, the city space falls victim to these violent ruptures, which reveal postmetropolitan existence to be intrinsically tied to repressed trauma. Whereas most of the characters seem to reinforce their social ties as a result of the earthquake (Gene, the serial adulterer, is shown hugging his family and Earl and Doreen mend their relationship), to say that the encounter with the Real reinvigorates social life in the city would be to miss Altman's more complex

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presentation of the event. Tess, for one, is shown alone in her home, singing to

herself as she mourns the loss of her daughter. Furthermore, many of the

characters, rather than reaching out to their community, merely reinforce the

boundaries that mark off their immediate social spheres, arguably instituting an

even more insular, capsular social environment. Gene, for instance, in an image

loaded with metaphorical weight, extends his arms around his children and wife,

enclosing and protecting them within an exclusive suburban, domestic, familial

space.

The earthquake's symbolic function is even further complicated if read

alongside Jerry's narrative. As mentioned above, precisely as Jerry murders the

girl, striking her in the head with a rock, the earthquake intervenes, suggesting

that this primal, unprovoked act of violence is what initiated the rupture in Los

Angeles' urban fabric. Jerry, plagued throughout the novel by feelings of sexual

inadequacy—his wife is a phone sex operator whose sexually-explicit

performances cause him to lose faith in their relationship—presumably attacks the

girl as a means of asserting sexual power through violence. The unexpected and

somewhat cryptic quality of this scene, however, suggests that Jerry's frustrations

stand in for deeper anxieties that have to do with living in a simulated

environment where, like his wife's phone-sex performances, our access to reality

is obscured and denied by suburban hyperreality. It is significant that the girl's

murder, according to news reports following the earthquake, is written off as

"falling rocks," which suggests that Jerry's act of violence has immediately been

concealed and repressed in the public imagination. When order is restored to the city, the traumatic event is overlaid by media representation, and the encounter with the Real is once again assimilated into frames of reference that absolve the city of its role in producing the urban anxieties that provoked the murder. Like Stuart's decision to leave the dead body in the river, Jerry's act of violence is excused and, perhaps, justified in order to relieve the public from confronting the horrors of the Real.

Unlike Viramontes, who focuses predominantly on the effects of freeway construction, Altman identifies capsularization and privatization—two processes that enable this kind of political and social myopia—as the primary forces driving postmetropolitan existence, and his formal strategies suggest little opportunity for social improvement. Similar to the "narrative freeways" of *Their Dogs*, Altman introduces a complex network of narratives that intertwine and intersect, forming the textual space of the film. Like the postmetropolis, with its dispersed urban nodes and absent center, *Short Cuts* does not utilize a central narrative and instead offers equal valence to each of the intertwining narratives. From the first frames, Altman establishes the connections between narrative and space that will prove vital for the film's simulation of the urban experience. As the helicopters move over the city, Altman introduces each of the ten narratives that he will follow over the course of the film. The helicopters, as they audibly intrude on the dialogue in each scene, take the viewer from one narrative to the next, connecting the

disparate storylines both to one another and to the city of Los Angeles, whose size and complexity is captured, visually, through a series of aerial shots.

From this point forward, Altman unspools each narrative, transitioning from one to the next through visual and thematic cues. For instance, in one scene, Honey is shown staring into an aquarium filled with exotic fish. Altman uses this image to transition to his next scene, which depicts Stuart and his friends fishing in the river, seemingly apathetic to the dead body floating in close proximity. Altman utilizes these transitional devices throughout the film to generate textual space that we, as viewers, negotiate and creatively engage. When these narratives *physically* intersect—the first notable instance occurring when Stormy Weathers (Peter Gallagher), Claire, Ann, and Mr. Bitkower, all strangers to one another, meet in the bakery—they yield minimal social production, as these characters are interested in fulfilling their private obligations rather than forming social bonds with one another. The space of Los Angeles is planned, it seems, to facilitate economic exchange rather than foster social production. As one critic notes, "characters remain unconnected and disconnected, sharing only a messy urban landscape" (Canby C1). In fact, with the exception of the empathetic moment shared by Ann and Mr. Bitkower later in the film—really the only genuine display of human connection that Altman depicts—the physical intersection of bodies in *Short Cuts* proves incapable of generating community or social cohesiveness. Even the Wymans' late night barbecue, which devolves into a drunken costume party, although generative in that it brings two socially-segregated couples

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together, is undercut by the clown costumes worn by all four characters; whatever social production occurs is undermined by the performative dimensions of the charade.

Furthermore, the film's overlapping dialogue, particularly in scenes where narratives intersect, often disorients the viewer, again casting doubt on the ability for valuable production to occur through random social encounters. Famous for his use of overlapping dialogue,[15] Altman's device achieves new dimensions when set in the context of Los Angeles. Often regarded as the most culturally and socially heterogeneous of American cities, Los Angeles is famous for its diversity and its heteroglossia. Here, however, the heteroglossic, overlapping dialogue obscures, rather than facilitates social production; as viewers, we have difficulty keeping track of what could be vital information being passed on through the competing dialogue. This is evident in the bakery scene mentioned above and also elsewhere in the film. We cannot help sympathizing with Earl in a later scene, when, attempting to absorb Tess' soulful singing at the jazz club, he is distracted by an offensive nearby conversation. Turning to the men, Earl brazenly asks, "You wanna keep it down so the lady can sing, here?" Unlike Altman's other films, *Short Cuts'* use of overlapping dialogue reveals the inability for people to connect socially and locate meaning in postmetropolitan space, which, he implies, is oversaturated with competing voices that never reach a state of harmony.

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[15] Readers will recall the memorable exchange at the 2006 Academy Awards between Lily Tomlin and Meryl Streep, who, in presenting Altman the Oscar for Lifetime Achievement, talked over one another, parodying the director's signature device. The script is available in Mitchell Zuckoff's *Robert Altman: The Oral Biography*.

When Altman's characters intersect, then, little social production occurs. Nevertheless, the narrative apparatus he utilizes, which involves linking narratives together to generate textual space, provides navigable interpretive terrain for viewers to inhabit. Transplanting Carver's stories in Los Angeles, Altman seems interested in simulating postmetropolitan space through narrative form. Carver's stories, when read in their original contexts in their respective story collections, are in no way related to one another; characters do not make cross-narrative appearances, nor do they adhere to any central, unifying narrative structure. In the film, however, stories exist *in relation* to one another. If social space, as Lefebvre has argued, is produced through social relations—individuals inhabiting subject positions in relation to one another—then the act of setting the stories against one another is generative of textual space. This process is significant, as it tends to counter Altman's otherwise bleak depiction of Los Angeles as a "placeless place" incapable of fostering the production of social space. Therefore, even though his characters may have difficulty accessing the affective moment, which, as I have shown, has been repressed in the urban imagination, the film's narrative structure offers a potentially productive assessment of social space and the potential for social regeneration, even in a fragmented environment like Los Angeles. Furthermore, the film's affective qualities draw viewers into the characters' personal lives. Viewing the narrative fabric from above and identifying with each of the characters, we cannot help but recognize the presence of a social condition that affects every character equally and is communicated through the dense,

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overlapping space of the narration. Perhaps this is the connective social fabric that Altman seeks, but fails to locate, in his characters' interactions.

What we witness, then, in the film's interconnected narrative space is what Edward Soja, in his essay, "Writing the City Spatially," has termed "synekism," which is "a creative living together in space" inspired by the social connections established in urban space. Soja, building on Lefebvre and others, argues that social interaction and social production are the most powerful forces driving contemporary cities, more powerful, even, than top-down institutional forces. Writing the city, then, in the manner that Altman does with his simulation of postmetropolitan space through narrative intersections, provides the only viable avenue for addressing the complexities of urban space through literature. He writes, "If human society, social relations, sociality itself can only be realized in urban life…then [writing the city spatially] must take *precedence* in writing the city, and, through the city, in making sense of globalization and other complexities of the contemporary world" ("Writing" 273). Bringing Carver's disparate narratives together, Altman "writes the city," generating an affective textual space that, perhaps, helps to redeem the otherwise bleak presentation of urban space revealed through his characters' interactions.

Furthermore, the space generated through Altman's intersecting narratives—both through the active engagement of transitional cues and the ambiguous framing of critical scenes (such as Jerry's act of violence during the earthquake)—provides the viewer with a degree of interpretive freedom for

meaning-making in the film. Jameson's concept of cognitive mapping, gleaned

from Kevin Lynch's earlier writings on how city dwellers psychologically

connect to their cities, helps to clarify Altman's complex use of textual space. As

I have shown throughout this chapter, postmetropolitan space dislocates

individuals from history, trauma, and the affective experience. In order to

reposition ourselves in this disorienting milieu, Jameson suggests the practice of

cognitive mapping.[16] Explaining this process, he writes, "Disalienation in the

traditional city, then, involves the practical reconquest of a sense of place and the

construction or reconstruction of an articulated ensemble which can be retained in

memory and which the individual subject can map and remap along the moments

of mobile, alternative trajectories" (*Postmodernism* 51). Cognitive mapping

"works as the intersection of the personal and the social, which enables people to

function in the spaces through which they move" (MacCabe xiv). Unlike

Viramontes' narrative scheme, which sends viewers along predetermined

pathways to an inevitable conclusion, Altman uses "mobile, alternative

trajectories" to open the textual space of the film, allowing viewers to creatively

engage and "remap" *Short Cuts*. The emotionally-imbued personal connections

that we make through our engagement of the various narratives generate a

connective terrain that contests the dislocated, rational space of the

postmetropolis. Therefore, the viewer's affective, non-rational response—inspired

by emotionally-wrenching scenes such as the discovery of Zoe's body and the

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[16] See also Elizabeth Tarpley Adams' article, "Making the Sprawl Vivid:
Narrative and Queer Los Angeles," which utilizes cognitive mapping to position
queer identity in Los Angeles city space.

moment of connection between Ann and Mr. Bitkower—suggests that piecing together the film's narrative can, to a certain degree, give us access to empathetic, human experiences that are otherwise denied to Altman's characters.

The implications of Altman's narrative strategies are significant. As I have shown in the previous chapters, narrative and, specifically, textual spaces generated by narrative provide vital means for both communicating and contesting institutional power. Inhabiting textual spaces distinct from the state offers individuals opportunities to generate critical sites of resistance to state-endorsed narratives. In Altman's film, what should be socially-productive urban spaces have been transformed by decades of urban planning that favor policies of privatization and capsularization, and characters are incapable of sustaining meaningful social relationships as a result of this transformation. By generating an affective, networked textual space, however, Altman places viewers in a position to critique the forces responsible for the social malaise depicted in the film. Like the aerial shots of the city that bookend the film, we, as viewers, critique the space of the city and the textual space of the film from a critically-removed position. Above, so to speak, the hyperreal space of the city, we achieve the critical distance that Altman's characters are denied. Furthermore, the film's affective qualities seem to suggest that the human capacity for empathy has not disappeared as a result of our relationship to urban space; although his characters have "forgotten how to feel," we have not, and the film's narrative structure reminds us of the vital connections between lived space and social production.

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In both *Short Cuts* and *Their Dogs Came with Them*, the postmetropolis functions as a new kind of urban space that often precludes the opportunity for productive social exchange. In each text, characters negotiate an urban space that, in its erasure of critical memory sites, largely denies the opportunity for engaging in valuable memory practices that build community and therefore encourage the production of space through social interaction. In this space, history, as Jameson, has shown, has been repressed (ix). *Short Cuts*, which takes place in the height of postmetropolitan expansion, suggests that the traumatic dimensions of the city have been almost totally repressed. Viramontes' novel depicts the source of this transformation. *Their Dogs* correctly identifies the latent sources of anxiety and social alienation in today's urban centers; freeway systems, which erase entire communities and enable social dislocation, are also responsible for giving birth to the undesired offspring of the postmetropolis: privatization and capsularization.

Both writers, to different degrees, seem resigned to the impossibility of successfully fostering human relationships in this environment. This, I argue, has something to do with the difficulty of engaging in the dynamic spatial practices that once proved vital in the condensed cities of the modern period, where street level social interaction allowed individuals to position themselves politically in space and thereby reclaim those spaces. In the postmetropolis, such street level activity is precluded by the decline of "the street" and "the neighborhood" as priorities for urban planners; rather, urban planning on an institutional scale is all too often concerned with facilitating the flow of production, consumption, and

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labor, which entails the construction of freeways that can move large numbers of people across vast spaces.[17] This puts characters in both texts in an untenable position, as the very spatial and psychological practices that once enabled political agency and social interaction have been stripped of their subversive potential. Furthermore, as *Short Cuts* shows, the retreat to a privatized, capsularized suburban existence carries with it the loss of empathy and social connection, which wreaks profound psychological damage on individuals opting into this seemingly attractive model for contemporary living.

These complex and often transparent processes of urban planning and development occur on both institutional and individual levels. Most often, municipalities, believing that population growth and private enterprise will lead to a more prosperous economy, are responsible for embracing urban development that privatizes city space, encouraging unbridled expansion and development. To accommodate this development, cities must adopt transportation models that will move suburbanites from their homes to their places of work; freeway expansion is often the most attractive and cost-efficient option. Operating simultaneous to these institutional forces are the "technologies of the self" that Foucault describes in his commentary on biopower and governmentality. Individuals align themselves with these models for urban growth, demanding freeways and privatized, gated communities, believing, perhaps correctly, that this kind of

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[17] Gary Hustwit's recent documentary, *Urbanized*, explores this phenomenon and discusses creative, new approaches to urban planning being utilized on a global scale. The architects and urban planners interviewed for the film consistently designate postmetropolitan expansion as responsible for widespread social and environmental problems.

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urban "progress" will make their lives easier and protect them from the perceived dangers of the inner city. When the short and long term effects (community erasure and social dislocation) of these policies begin to bear on individuals and communities, we enter the terrain of political trauma that I have described over the course of this study. The transparent institutional presence responsible for political trauma is here materialized through widespread policies of privatization and urban growth that individuals cannot confront or understand in complete or productive ways. This problematic relationship between urban space, capitalism, and the state, of course, underscores the necessity for change, both in the ways that we negotiate the postmetropolis and in the license we grant to institutional power for the future development of our cities.

CHAPTER 5

TACTICAL TEXTS: EXPLOITING NARRATIVE THROUGH THE

PRODUCTION OF SPACE

We live immersed in narrative, recounting and reassessing the meaning of our

past actions, anticipating the outcome of future projects, situating ourselves at the

intersection of several stories not yet completed.

Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*

Institutional trauma in the twenty-first century, as the preceding chapters

have demonstrated, is deeply intertwined with projects of narrativization.

Narratives are, by nature, political and are therefore instrumental to projects that

discipline Americans in the name of national security and public order. The

specter of terrorism, the desire to protect the "homeland," the politicization of

urban spaces after Hurricane Katrina, and the movement toward new urban

models that render urban space inaccessible: these zones of investigation form the

foundation of this study. Addressing these disparate sources of trauma, each

chapter has probed the ways that contemporary American literature represents the

traumatic relationship between the individual and the institution, a relationship

that is often difficult to untangle because of its entrenchment in what de Certeau

would call "the practice of everyday life." Institutional power has inscribed itself

on our most psychologically-intimate and politically-vital sites: our homes and

our cities. If we are to reclaim these sites, I have argued throughout, we must better understand our relationship to institutional power, to the material spaces we inhabit, and to the modes of narrative production that inform our political reality.

As I have shown in previous chapters, literature provides valuable opportunities for reclaiming these sites and for establishing critical distance from hegemonic institutional discourse. Integral to this process is the complex relationship between space and narrative, which de Certeau and others have explored in recent decades. If text and narrative are spatial environments, and if it is true that inhabiting and producing space is a politically-subversive tactical maneuver, then the political narratives disseminated by the state are, indeed, vulnerable sites of political strife; readers entering these textual spaces may position themselves against hegemonic discourse as a means of political empowerment.[1] In addition to discussing how and to what effect literature *represents* space, the preceding chapters have given attention to the ways that texts *simulate* spaces, inviting readers to *practice* space as a means of removing them from discourses of power embedded in institutional narratives. For instance, in chapter one, I argue that satire functions as a heterotopic "other space" that allows readers to contest complex narratives of national trauma and politics that

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[1] Ross Chambers' essay, "Strolling, Touring, Cruising: Counter-Disciplinary Narrative and the Loiterature of Travel," offers a productive application of Foucault's theories on institutional discipline to narrative. Arguing that conventional narrative structures discipline readers along pre-determined pathways, Chambers demonstrates that "loiterly" narrative strategies that deny closure provide resistance to modes of discipline embedded in conventional narrative. My commentary on spatializing narrative tactics extends this logic into the realm of the spatial.

circulated in the years following 9/11. Along similar lines, Helena María Viramontes' "narrative freeways" simulate the experience of postmetropolitan space, allowing readers to immersively experience the difficulty of generating social space in the new metropolis. Inhabiting these textual spaces enables important discursive production for readers attempting to locate outlets from institutionally-disciplined space.

The preceding chapters have only begun to lay out the possibilities for spatial production via textuality. This final chapter opens the door for further discussion on the political and psychological dimensions of textual space, arguing that reading literature through the lens of spatiality—and *practicing* textual space in the same way we would, say, a city's streets—enables important interpretive and experiential confrontations with trauma and politics. Texts that adopt spatializing narrative strategies require readers to enter these spaces to confront political and traumatic discourses that are often inaccessible through more conventional narrative strategies, which, I argue, are avenues reserved for institutional narrative production. Having already explored the spatial dimensions of satire, narrative violence, performativity, and narrative plotting that simulates urban space, I am now interested in extending this interpretive model outward, suggesting that an awareness of a text's spatial dimensions is often critical to appreciating its political potency and psychological weight. The following pages take a look at three narrative strategies—textual presentation, adaptation, and textual performativity—that remove readers from a conventional narrative

apparatus in order to simulate and induce the experience of trauma. What unifies

these three otherwise disparate narrative strategies is their ability to generate

textual spaces that facilitate important political and psychological encounters.

This process, I argue, provides opportunities to confront political trauma, which,

as I have shown, uses narrative and space as its modes of transmission. While

these short sections certainly aim to initiate important conversations on narrative

and space that may continue beyond this study, they do not claim to provide a

master key with which to unlock the secrets and mysteries of all literature. Rather,

I hope to call attention to a growing number of contemporary writers who—like

Roth, Walter, Viramontes, and each of the writers whose work I have discussed in

this study—have embraced spatial approaches to literature as a means of

circumventing the politics of conventional narrative structures.[2] As I have argued

throughout, in the age of biopolitics, where institutional narratives all too often

co-opt the channels for articulating and confronting political trauma, these

spatializing narrative strategies provide critical avenues for the cultivation of

political voice.

Although narrative has been an important field of critical inquiry over the

past three decades, surprisingly little has been written on the experience of

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[2] By this phrasing, I refer to narrative conventions that implicitly endorse
institutional power. The "redemptive narrative," for instance, attempts to render
politically-traumatic events into frames of reference packaged for consumption.
Dominick LaCapra's *Writing History, Writing Trauma* analyzes these narrative
structures, claiming that, for instance, films like *Schindler's List* render the
Holocaust as an event that would inspire optimism for Jews in the twentieth
century (157); the burning candle in the film's final scene encloses this
redemptive narrative structure, effectively packaging the Holocaust as an event
for consumption.

reading as a spatial practice. While recent critics such as Rick Altman and Michael Bamberg have begun to theorize narrative as an ideological and political instrument,[3] the vast majority of narrative theory leading up to the 1990s sought merely to deconstruct the formal machinery of narrative, interrogating how stories function and designating their constituent parts. This chapter is more interested in dealing with the political dimensions of narrative and the subversive, tactical opportunities that arise through our negotiation of textual space. Although Joseph E. Davis is correct when he writes, "Narrative is a powerful concept, illuminating the interplay of agency and social structure, and storytelling, like [social] movements themselves, specifies valued endpoints and stimulates creative participation" (27), he does not adequately address the full range of strategies by which narratives invite this kind of participation on the part of the reader. Likewise, Wendy Patterson's designation of narrative as a strategic action—a term she gleans from de Certeau—brings us to familiar spatial territory, but does not fully engage the subversive possibilities of space that de Certeau outlines in his writings (1). Following a different thread, Jameson's exploration of narrative in *The Political Unconscious* theorizes the political and psychological dimensions of narrative, but, again, does not acknowledge narrative production as a spatial practice in the spirit of de Certeau, or even Roland Barthes, with his "readerly" and "writerly" texts. This chapter, in addition to suggesting new ways of

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[3] For further reading, see Altman's *A Theory of Narrative* and Bamberg's writings in his co-edited collection of essays, *Considering Counter-Narratives: Narrating, Resisting, Making Sense*. Also see David H. Richter's comprehensive collection of essays, *Narrative/Theory*.

traversing well-trodden theoretical ground, seeks to unpack the spatio-political dialectic at the heart of many works of contemporary fiction, demonstrating how spatializing narrative strategies provide valuable opportunities for simulating and confronting trauma.

Laying Out the Narrative

As I have argued throughout, the spatializing tactics described in each of the preceding chapters are critical to texts' political power and their ability to engage, in Jenny Edkins' term, "trauma time" by simulating the experience of trauma. No text better exemplifies this process than Mark Z. Danielewski's work of experimental fiction, *House of Leaves*. Comprised of multiple layers of narration—some of which, through radical experiments with textual layout, force the reader into disorienting, labyrinthine textual spaces—the book simulates the narrator, Johnny Truant's, attempts to confront the repressed loss of his mother, which occurred early in his childhood but continues to haunt him into adulthood. Although the central narrative of the novel concerns the explication and analysis of a film, *The Navidson Record*, which documents the encounter with and exploration of the spatially-unstable "House on Ash Tree Lane," Truant's repressed trauma begins to infiltrate and overwhelm the novel's entire textual apparatus; by its conclusion, the novel's many layers of narrative are revealed to be psychological defenses erected by Truant as a means of concealing the absence of his lost mother. Inviting the reader to enter immersive textual spaces, Danielewski simulates the experience of trauma, giving readers the opportunity to

enter psychological zones that would otherwise be inaccessible through conventional narrative structures.

Danielewski employs a complex narrative arrangement to undercut the reader's desire for a central, hegemonic narrative. The novel consists of the following: (1) an anonymous editor's compiling of (2) Johnny Truant's revisions and footnotes on (3) Zampanó's interpretation of (4) *The Navidson Record*. Sublevels exist within each narrative line, as well. For instance, *The Navidson Record* includes first-person accounts offered by Karen Navidson, Will Navidson, Tom Navidson, and Billy Reston, each providing a different perspective on the events occurring around and within the house. Within this textual milieu, the reader's narrative bearings are destabilized; exposed to the "presence of absence" that emerges both in the textual layout and in the space between narratives, readers are forced to confront narrative as a dynamic, immersive spatial practice rather than a static object for consumption.

Through textual cues that only begin to reveal themselves late in the novel, Danielewski subtly indicates that the divergent narratives that comprise the novel are, in fact, textual creations that Truant manufactured in order to deal with repressed childhood trauma. *The Navidson Record*—a narrative twice-removed from Truant's narration—depicts two vital events that indicate cross-narrative pollination in the text. First, the film contains a segment named "The Five and a Half Minute Hallway," which describes one of the early video renderings of the house's spatial instability. Second, during the multiple explorations of the house,

several characters report having heard a disembodied roar that echoes through the space of the house. Both occurrences reappear throughout *The Navidson Record* and become familiar points of reference for the reader. More importantly, though, these events emerge as evidence of Truant's creative control over *The Navidson Record* and, more broadly, every narrative level that comprises *House of Leaves*. In the final pages of Truant's narration, he directly confronts the traumatic moment in his childhood when his mother was taken from him and sent to a mental institution, where she would spend the remaining years of her life. This incident had a profound effect on Truant, as his damaged psyche and his failed relationships throughout the novel in many ways reveal the absence of a mother figure in his life. In the revealing passages that describe this critical moment, Truant writes, "[his mother] started to scream, screaming for me, not wanting to go at all but crying out my name—and there it was the roar, the one I've been remembering, in the end not a roar, but the saddest call of all—reaching for me, her voice sounding as if it would shatter the world, fill it with thunder and darkness, which I guess it finally did" (Danielewski 517). Later, he adds, "[In] my own dark hallway…like a bad dream, the details of those five and a half minutes just went and left me to my future" (517). These passages reveal that Truant has produced a textual space—the novel in which we find ourselves immersed—in order to indirectly confront the repressed trauma of his childhood.

Once Danielewski plays his hand, so to speak, the traumatic ruptures that infiltrate the text begin to reveal how Truant may approach, but never realize, an

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encounter with the repressed loss of his mother. The novel contains several sections, appearing on a number of narrative levels, that emphasize absence both in a literal and a symbolic sense, and the presence of absence here, following Eisenman's theories, indicates Truant's attempts to cope with the absence of his mother. At one point, Truant notes how "some kind of ash landed on the following pages, in some places burning away small holes, in other places eradicating large chunks of text" (323). In other instances, the page layout contains brackets that enclose empty space (485). These sorts of textual devices appear throughout the novel and emphasize the ways in which Truant uses space to confront the absence of his mother embodied in the traumatic moment revealed later in the novel. Discussing the impossibility of representing or confronting trauma through straightforward narrative, Cathy Caruth writes, "[trauma] is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language" (4). By inviting readers to experience traumatic absence through the novel's textual layout, Danielewski removes us from language and invites us into the realm of the spatial, where trauma, which always exists beyond representation, resides.

Danielewski thus utilizes a spatially-defined textual apparatus and at the same time provides opportunities both for Truant to confront psychological trauma and for the reader to interactively engage the psychological processes that

make this confrontation possible. Like the House on Ash Tree Lane, whose unstable spatial coordinates demand a more complex understanding of space, the text of *House of Leaves*, too, reflects the spatial instability of narrative (insofar as narrative, like space, is dependent on discursive production). Danielewski's textual presentation encourages the reader to regard the novel as a house or—extending the traditional metaphor of the gothic house for the human psyche—as a textual manifestation of Truant's psyche. The labyrinth scenes, specifically, offer confusing textual arrangements that mirror the house's unstable spatial layout. As Will Navidson continues to lose his spatial coordinates within the labyrinth, the reader, too, loses spatial coordinates within the unstable textual layout, which forces her to engage in a textual and, by extension, psychological exploration through the space of the novel. For example, in one instance, the text extends vertically, horizontally, and diagonally across the page, with no apparent pattern to follow (Danielewski 432). Much like Spiegelman's nonlinear comic panels, the novel requires the reader constructs meaning by linking signs together, by locating coherent sentence fragments, and by piecing together a text with indistinct spatial boundaries.

This example illustrates the root of an interactive process that the reader engages on a broader level throughout the novel. Compiling fragments of narrative across the multiple levels of the text, the reader constructs boundaries for Truant's psychological space. The anxieties that characters from *The Navidson Record* experience, for example, emerge as Truant's own anxieties, and his

attempt to articulate them through textual layers creates a discursive space that is linked to traumatic repression. The predominant discourses that define this space concern family relationships and the construction of the self, and the reader's encounter with these discourses yields, in Lefebvre's terms, the production of meaning in the novel; by engaging these discourses, we come to terms with the repressed trauma of Truant's past. As described above, the novel's textual apparatus serves as a physical manifestation of Truant's psyche, and this, in turn, affords the reader a space in which to engage directly the discourses that he represses throughout the novel. The narrative levels and the discourses within them function as a repository for memory, and the disorienting textual layout, which initially conceals meaning from the reader, ultimately reflects the psychological processes that prevent Truant's confrontation with repressed trauma. Although readers of *House of Leaves* arguably remain trapped in Truant's trauma narrative, the novel's textual apparatus certainly offers the *experience* of space, which—in its distance from readerly narrative structures dependent on language—enables some form of writerly agency.[4] Navigating the novel's textual dimensions (with its extensive appendices and textual detours, *House of Leaves*

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[4] Barthes' theories on "readerly" and "writerly" texts, though belabored by literary critics at this point, provide useful terminology for this discussion. For Barthes, conventional narrative is intimately tied to consumption; traditional narratives interpellate readers as complicit consumers of narrative action. A "readerly" text positions us as inactive participants in a textual space that denies creative, interpretive production. "Writerly" texts, on the other hand, position readers as producers of meaning within textual space and therefore open a space for production, which may occur in political, discursive, or psychological terms (Barthes 4-5).

lacks a prescriptive, linear narrative trajectory), readers enjoy (or perhaps are burdened with) a great deal of interpretive freedom and mobility.

The aim of Danielewski's "textual tactics," of course, is to allow readers to dwell in the moment of trauma and to simulate the experience of psychological dislocation endured by the victim of trauma. Although the book's political dimensions are less clearly defined than, say, the 9/11 satires discussed in chapter one, its textual apparatus certainly enables spatial practices that remove us from hegemonic, prescriptive narrative structures. In this regard, Danielewski's novel aligns itself with an emerging body of experimental fiction that utilizes textual layout to simulate the experience of space and trauma. Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, for instance, experiments with textual presentation to simulate the ineffability of trauma for survivors of Dresden; the novel's at times confusing textual layout thrusts readers into the traumatized mind of its protagonist, a twelve-year-old boy attempting to come to terms with his father's death in the World Trade Center. Steven Hall's *The Raw Shark Texts*, a novel often situated alongside *House of Leaves* in conversations on experimental narrative form, similarly uses text to remove readers from a dangerous narrative space patrolled by a "conceptual shark." Including thirty-six "un-chapters," which appear online, and elsewhere, rather than in the print version of the novel, Hall literally removes readers from the space of his text. In her analysis of the novel, N. Katherine Hayles writes, "Supremely conscious of itself as a print production, this book explores the linguistic pleasures and dangerous seductions of immersive

fictions, while at the same time exploring the possibilities of extending its

narrative into transmedial productions at Internet sites, translations into other

languages, and physical locations" (16). Using these strategies, Hall's novel

provides crucial opportunities for achieving distance from conventional narrative

structures.

The critical and popular attention that *House of Leaves* has garnered over

the past decade, due, no doubt, to its experiments with narrative form, has been

remarkable. Blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality, the book boasts a

devoted readership—a quick Google search offers a glimpse of its impressive

online presence—that consistently seems drawn to the unsettling effect it has on

its readers. This effect has much to do with the book's ability to produce an

uncanny textual space through its multiple layers of narration and its simulation of

domestic space. Although my analysis of the book thus far has described the

processes by which Danielewski uses textual layout to confront and simulate

repressed trauma, the concept of the uncanny helps to explain the deeper

psychological effect the book has on its readers. Freud's writings on the uncanny,

which I utilize more extensively in the following section, describe the process by

which familiar domestic spaces become defamiliarized through complex

psychological encounters that stem from a child's traumatic separation from the

womb. This movement from the "heimlich" to the "unheimlich," the homely to

the unhomely, destabilizes the individual's psychological defenses, which are

responsible for the repression of trauma. Through this lens, the unsettling

experience of reading *House of Leaves* owes itself in part to the book's ability to induce an uncanny encounter through its manipulations of textual space. Considering the book's central narrative, which concerns Truant's confrontation of his childhood trauma, this immersive textual tactic brings the reader in close psychological proximity to Truant as he unearths his past. Building from Danielewski's use of the uncanny, the following section discusses adaptation as a formal strategy that, like *House of Leaves'* textual machinery, provokes an uncanny experience as a means of simulating trauma.

Adapting the Narrative

Danielewski's textual experiments place readers in a position to confront trauma through the space of the text, and in producing an uncanny space through his textual presentation, Danielewski introduces new psychological dimensions to our experience with the novel. As I have argued throughout this study, dwelling in the destabilizing moment of trauma allows for otherwise inaccessible moments of psychological and political clarity. Jenny Edkins' concept of "trauma time" describes the processes by which individuals, in moments of trauma, are made aware of their incomplete relationship to institutional power. In this instant, social and political realities are temporarily laid bare. This section addresses adaptation as a narrative strategy that, in facilitating an uncanny encounter, may be used to dislodge readers from their entrenchment in the hegemonic narratives that conceal these realities. As a spatial tactic, the uncanny encourages readers to occupy multiple spaces simultaneously, which, first, enables critical confrontations with

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trauma[5] and, second, encourages discursive fluidity as readers are released from static, readerly subject positions. Like Danielewski's textual apparatus, adaptation as a formal strategy opens similar possibilities for creative negotiations of textual space. Despite recent scholarship on adaptation as a formal strategy, relatively little attention has been given to its spatial dimensions and its ability to provoke psychological responses in readers, specifically as linked to the uncanny. In utilizing uncanny resonances to generate "trauma time," adaptation encourages psychological and discursive activity that could not be achieved through conventional, hegemonic narrative structures, which, as became evident in the state-endorsed narratives following 9/11, only serve to deny individuals opportunities for establishing political subjectivity.

This section investigates Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*, a contemporary adaptation of *King Lear*, to examine how adaptation produces uncanny textual spaces that provide opportunities for immersive, experiential engagement with discourses on patriarchy and sexual violence. By probing the uncanny mechanics of adaptation, we can begin to understand how adapted texts encourage us to enter discursive, reflective, and interpretive spaces that exist outside of hegemonic political discourse, which, in the novel, are associated with the transparent and ubiquitous space of patriarchy. Smiley utilizes the uncanny, intertextual

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[5] As mentioned earlier, Freud's 1916 essay links the uncanny to early experiences of childhood trauma. Stemming from the child's traumatic separation from the mother's womb, uncanny moments return us to repressed fears and anxieties that reside deep in the unconscious. Although Freud did not address the political dimensions of trauma, I am interested in the ways that the uncanny may induce a traumatic encounter, which, as Edkins and other contemporary trauma theorists argue, can be politically productive.

resonances between her novel and Shakespeare's play to simulate her protagonist, Ginny's, psychological confrontation with repressed incest and sexual abuse, which occurs within the domestic space of the house. These moments of violence in her youth, and her subsequent repression of these events as an adult, occur as a result of patriarchy's transparent inscription on everyday life. Ginny's uncanny encounter in her family home facilitates her personal and political growth in the novel, and the text's ability to simulate this experience through formal strategies generates similarly productive opportunities for readers.

In much the same way that the discourses of homeland security discussed in chapter two embedded themselves in domestic space, preventing individuals from articulating political positions distinct from state narratives, patriarchy as a pervasive institutional program prevents Ginny from confronting and articulating her abuse in personally-meaningful ways. Sexual abuse, I argue, is a material effect of institutional patriarchy and is therefore political. Ginny's rape is the result of narratives of masculine exceptionalism—woven into the social fabric— that legitimate violence and simultaneously deny women avenues through which to narrate and confront their trauma. In simulating this experience and in positioning readers in "trauma time," Smiley creates a space in which readers may challenge a tradition of patriarchy both in the novel and without. Although I focus exclusively on Smiley's novel, her work should not be read as unique as an adaptation; any work that calls attention to its participation in intertextual space likewise involves readers in uncanny psychological encounters. If utilized to

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simulate political trauma, adaptation may help readers to achieve critical distance from narratives and political discourses that are otherwise transparent and universal.

The mechanics of adaptation require readers to confront the adaptation (the hypertext) and its source material (the hypotext) simultaneously, which provokes an uncanny psychological response capable of bringing readers closer to the experience of trauma. To engage this process, a text must utilize the uncanny dimensions of the hypertext to simulate the destabilizing experience of trauma, thereby inviting an encounter with, in Edkins' terms, "the political." Within the text's discursive context (sexual abuse and patriarchy, in Smiley's novel) readers, suspended in "trauma time," may access political discourse outside of hegemonic channels. In order to unpack the uncanny dimensions of adaptation, it might first be useful to examine the ways in which the uncanny operates, spatially, on a formal level. In her article, "Reconstructing Love: *King Lear* and Theatre Architecture," Peggy Phelan successfully navigates the ground between textual space and narrative space, or the space in which the characters interact within the work. Theatre space, she explains, allows the audience to experience both a physical location's fixed points and, simultaneously, the freedom of mobility through the play's manipulation of space and time. Phelan writes, "This sense of being in two different historical places at once is part of the compelling allure of the [theatre]" and this phenomenon suggests "something about the uncanny dimensions of theatrical architecture" (14). She describes the ways that theatre

architecture propels the audience into a state of psychological placelessness, which, in turn, complements the psychological desolation experienced by Lear over the course of the play. She writes, "Without a fixed boundary in time or space, theatre strips us of our location and gives us a taste of property-less being. Exposed with Lear to the elemental force of the need for love, the audience of *King Lear* also loses the sheltering consolations of architectural form" (33). Phelan's methodology bridges the ground between theatre space and the action of the play. The theatre thus creates a space in which the audience opens itself to the unsettling experience of unfamiliarity in an otherwise familiar environment.

Phelan's use of space includes both the physical *place* of the stage and the discursive *space* of the text and the performance; Shakespeare is able to engage both of these territories to effect an uncanny response in the audience. As an intertextual practice, adaptation generates a similar discursive space that the reader both engages and produces through her interaction with the text. Insofar as adaptation engages (at least) two textual spaces simultaneously and defamiliarizes readers from the source text, as a formal strategy, like Phelan's theatrical stage, it propels readers outside of systemic narrative structures that usually deny creative engagement. In this process, readers are removed from the hegemony of a central narrative. In order to generate this critical distance, adaptation must sustain uncanny resonances through repetition; the success of the adaptation depends largely on its ability to remind readers continually of the hypotext's ghostly presence within the narrative. Linda Hutcheon's commentary on repetition as an

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essential component of adaptation clarifies this phenomenon. She writes, "Adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication. And there are manifestly many different possible intentions behind the act of adaptation: the urge to consume and erase the memory of the adapted text or to call it into question" (7). In either case, the hypotext must repeatedly speak through the adaptation, reminding the reader of its presence within a second spatial environment. This process has psychological consequences insofar as it asks readers to question the autonomy of the adaptation and therefore question the stability of the text. Freud explains this process in terms of ego-development and the longing for a return to a state of simplicity. He writes, "[these moments of instability] are a harking-back to particular phases in the evolution of the self-regarding feeling, a regression to a time when the ego had not yet marked itself off sharply from the external world and from other people" (10). Adaptation's ability to destabilize texts by exposing origins therefore involves us in a figurative return to innocence that has profound psychological reverberations.

Adaptation's dependence on repetition further resonates with Freud's understanding of the uncanny. In adaptation, each character and each sequence in the narrative has a corollary in the hypotext, and this relationship—made visible through repetition—contains the potential for an experience of the uncanny. Freud discusses the haunting presence of "doubles" in literature, or characters whose similarity to one another disorients the reader. He explains the uncanny responses such associations can provoke and the essential role repetition plays in this

dynamic. He writes, "[in confronting the double] there is the constant recurrence of the same thing — the repetition of the same features or character-traits or vicissitudes, of the same crimes, or even the same names through several consecutive generations" (9). Like the double, adapted characters achieve their uncanny duality through repetition; as the hypertext repeatedly evokes its origins, the reader experiences a sense of textual familiarity, and this, Freud would argue, indicates a longing for psychological stability and innocence. In *A Thousand Acres*, for instance, Smiley makes overt references to *Lear* through naming. Each character's name resonates with its adapted double: Ginny (Goneril), Rose (Regan), Larry (Lear), etc. Furthermore, the major plot points in *King Lear* are represented in Smiley's novel in proper sequential order.[6] These overt connections between the two texts prompt the reader to continually set them against one another, and this process reveals the uncanny duality between the novel and the play. The uncanny experience occurs as the reader realizes that the hypertext has radically and irrevocably destabilized these established origins. Placed in an unstable textual environment and exposed to these moments of uncanny suspension, readers occupy a textual "other space" that facilitates marginalized, suppressed political discourse.

Other critics invested in adaptation theory have discussed the presence of the uncanny in similar terms. Linda Hutcheon addresses this phenomenon in

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[6] For a more detailed discussion on the resonances and absences extant in the two works, see David Brauner's essay, "'Speak Again': The Politics of Rewriting in *A Thousand Acres*." Brauner's writing details the creative act of storytelling that allows both Smiley and Ginny to create alternate histories that are at once empowering and self-destructive.

terms of palimpsests, arguing that hypertexts are always haunted by their hypotexts (6). Marjorie Garber's book, *Shakespeare's Ghost Writers*, offers useful commentary on the uncanny presence built into Shakespeare's plays and, more specifically, into the concept of Shakespeare as an author, whose unstable literary origins imbue his plays with a ghostly function linked to the uncanny. Garber's perspective is useful insofar as it denotes the psychological processes at play during encounters with Shakespearean adaptation, and, through an alternative vocabulary, it complements and expands upon Hutcheon's commentary on palimpsests. What these critics fail to address, however, is the possibility of utilizing the experience of the uncanny to enable political production. Removing readers from conventional narrative structures through psychological displacement, the uncanny resonances of adaptation likewise remove readers from the political discourses embedded in these structures.

Having theorized the uncanny spatial dynamics of adaptation, I now turn to Smiley's novel to demonstrate how readers' interactions with its spatial dynamics are, in fact, essential to its commentary on trauma and, more broadly, patriarchy. Setting her novel on a farm in Iowa, Smiley re-conceptualizes Shakespeare's characters in a rural context, as the aging Larry, the patriarchal presence in the novel and also the perpetrator of rape and incest, bestows upon his daughters the thousand acres of farmland that he owns. Perhaps acknowledging the impossibility of confronting trauma through language, Smiley depicts her characters' uncanny interactions with domestic space, inviting us interactively to

share the experience of trauma through the space of the text. This maneuver requires readers to enter the textual space of adaptation—that is, engage in the intertextual spatial practices inherent in the form—in order to transgress the boundary that separates form from content in the novel. In this way, the radical act that the novel depicts—the freeing of one's self from the grips of patriarchy and its concomitant narratives—becomes paramount for the reader, too, as she participates in the intertextual space of adaptation.

The novel's pivotal scene occurs as Ginny, unaware of the sexual violence perpetrated on her in her youth, confronts her traumatic past through an uncanny encounter with domestic space in her childhood home. After her sister, Rose, informs her of the sexual abuse they had both experienced as children, Ginny returns to the familiar space of the house to unearth memories of her mother and her past. She explains, "It was not as though I forgot that I'd been there every day of my life…I ignored the fact that the place was depressingly familiar, that Rose and I had spring-cleaned there every year. There had to be something" (Smiley 225). As she moves from room to room, the house begins to take on *unheimlich* characteristics that signal a movement away from the sense of familiarity she initially experiences. She is unable, for instance, to recognize herself or her sisters in old family photographs. Finally, as she ascends the staircase to her bedroom where the sexual abuse occurred, she notes "a kind of self-conscious distance from my body as it rose up the staircase. My hand on the banister looked white and strange, my feet seemed oddly careful as they counted out the steps" (227).

This moment suggests a psychological experience of the uncanny, one that moments later allows Ginny to recall her father having sex with her in that space. By using the domestic space of the house—space imbued with memory and familiarity—Ginny surrenders to its *unheimlich* dimensions, thereby opening herself to confront the repressed trauma of her childhood. This experience, as I discuss below, mirrors the psychologically and politically destabilizing process that readers engage as they negotiate the novel's intertextual space. Smiley thus situates the experience of the uncanny as a necessary means of confronting trauma, and, as she develops the uncanny associations between her text and Shakespeare's, she reveals the possibility of involving the reader in a similar psychological exercise.

Adaptation, and its ability to provoke the uncanny through psychological association with literary origins, is the critical intertextual practice that removes readers from conventional narrative structures. By involving them in the dialogic process of intertextual reading, Smiley places readers in a position similar to Ginny's, insofar as they, too, must carry out spatial practices that reach back to origins in an effort to confront the trauma of political violence, embodied here by Shakespeare, who, as critics like Harold Bloom have shown, functions as a patriarchal origin of sorts in contemporary literature. As detailed above, adaptation—through defamiliarization and repetition—provokes an uncanny experience that unearths repressed childhood memories and trauma. By utilizing Shakespeare's hypotext as the familiar origin and her own novel, *A Thousand*

Acres, as the defamiliarizing hypertext, Smiley generates an uncanny textual

space that simulates Ginny's psychologically-jarring experience in her childhood

home; if Shakespeare's play functions as a "home" for readers encountering its

literary offshoots, then the defamiliarizing process of adaptation brings us

psychologically and politically nearer to Ginny and her rejection of a tradition of

patriarchy.[7]

What is important, here, is the reader's interactive position in textual

space. The extent to which readers identify connections between and absences

within the two texts depends on their familiarity with *King Lear* and their ability

to negotiate the territory between the two texts. De Certeau writes, "to read is to

wander through an imposed system…[A] system of verbal or iconic signs is a

reservoir of forms to which the reader must give a meaning…He combines their

fragments and creates something un-known in the space organized by their

capacity for allowing an indefinite plurality of meanings" (169). Recognizing that

adaptation is a space between texts and not a clearly delineated system of signs,

Smiley invites us into a textual space that requires creative, interpretive

engagement. Understanding that the uncanny experience is an exclusively spatial

practice, she relies upon this reader-centered approach to induce the sensation of a

spatial environment existing between the texts. As readers engage "an indefinite

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[7] If one were to follow this thread, it could be argued that Smiley's complex
machinery of adaptation destabilizes the patriarchal foundations of Western
literature, embodied here by Shakespeare as a literary construct and an institution
unto itself. For this purposes of this short section on adaptation, it is sufficient to
say that Smiley's use of adaptation provokes an uncanny encounter that invites
readers into the politically-destabilizing moment of trauma time.

plurality of meanings," in the spirit of Lefebvre's ideas on the production of space, we generate the space of the adaptation.

By directly involving readers in the same spatial practices in which her characters participate, Smiley immerses readers in the space of the text, which enables them to address political discourses of sexual violence and patriarchy outside of traditional narrative structures. These structures, as I have argued throughout this dissertation, are inherently political and often provide only limited channels for political expression. The task for both Ginny and readers of the novel is to locate and inhabit spaces for narrative production that exist outside of these hegemonic narrative structures. Readers may easily identify Smiley's feminist agenda in the novel, most clearly evident through Ginny's narration and her shifting attitude toward patriarchy, but the novel's subtle formal tactics in fact prove more important to Smiley's aims with the text. Through adaptation, she locates us outside of a patriarchal tradition that has engrained itself in the modern psyche and whose presence in contemporary thought is still very much embedded in dominant discourses of power. Adaptation facilitates this exchange. By exposing its machinery, we can see how Smiley's approach is by no means exceptional. Writers cognizant of the uncanny dimensions of adaptation may involve readers in productive discursive activity, creating psychologically and politically productive counter spaces that provide critical distance from otherwise pervasive institutional narratives.

Performing the Narrative

In my analyses of these formal strategies—both in this chapter and in the preceding ones—I have relied heavily on de Certeau's theories on reading as a spatial practice that situates readers as producers of space and, more specifically, producers of meaning; any immersive encounter with text inherently involves an element of "embodiment," in which readers, more than just encountering words on a page, "practice space" within the text, interpreting signs and creating meaning as they go. De Certeau's chapter on "spatial stories," in fact, operates alongside Barthes' commentary on writerly texts; each concept relies on an interactive relationship between the reader and the text, in which readers utilize the text as a discursively-productive interpretive space. In this regard, readers are political bodies that *inhabit* texts. By this logic, establishing oneself in textual space involves engaging in performative practices stemming from the insertion of a reader's subjectivity into a textual domain.

If this is true, then many of the critical spatial practices that Diana Taylor describes in her writings on archival and performative memory may also apply to the experience of reading, particularly to our encounter with texts that tactically remove readers from conventional narrative structures. This final section brings these theories on textual space to their logical endpoint, working under the somewhat radical assumption that reading is an embodied, performative practice, and that in fostering performative engagement with text, literature may challenge archival, institutional power embedded in narrative. Leslie Marmon Silko's

Ceremony, a novel heavily invested in challenging institutional narrative structures and the political violence they inflict on marginalized groups, here, indigenous Laguna Pueblo Indians, utilizes textual tactics that encourage performativity. By engaging a Native American oral tradition and subverting conventional narrative through the frequent incorporation of song and poetry, Silko encourages readers to remove themselves from white, hegemonic narrative structures; in performing the text—by this I mean singing and reciting poetry as an embodied practice—the book provides critical avenues for political assertion and the processing of political trauma, a concept all too familiar to many Native Americans, even here in the twenty-first century.

In the third chapter of this study, which deconstructed the politics of urban space in post-Katrina New Orleans, I described the ways in which embodied performance provided vital means of contesting institutional power and confronting trauma for those affected by the hurricane. Utilizing Diana Taylor's theories on performance, I demonstrated that street-level spatial practices enabled an important "acting out" of trauma, which stood apart from the static discourses of power embedded in city space. More than just denoting the subversive potential of performance, Taylor's study makes important distinctions between "the archive" and "the repertoire," two concepts that help to explain how knowledge and political discourse are produced, disseminated, and exchanged. "'Archival' memory," she explains, "exists as documents, maps, literary texts, letters, archaeological remains, bones, videos, films, CDs, all those items

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supposedly resistant to change…[and] we might conclude that the archival, from the beginning, sustains power" (Taylor 19). Institutional power reproduces itself through the archive, preserving self-affirming discourses and, in the same breath, rendering those discourses static and inert. Taylor goes on to explain, "The repertoire, on the other hand, enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing—in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge…The repertoire requires presence: people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by 'being there,' being a part of the transmission" (20). Embodied performance therefore provides alternate avenues of political expression that resist being co-opted by the archive; discourse remains dynamic insofar as it circulates through modes of transmission that are never fixed by and assimilated into institutional, archival memory.

Narrative, too, is implicated in the archive/repertoire dialectic that Taylor describes. Conventional narrative structures, and more broadly all narrative structures that fix meaning in a static, printed text, are instruments of archival memory. Narratives, whether appearing in canonized literature or positioned within more opaque structures (genre, form, medium, etc.) that respond to readers' expectations and desires, are always involved in processes that package and, therefore, politicize the text as an article of consumption. We saw this process played out most clearly in the revanchist and redemptive narratives discussed in chapter one. Taylor notes the tension between writing and performance, arguing that "writing has paradoxically come to stand in for and

against embodiment" (16). If texts produce space, however, and if they encourage immersive, performative participation from the reader, then perhaps these texts may resist the archival forces that threaten to sap their political vitality. Silko's novel, for one, comments explicitly on narrative as a political instrument of white, hegemonic power. Continually resisting the pull of conventional narrative, *Ceremony* challenges archival narrative conventions that implicitly endorse a culture of violence and destruction. These narrative conventions, Silko suggests, are instruments of political trauma, as, in normalizing whiteness (and the political violence associated with it), they alienate indigenous peoples from their tribal communities. *Ceremony* provides crucial opportunities for embodied performance that locate the book's rhetorical power in the repertoire rather than the archive, providing valuable means for situating readers outside of linear, white-hegemonic narratives.

Silko's novel tells the story of Tayo, a member of the Laguna Pueblo tribe and a survivor of World War II's Bataan Death March, one of the most horrific events occurring in the South Pacific during the war. Returning home to the reservation, Tayo, traumatized by his experiences, has difficulty adapting to his old life and his old friends, who, grappling with their own demons, repeatedly perpetrate violence against themselves and Tayo. The trauma of the war, of course, stands in for the long-standing trauma experienced by Native Americans dealing with the erosion of their culture and the disappearance of their land. On a formal level, the book both represents and simulates the ceremony Tayo practices

in order to repair his damaged psyche. Many critics have addressed the formal strategies Silko uses to engage this process. Carol Mitchell argues that "Silko's novel is itself a curing ceremony" (28). Expanding this idea, Joanne Lipson Freed writes, "Silko's novel does not merely describe the ceremony that Tayo carries out but also *enacts* a ceremony *in which we as readers participate*" (emphasis in original, 229). Along these lines, Gloria Bird remarks on "our ability as readers to enter as participants of the story" (4). Each of these accounts correctly locates the text's ability to simulate the experience of the ceremony; as Tayo embarks on his quest for psychological healing, we, too, are invited to participate in a process that removes us from white, hegemonic discourse. Silko's strategies, however, are more radical than these accounts would suggest. By inviting the reader to *embody* the text—through performative chants, songs, and poetry—Silko generates spaces for cultural and political positioning that exist beyond the reach of the archive.

Before analyzing these performative moments in the text, it might be best to examine Silko's view of conventional narrative structuring as an instrument of white hegemonic power. Midway through the novel, Betonie, an old medicine man, tells Tayo the story of how witchery was unleashed on the world. White people, and the destruction that they represent for Tayo's community, we come to learn, are the product of an ancient witch "conference." In this conference, the story goes, the witches hold "a contest in dark things," which begins innocently enough, until one witch comes forth, stating simply, "What I have is a story" (135). This story, in its telling, presumably unleashes what the Western

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imagination might locate as "evil" on the world. What is significant, here, is that narrative—and specifically narrative as a linear construction—represents the source of world destruction. Unlike Tayo's ceremony, which is "a continuing process" (35), and unlike the novel itself, which begins and ends, cyclically, with a sunrise, the witch's story adopts a terminal, linear narrative trajectory: "It can't be called back," explains the witch at the story's conclusion. In another telling moment, the witch declares, "[White people] will lay the *final pattern* with [the uranium found on the reservation] / they will lay it across the world / and explode everything" (emphasis mine, 137), implying that white culture will fulfill the structure of a terminal narrative by destroying the world. Silko makes two important gestures with this story. First, she designates linear narrative as simultaneously generative of political power (that is, the story *created* white people) and inherently destructive, insofar as it sets in motion a series of events that ends in apocalypse. Second, Silko draws the connection between nuclear destruction—symbolized by the uranium mines—and narrative; the "final pattern," fulfilled by the atomic bomb, represents an apocalyptic end to a linear narrative linked to white institutional power. The Laguna Pueblo storytelling tradition, on the other hand, is cyclical and therefore can accommodate neither the "final pattern" nor the apocalyptic narrative ending that it implies.

This distrust of linear narrative also plays a significant role in the novel's narrative climax (if one indeed exists), where Tayo is given the opportunity to kill his former friend, Emo, who has disinherited his tribal heritage. Awaiting Emo

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and his drunk companions, Tayo observes that "they were coming to end it their way" (Silko 235) by murdering Tayo and fulfilling a terminal narrative of destruction. Moments later, forgoing the opportunity to murder Emo (an act that would hardly provoke the reader's disapproval), Tayo "moved back into the boulders. It had been a close call. The witchery had almost ended the story according to its plan" (253). Recognizing that killing Emo would fulfill the demands of a linear narrative—with a rising action, a narrative climax, and a denouement that would feature Tayo either in jail or in a mental institution—he refuses to provide the expected narrative conclusion, one which, Silko makes clear, is implicitly linked to whiteness and violence. In shirking this narrative convention, on a formal level, the book defies the reader's novelistic expectations, which are caught up in processes of narrative production and consumption. If we feel disappointed by the novel's anti-climax, it is only because we find ourselves implicated in what Silko would argue is an inherently violent culture dependent on narrative resolution and, symbolically, death.

In his groundbreaking study of narrative theory, *The Sense of an Ending*, Frank Kermode describes the relationship between narrative and what he sees as an inherently human desire for closure, which we engage through linear narrative structures that are bounded by "beginnings and endings." In "the ending," readers achieve a moment of narrative closure, and this, Kermode argues, satisfies a deep-rooted desire for the apocalypse, or the sense of an ending that moves far beyond the work itself. Although Kermode's theories are more or less foundational at this

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point, his study focuses exclusively on a Western literary tradition and implicitly

privileges distinctly Western literary and cultural imaginations. This is important

to consider when situating his theories among literatures and cultures that abide

by indigenous, non-white cultural assumptions; the Laguna Pueblo culture, for

instance, favors circular narratives and an ongoing performative storytelling

tradition, neither of which is intended to fulfill humans' "need in the moment to

belong, to be related to a beginning and to an end" (Kermode 4). These are

distinctly Western concerns, and Kermode has correctly described how they

permeate and define a particular Western conception of narrative.[8] When Emo

and his friends come "to end it their way," they align themselves within this

narrative tradition and in doing so slough off their tribal identity, situating

themselves within a linear narrative of self-destruction. Recognizing that this

narrative tradition is intrinsically violent (that is, apocalyptic) and simultaneously

an instrument of white political oppression, Silko produces textual spaces that

enable the reader to confront narrative in non-archival, indigenous terms.

　　　In order to bring this indigenous reading to the surface, Silko complements

Tayo's narrative with a series of tribal stories, songs, poems, and chants gleaned

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[8] Resisting reader expectations through experiments in narrative structuring is
certainly not unique to Native American literature, as both modern and
postmodern writers, from Gertrude Stein to Thomas Pynchon, have denied
narrative closure in their fiction. Despite these important experiments in narrative
form, mainstream American culture is still deeply invested in narratives that
demonstrate structural unity. The top-grossing Hollywood films and the majority
of bestseller fiction still adhere to narratives that provide closure. Silko's
commentary on white culture and its desire "to end it their way" addresses an
American public that desires non-disruptive modes of narrative, packaged for
easy consumption. These narratives confirm Americans' political beliefs under
the guise of apolitical entertainment.

from the Laguna Pueblo oral tradition.[9] The most significant of these is the central

oral narrative, which concerns the departure and return of Nau'ts'ity'i. Working

alongside Tayo's narrative of psychological healing, this story describes the

cyclical processes and rituals that must be performed in order to bring an end to a

terrible drought on the Laguna Pueblo. Orbiting this narrative are a series of

satellite stories featuring mythic figures such as The Gambler (Kaup'a'ta), Spider

Grandmother (Ts'its'tsi'nako), and Corn Woman (Iyetiko). More significant than

the content of the stories—and this is where my argument sidesteps the

Gunn/Nelson debate—are the performative modes implicit in their rendering on

the page. In interviews, Silko has been forthcoming about her desire to simulate

orality, remarking on her effort to produce "the feeling or the sense that language

is being used orally. So I play with the page and things you could do on the

page…so that the reader has a sense of how it might sound if I were reading it to

him or her" (Silko, "Interview" 87). Despite recognizing some of the oral qualities

of her text, Silko seems somewhat oblivious to the novel's performative

dimensions.

 Along these lines, Konrad Groβ writes, "Silko's attempt at integrating oral

traditions into her novel is therefore a highly risky venture since the printed text

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[9] Paula Gunn Allen's now-famous critique of Silko's novel centers on her disapproval of her fellow tribeswoman's lack of disregard for the tribe's sacred oral tradition. Robert M. Nelson, in response to Allen, argues that Silko's presentation of her tribe's stories represents a tactical effort to reclaim the oral tradition from ethnographers who had already transcribed the stories decades earlier. See Allen's "Special Problems in Teaching Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*" and Nelson's "The Embedded Texts in Leslie Silko's *Ceremony*" for more on this important critical debate.

means a removal of the oral material from the originally dramatic and performance-oriented context where the immediacy of the situation and the direct participation of the audience were of equal, if not greater importance than the message itself" (88). The narrative interruptions, as I read them, require the reader not to "hear" the stories, as Silko and Groβ suggest, but rather to "perform" them through verbal participation; Silko's ideal reader uses the written word as a script for vocal, ceremonial performance. With the frequent incorporation of what are clearly vocal incantations that move us beyond the written word, Silko invites this kind of participation. For instance during Betonie's ceremony, she involves us in the execution of the ceremony itself, encouraging us to vocalize the text: "en-e-e-ya-a-a-a-a! / en-e-e-ya-a-a-a-a! / en-e-e-ya-a-a-a-a! / en-e-e-ya-a-a-a-a!" (142) and later, "Hey-ya-ah-na-ah! Hey-ya-ah-na-ah / Ku-ru-tsu-eh-ah-eh-na! Ku-ru-tsu-eh-ah-eh-na!" (206). Anyone who has taught *Ceremony* in the classroom and who has read these passages out loud will attest to the performative dimensions of such language; when vocalized, these chants exert a powerful force on both the reader-cum-speaker and on those experiencing the performance, in my personal example, my students. The text, all of a sudden, is activated, made dynamic by a vocal performance that moves reader and listener into an experiential zone altogether dislodged from the archival confines of textuality.

In this way, Silko perhaps underestimates the performative and political power of her novel. Incorporating an oral tradition into her text speaks to the tension existing between the written text and oral performance, between the

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archive and the repertoire. She explains in an interview, "Stories stay alive within

the community…because the stories have a life of their own. The life of the story

is not something that any individual person can save and certainly not someone

writing it down or recording it on tape or video" (Silko, "Interview" 88).

Interpellating the reader as a performer reveals the possibilities for liberating

textuality from the disciplining power of the archive, suggesting that texts, in their

ability to create and enable spatial practices (here, performance), are not by

definition caught in the grips of institutional power. Tactical texts like Silko's

produce immersive spaces that remove readers from the conventional narrative

structures that—as Silko demonstrates in *Ceremony*—are intimately tied to

institutions that generate and perpetuate political realities at the expense of

underprivileged peoples and communities. The same impulse to challenge

institutional power through narrative informs my reading of Smiley's *A Thousand

Acres*, which, rather than contesting a tradition of whiteness, challenges

patriarchy and its investment in conventional narrative structures. Less concerned

with the political dimensions of narrative, Danielewski's book does much to

reveal the spatial possibilities embedded in textuality; following his lead, future

critics and novelists alike may seek to exploit the political dimensions of narrative

in order to produce and foster critical sites of resistance for readers to inhabit.

These critical approaches to contemporary fiction, far from providing answers to

the enduring problems of representation, authorship, and politics that complicate

literature here in the twenty-first century, merely suggest the possibility of

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engaging literature through what I have shown are potentially-productive spatial lenses.

Coda

Election years are robust times for the study of narrative. On a recent walk around the neighborhood with my big, furry golden-retriever, I came upon a sticker pasted across the bumper of an old pickup truck: "Nobody lies so much as after fishing and before an election," it said. Well intentioned, and no doubt politically cognizant, my neighbor seems to miss the more subtle mechanics of political production and institutional power here in the twenty-first century. It's not that politicians lie, or that the news media puts a spin on political issues, it's that the very modes of narrative that inform political reality are, on a formal level, instruments of political power. Worse yet, the invisibility of narrative production as a formal strategy more often than not renders the source of political oppression—the politics of homeland security, the socially-corrosive infrastructure of the postmetropolis, the national response to terror attacks, etc.—below our political horizons, inaccessible because of the extent to which they are normalized and written into our experience of everyday life.

Foucault's writings on "technologies of the self" describe the ways that individuals, as extensions of the state, unknowingly internalize and act out biopolitical narratives. As I have demonstrated, embracing the politics of domestic space and endorsing urban models that discourage the production of space make it difficult for individuals to achieve critical distance from the

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narratives of the state, narratives that they, themselves, put into practice in their everyday lives. This entrenchment of narrative in our very experience of reality has made political trauma an increasingly problematic and slippery theoretical concept. Unable to locate the source of our disenfranchisement and often deprived of a traumatic referent, we experience trauma in ways that prevent the modes of processing and "working through" that Freud described over a hundred years ago. This is why the writings of Jenny Edkins, Kali Tal, Ana Douglass, and Thomas Vogler have featured so prominently in this study; their theoretical approaches to trauma recognize that in order to process the traumatic event, individuals must break through the psychological and political barriers that often preclude such confrontation. Accessing trauma, then, peeling away the sedimented layers of political discourse and probing our psychological depths, signifies an intensely political and often subversive act of political empowerment. In the traumatic moment, as Edkins makes clear, exists the opportunity to deconstruct the complex relationship between the individual and institutional power.

How, though, is one to "access trauma?" If the traumatic referent is inaccessible, how can one come to terms with and confront "an absence?" How can literature facilitate this process? These are the questions I have grappled with in the preceding chapters, and I have demonstrated, first, how trauma is often subtly exerted through spatial politics and, second, how space, specifically the "production of space," provides avenues for the cultivation of political subjectivity. Producing space—in the manner described by Foucault and

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Lefebvre—creates opportunities for situating oneself outside of mainstream institutional discourse, which is often inscribed on hegemonic spaces of the city and the home, both highly political zones manufactured at least in part by the cultural imaginary. "Walking in the city," "producing space," generating "heterotopic space"—these spatial practices promise some degree of political agency for those affected by institutional politics in space.

The first four chapters of this dissertation follow a trajectory of political violence in America in recent memory, from the processes of narrative production after 9/11 to the domestic dimensions of homeland security to the restructuring of urban space after Hurricane Katrina and finally to the emergence of the socially-corrosive postmetropolis, where institutional power inscribes itself in the very structure of our lived spaces. In each chapter I have paid particular attention to the enduring tension between the institution and individual, noting how processes of narrative production embed themselves in the spaces of everyday life, precluding both the confrontation with trauma and the exercise of political voice. Equally important, these chapters have discussed literature as a narrative medium that introduces opportunities, through the production of textual space, for individuals to achieve critical distance from institutional narratives. The post-9/11 political satires discussed in chapter one challenge state-endorsed narratives that circulated in the wake of the attacks on the World Trade Center, narratives that rendered Americans complicit in the political and military campaigns of the state. As a formal strategy, satire provides a heterotopic textual space that positions readers

outside of these pervasive institutional discourses. In the years following the

attacks, these discourses would embed themselves in domestic space, dissolving

boundaries that traditionally separated the public from the private. Our

psychological attachment to domestic space, which I address in chapter two,

enabled the politics of the state—specifically in regard to discourses on homeland

security—to intervene on our private lives, interpellating Americans as complicit

supporters of state violence. These discourses of homeland security were similarly

intertwined with the institutional response to Hurricane Katrina. After the

hurricane, institutional power—embodied most directly by the Department of

Homeland Security—inscribed itself on the urban space of New Orleans,

transforming a free space of cultural performance to a site of institutional

discipline. However, the tension between the individual and institutional power in

urban space is certainly not unique to post-Katrina New Orleans; the new

American metropolis, as I explain in chapter four, is a highly political site of

institutional discipline that, in its spatial organization, precludes opportunities for

politically productive spatial practices.

As institutional narratives embed themselves in these urban and domestic

spaces, they likewise enact political violence on individuals who, lacking the

means to contest these processes, are exposed to political trauma. In addition to

describing the political dimensions of space, these chapters have suggested

narrative strategies that utilize textual space to position readers outside of these

otherwise pervasive institutional narratives, giving them opportunities to confront

trauma in politically productive ways. Michael Haneke's *Funny Games*, for instance, requires viewers to step outside the film's narrative to reflect on their own desire for violence and how this desire manifests itself in processes of narrative production and consumption. In *Their Dogs Came with Them*, Helena María Viramontes' narrative strategies simulate urban space, sending readers along narrative freeways that intersect in violence. Here, simulating urban space through formal strategies requires readers to reflect on the deleterious social consequences of urban growth and the loss of social spaces in contemporary cities. By providing readers with the opportunity to inhabit these "other spaces" that exist outside of conventional narrative structures, the texts under consideration in this study reveal the potential for literature to address issues of trauma and politics in immediate and productive ways.

This final chapter has extended this methodological approach to new zones of inquiry, suggesting that experimental narrative strategies that remove readers from conventional narrative structures may be employed in a variety of ways that are not confined to urban and domestic spaces. As much as I have argued throughout this study that inhabiting physical space and engaging in spatial practices holds critical opportunities for political engagement, our negotiation of space should not be limited to the physical sites that we occupy; rather, we should, following de Certeau, think of text as a spatial environment that enables subversive spatial practices. If it is true that narrative production is the single most pernicious and transparent form of institutional discipline and trauma

in contemporary life, then our ability to generate, sustain, and occupy textual

spaces that remove us from institutional narrative is of supreme importance.

Textual space provides us with opportunities to distance ourselves from and

contest the politics of the state; furthermore, in simulating the experience of

trauma through textual space, as we see in *House of Leaves* and *A Thousand

Acres*, literature offers individuals the opportunity to confront the deeply-

embedded, traumatic discourses underlying our contemporary political landscape.

The question, then, in an election year, in any year for that matter, isn't

whether politicians are telling the truth, or whether the media is manufacturing

reality, or whether the public is savvy enough to engage political discourse; the

question is how to locate material and textual spaces that give us critical distance

from the very structures of narrative. This study has outlined strategies for

political positioning that depend on literature for critical engagement. As a literary

scholar, these forms of narrative interest me most, but room certainly exists in

other disciplines to pursue narrative through the lenses of trauma and spatial

theory. Our globalized, hyper-mediated political landscape, to say the least,

demands such critical interrogation.

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