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EDITOR'S NOTE

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We can't hope to understand these incredible times unless we look at these images and accept the witness¹ of these images. Looking at the falling man and to discuss it is the one option that we have, given that there is a falling man.
(Tom Junod, 2006)

- 1 In his professional attempt to depict these incredible times, journalist Tom Junod wrote an important essay for *Esquire Magazine* about the search for the identity of the falling man photographed by Associated Press photographer Richard Drew—a picture striking in its beauty and elegance but also in its potential to provoke. At once characterized as voyeuristic and inappropriate, it features a man falling headfirst to his death alongside the North Tower.
- 2 While the figure of the man falling has emerged as an iconic figure of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the fiction, poetry, and art that have attempted to grapple with it have often been met with hostility and even rage. Similarly, the journalism, especially the photography, that documents the falling man and our witnessing of his fall elicits a kind of open-wound response that is understandable even as it raises such questions as: Why did Americans react so strongly even to the truth-telling mission of photography and journalism to capture 9/11 and its aftermath? What does it say about the United States as a nation in crisis more broadly, and about the status of art and literature in its failed attempts adequately to respond to the event?

- 3 With a focus on Junod's *Esquire* article of 2003, Henry Singer's 2006 documentary *9/11: The Falling Man*, and the Abu Ghraib photography that appeared as a generic attempt to understand the treatment of that prison's detainees, this chapter details the powerful reactions against these images as evidence for a broader claim about the vexed relationship between traumatic events and representation. By juxtaposing the reception of Richard Drew's photograph of the falling man with U.S. soldiers' photographs of torture at Abu Ghraib, I seek to articulate the vexed nature of reading a photograph linked inextricably with trauma and the claim it makes on the viewer. Ultimately, I argue that while we all have an ethical responsibility to look, to commemorate, we simultaneously—and paradoxically—must grapple with the impossibility of offering an adequate, and therefore ethical response.
- 4 What intrigues me most here is the fact that mural artists, poets, and novelists are not the only creators burdened with how to refer to falling, with how to document it for a mourning public. What is striking about the discipline of journalism, about the profession of journalists and photographers who work in tandem to capture history, is that their duty to record the facts would initially seem more straightforward, less prone to questions about taste and aesthetics, especially when rendered, as with Drew's photography, with such honesty and grace.
- 5 Yet, on the other side of this search for truth are videos published by the "truthers"—(mostly) American citizens who believe that 9/11 was a government conspiracy. While we might all agree that some attempts at documenting the truth about 9/11 are more credible than others, I nonetheless wonder at the appeal that the "truthers'" version of documenting the event holds for U.S. citizens. Both the professional media and, in my mind, the conspiracy theorists, point to a larger problem in how we as a nation mourned in the wake of the attacks: even straightforwardly recording the facts of the day proved inadequate. While I begin with the controversy surrounding Richard Drew's photograph as detailed by Tom Junod's writing for *Esquire* and Henry Singer's documentary, I will end with a discussion of another set of provocative photos: those taken at Abu Ghraib where prisoners in a war the U.S. government said was related to 9/11 were being tortured.
- 6 In this way, I argue, the camera works to call into question our sense of ethics and responsibility in the wake of the attacks, a crisis point not only in terms of representation, but in terms of a wavering moral code as well. In the cases presented here—the falling man photograph, the documentary, the *Esquire* follow-up, the Abu Ghraib photos—no one wanted to look, certainly not Americans, as they challenged our reputation as fighters, as holders and enforcers of the moral code, as righteous and unified survivors during crisis and controversy.
- 7 Singer's documentary begins with Michael Lomonaco, executive chef and director of the Windows on the World restaurant atop the North Tower. There were 170 people there that day. Just over eight minutes into the film, Lomonaco, who was late arriving to work, reflects that jumping was likely "the only option left": there was no exit through the building as the plane sliced through the elevator shaft. Flames and toxic smoke raged throughout the stairwells. Richard Drew, the Associated Press photographer, is introduced in the film not long after that: "people started coming down", he says: "bodies were falling". He could hear them hitting the ground.
- 8 Richard Drew shot the photograph that disturbed the world—a photograph that was labeled "distasteful" and "voyeuristic" and was rejected initially, according to the

documentary's narrative voice, Steven MacKinton, in favor of heroic images depicting instead "how the American spirit prevailed".

- 9 Drew used his camera as a filter: "what was so traumatizing was not just burning buildings, but falling bodies" (16:27). After looking at all of the frames he had taken, he chose the now canonical falling man photo: "It hits you—no blood, no guts, it's just a person falling" (25:00). As Drew sensed from the beginning, this photograph was special for its artistic and aesthetic qualities in addition to the fact that it captured the final moments of a young man's life.
- 10 The film uses a local paper, *The Morning Call*, the daily out of Allentown, PA, as a perfect case about what happened next—beginning with an editorial decision about which photos distributed by the Associated Press would be printed to commemorate the previous day's news. Michael Hirsch believed the photo was too obscene, in that it captured a private moment; he felt it would be taking the faller's humanity away by peering into the last moments of a person's life (26:44).
- 11 The photo was printed precisely for that reason: it was one of those historical photos that provided a literal flash point. *The Morning Call* printed it larger than any other photo in the country. On September 12, 2001, 170,000 copies of the paper featuring Drew's photograph were distributed throughout Allentown. Allentown citizen Bob Messinger viewed it, he remembers, with "utter disgust" (29:42). Ken Myers confesses how "that day, that picture made me angry" (30:16). According to the narrator, "the reaction in Allentown mirrored" the response around the world (32:01).
- 12 When interviewed for the film, Tom Junod wonders why, reiterating what Drew had already sensed about the composition of the photograph and the uncomfortable relationship between beauty and horror it embodies. For Junod: "He seems almost perfectly composed. I never saw that picture again. No one wanted to confront the existence of the jumper" (32:29). "Americans recoiled from the falling man", reflects Junod, continuing: "the pictures that lasted are heroic [as if to say] the American spirit shall prevail" (34:00). When Junod called the Coroner's Office and asked about how many people made the 1500-foot jump, he was told straight out: "Nobody jumped that day" (34:44). According to Junod, it was one of the "[t]hings about that day you weren't supposed to talk about". And all of that had been attached to Drew's picture.
- 13 Canadian reporter Peter Cheney was assigned to find out who it was (36:09) only to learn very early that "no one wanted to claim the falling man" (38:06). At first Cheney thought that based on the goatee, the waiter's jacket, the dark skin tone, it would be Norberto Hernandez. After getting some confirmation from the family, he published an article identifying Hernandez as "the jumper"—a title that horrified the family, his wife and three daughters. "That's not my father", Jacqueline Hernandez repeated (39:54). It contradicted everything their family stood for: "Together forever" (41:00). The family insists that it was more than grief that was driving their denial of the photograph; it was also a belief that suicide is punishable by God: "by calling him a jumper, you are telling me he's in hell", they say (43:57).
- 14 When Junod learned that there was more to the story, as the falling man was also wearing an orange shirt—a shirt never owned by Hernandez—he pursued the question of the man's identity once more. He was "convinced America needed to confront" this photo, this issue (46:06). He "wanted to be sure that healing didn't mean forgetting" the people who perished in the attacks (49:50). Lomonaco agreed to look at the photo again, and said

it could be Jonathan Briley, a sound engineer working at Windows that morning (1:00:15). Says Lomonaco, it “offered me no comfort to think, oh, that’s Jonathan”. But for Junod, there is a kind of closure—paradoxically—through the hauntingly open question: “One has to be made to stand for many” as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier does (1:09:22). And that is when Junod says that we can’t refuse to look: we must “accept the witness of these images”, he says, suggesting that these images testify to a history we will never know. That reality is linked to what it might take to commit to the unimaginable fall from 1500 feet up: the decision to take “his life in his hands for just that second”, says Briley’s sister, Gwendolyn (1:03:04). It must have felt like flying, people say—for just that second.

- 15 The essay that seems to have motivated, even inspired Henry Singer’s documentary, is Tom Junod’s 2003 article for *Esquire* that traces the journey to identify the unknown “jumper”. Whereas the strength of Singer’s journalistic account lies in the camera-work, the sometimes incessant coverage of the burning buildings, the sheer weight and repetition of the images of all of those people about to jump or who are in the process of falling through the sky, the strength of Junod’s 2003 account lies in his use of language, which is equally as lyrical and affective as the poetry and fiction written in response to the attacks. Beside the famous Richard Drew photograph we read this ekphrastic description:

If he were not falling, he might very well be flying. He appears relaxed, hurtling through the air. He appears comfortable in the grip of unimaginable motion. He does not appear intimidated by gravity’s divine suction or by what awaits him. His arms are by his side, only slightly outriggered. His left leg is bent at the knee, almost casually. His white shirt, or jacket, or frock, is billowing free of his black pants. His black high-tops are still on his feet. (Junod 2003)

- 16 Most striking is Junod’s focus on the fact of gravity, of its apparent “divinity”, and on the visual paradox of watching a man fall and yet seeing in him aspects of flight, of survival: the perfectly graceful position buoyed further by the shirt that acts like a parachute.
- 17 In his article, Junod goes on to talk about the sheer grace and beauty of the photograph, words that still seem sacrilegious to display on a screen or on the page. What kind of monster, or critic (and by monster and critic, I mean me—not Junod) would peer into the final minutes of a man’s life, a life that will end, that will have ended, in a gruesome fall, and see in it something as pleasing as beauty? Is it possible to see in the image of a man falling both beauty and horror—the new exemplar for the sublime?
- 18 Junod sees the exceptionality of this photograph too when he says:

In all the other pictures, the people who did what he did—who jumped—appear to be struggling against horrific discrepancies of scale. They are made puny by the backdrop of the towers, which loom like colossi, and then by the event itself. Some of them are shirtless; their shoes fly off as they flail and fall; they look confused, as though trying to swim down the side of a mountain. The man in the picture, by contrast, is perfectly vertical, and so is in accord with the lines of the buildings behind him. (Junod 2003)

What Junod sees is what an artist sees—he looks at lines, at scale, at the parallelism between the man falling and the tower as it still stands.

- 19 He continues with the language of geometry in the following passage, one of the most lucid and articulate descriptions of the photograph, poetic in its focus, philosophical in its thought:

He splits them, bisects them: Everything to the left of him in the picture is the North Tower; everything to the right, the South. Though oblivious to the geometric

balance he has achieved, he is the essential element in the creation of a new flag, a banner composed entirely of steel bars shining in the sun. Some people who look at the picture see stoicism, willpower, a portrait of resignation; others see something else—something discordant and therefore terrible: freedom. (Junod 2003)

In this reading, Junod ascribes the reaction against the photograph to the jarring depiction of a death resulting in being trapped in a smoky skyscraper with the freedom sought that will nonetheless also result in death. It is a choiceless choice by definition: resign oneself, or commit oneself to death by asphyxiation or to death by falling. The “terrible [...] freedom” is not something we ourselves can confront, the impulse to jump, the sensation of flying for even that instant.

- 20 And perhaps it is with a focus on stoicism and willpower that Junod is able to see a kind of righteousness, or rebelliousness (to use his word):

There is something almost rebellious in the man's posture, as though once faced with the inevitability of death, he decided to get on with it; as though he were a missile, a spear, bent on attaining his own end. He is, fifteen seconds past 9:41 a.m. EST, the moment the picture is taken, in the clutches of pure physics, accelerating at a rate of thirty-two feet per second squared. He will soon be traveling at upwards of 150 miles per hour, and he is upside down. (Junod 2003)

Junod here focuses on the man's agency, militaristic power and control: he is compared to a spear and a missile. Juxtaposed with the literary language of the simile “as though he were a” is the language of time and mathematics: “fifteen seconds past 9:41”; “thirty-two feet per second squared”; “upwards of 150 miles per hour”. It is interesting that, despite the objective language, the thing that one remembers is the apparently tagged-on phrase “and he is upside down”. One wonders at the sense of exhilarating freedom, that “terrible freedom”, the literal rush of falling so fast, headfirst. It is, of course, a way to die that is impossible to imagine. But what Junod seems to be pointing out here is the way the photograph invites the imagining, and perhaps that is why it has met with such resistance: it is not the voyeurism simply, but the personal connection with, and confrontation of, the question: what might it feel like to fall so fast to your own death? This is a question that, it seems to me, no one wants to face, least of all in the twenty-first century.

- 21 Junod reports that the fact of the man falling posed not only a conundrum for Richard Drew, who was there with his camera, but for the first responders and city leaders as well. Junod reports that: “It was the sight of the jumpers that prompted Rudy Giuliani to say to his police commissioner, ‘We’re in uncharted waters now’” (Junod 2003). Giuliani most likely was talking about how to handle the crisis in the city—the fire, the bodies, the media—but it is an observation that critics and artists would also do well to heed. We too are in uncharted waters, as evidenced by the extreme reactions to representations of the man falling. How does one report on such atrocity without appearing to appeal to people's desires to both face and turn away from horror—in life and in art? As Junod concludes:

In most American newspapers, the photograph that Richard Drew took of the Falling Man ran once and never again. Papers all over the country, from the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* to the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* to *The Denver Post*, were forced to defend themselves against charges that they exploited a man's death, stripped him of his dignity, invaded his privacy, turned tragedy into leering pornography. (Junod 2003)

- 22 And yet, for all of his searching, Junod would say that his quest to identify the man in the photograph, a quest that led him to look at the image (and others like it) hundreds of

times, is neither leering nor driven by an attraction toward pornographic violence. He understands his writing, and his search, as a way of bearing witness, angered and confused by the fact that Drew's image, and the narratives of the falling men and women, were swept away so shortly after the attacks. According to Junod: "The picture went all around the world, and then disappeared, as if we willed it away. One of the most famous photographs in human history became an unmarked grave, and the man buried inside its frame—the Falling Man—became the Unknown Soldier in a war whose end we have not yet seen" (Junod 2003).

- 23 As he will do in the Henry Singer film, Junod ends his piece by comparing the Drew photograph with the tomb of the Unknown Soldier, suggesting that if we have one icon to stand for the many, then we may perhaps have an easier time confronting the war-related deaths. But Junod is not making a simple comparison here: by saying "we have not yet seen" the end of the war of the Falling Man, "buried" as he is inside a photograph's "frame", he is referring, I believe not only to the literal wars that the attacks apparently motivated, first in Iraq and then in Afghanistan, but also to a war waged against those whose duties it is to report the violence. The directive from the American public seems to be to report using the facts in front of you, but carefully to select the facts so that they are "decent" and easy to take in. Unfortunately, this goes against much of the training that journalists, reporters, and photographers receive. How can one turn his back on a falling man, when the most appropriate thing to do seems to commemorate the life for all time?
- 24 In his 2011 *Esquire* follow-up, published on the 10th anniversary of the attacks, Junod returns to this idea of memorializing each one of the jumpers—whether or not his name is Jonathan Briley, saying: "The memorial that will stand for all the others murdered that day is on the ground; the memorial for Jonathan is in the sky, or in the infinitely replicable pixels of a digital photograph" (Junod 2011). I like to think that the photograph itself can be a kind of memorial, precisely because of its sheer artistic power. And certainly the conversation it sparked is a kind of memorial unto itself. Junod wanted to be sure that "healing didn't mean forgetting"; and although I am not sure we can say as a nation we have fully healed, I do believe it is fair to say we have not forgotten, nor will we ever.
- 25 It is with this focus on memory and commemoration in mind that I turn all too briefly to the "Truthers" movement—a movement that argues with increasing passion that the 9/11 terrorist attack was "an inside job". I do believe there is more scholarly work to be done in this area—that is, offering perhaps a cultural or psychoanalytic reading of why the movement has garnered such momentum and support—but I have to say that I am not the person for that work.
- 26 Some examples of films that share the same visual effect as Henry Singer's include *Loose Change* (written and directed by Dylan Avery and produced by Korey Rowe) and *Painful Deceptions*, by Eric Hufschmid. One important difference, however, is that they argue not for a recognition of those who lost their lives that day, but for a recognition that the victims of 9/11 were casualties of a governmental plot.
- 27 *Loose Change* uses the same footage as the mainstream media and other documentarians to argue that money hidden under the towers was at stake and that the December 14 Osama bin Laden confession tape does not feature bin Laden at all. *Painful Deceptions* offers a close reading of the 9/11 *Commission Report*, but argues that there are too many questions

left unanswered and too many contradictions for the attacks possibly to have been instigated by the U.S. against the U.S. Further, STJ911.org – Scholars for 9/11 Truth & Justice represents professors who believe in the conspiracy plot and allows them a platform for speaking and publishing their theories via the web.

- 28 In terms of my argument about a crisis point in representing 9/11, especially in the case of representing the falling man, which is an image these alternative documents increasingly rely on, I wonder how and in what ways these conspiracy theories speak to the larger problem of reference in representing 9/11. Is this yet another sign of a traumatized culture indicating the myriad ways we all watch images in both horror and disbelief? Especially in the case of Scholars for 9/11, I might wager that anyone reading this essay probably knows one or two people who are a part of the movement, as generally they are intellectuals who come from a culture of questioning, of closely reading documentations, and have channeled their disbelief and grief in this way.
- 29 Just as the photos capturing the falling man on September 11, 2001 were met with horror, so too were the photographs that emerged from Abu Ghraib in 2004, photos that reveal not a literally falling body, but the falling moral compass and culture of the United States military. While Americans are quick to decry the atrocity perpetrated against the U.S. on 9/11, they seem far less willing to talk about the atrocity Americans inflicted on others in prison. These later photos, it seems to me, would be the ones to be confronted by deniers and conspiracy theorists, as they are so horrific—and they are horrific in a very particular way: they reveal representatives of the U.S. not in the heroic terms associated with the clean-up efforts of 9/11 but as perpetrators of terror in their own right. Like the 9/11 photos, the Abu Ghraib torture photos are “war photos” in the sense that they capture war, or the effects of war, from a distance, which was true for the great majority of us who watched the events of the twenty-first century unfold from within the pages of newspapers we held in the comfort of our own homes.
- 30 In considering the representation of war from a distance—through the filter of a lens—I offer in what follows a brief theoretical genealogy linking trauma and war photography, a linkage I have tried to make here via Junod and Richard Drew, but which needs perhaps more emphasis on the role of the witness in the following section on Abu Ghraib torture photography. By integrating this final section on torture photos, I aim to extend my argument about what it means not to want to look, to reject such painful images as voyeuristic, when perhaps we also are guilty of the voyeuristic impulse.
- 31 Susan Sontag writes about the role of the secondary witness in the opening of her 2003 book, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, by reflecting on the opening pages of another war treatise: Virginia Woolf’s *Three Guineas*, published 65 years earlier. Both writers ultimately consider the causes and effects of war and, particularly, the effects of photographs of war on the “privileged” and “merely safe” invited to look at them. For Woolf, and for Sontag after her, war photos have an equal chance at preventing wars as they do of inciting them; and while their gruesome nature may invite people to look, even their documentary style cannot promise that viewers could grasp the reality they seek to depict (Sontag 3-7). Such is the challenge of photography, along with other types of ostensibly transparent representation such as the documentary, court transcripts, journalism, and testimony that beg the question: How does one fully capture the truth of a traumatic event? Is it even possible, for photos of torture, for example, to serve as realistic representations—despite what Michael Rothberg (2000) refers to as “the demands of extremity” (Rothberg 14)?

- 32 In their interest in “traumatic realism”, Rothberg and Sontag both to some extent take their lead from Marianne Hirsch, who argued in 1997 that the myth or image of a particular group, through photography alone, “dominates lived reality, even though it can exist in conflict with it and can be ruled by different interests. It survives by means of its narrative and imaginary power, a power that photographs have a particular capacity to tap” (Hirsch 8). Hirsch’s language here helps reinforce the relationship between testimony (in the form of photography, court transcripts, survivor accounts) and the trauma it seeks to represent. For Hirsch, photography in particular has the capacity to tap an imaginative power—a power to testify to trauma—where other modes of representation may fail.
- 33 What would it mean, however, for the torture photographs of Abu Ghraib to have tapped this “imaginary power”—a narrative of the U.S. foreign policy—that bears on our identities as bystanders who are, to borrow from Sontag, “privileged” and “merely safe”, and might otherwise choose to ignore a conflict that takes place half a world away? To what extent do these photos simultaneously invoke and complicate American fantasies about the preternatural professionalism of our soldiers, and about our own willingness to embrace torture?
- 34 What might be more troubling than even considering these torture photos as singular moments in the history of U.S. foreign policy, then, is that they are just one of many types of documents testifying to the traumatic legacy of the United States. As Walter Kalaidjian has argued:
- What makes these photographs such a “different thing”—as Rumsfeld’s testimony has it—is, arguably, not just the impact of such literal images of death and bodily violation, but also the return of a certain specter of modernism haunting the photographic archive of American foreign policy. The gleeful and thoroughly banal sadism captured in the thumbs-up sign that Graner and Harman flash beside a desecrated and unburied corpse [...] surely conjures the phantoms of atrocity witness in the pictorial record and survivor accounts of the Holocaust and other modern genocide. (Kalaidjian 195)
- On this argument, what is different about the Abu Ghraib pictures is that they frame not just the present, but also America’s violent past, and they present the violence of America’s foreign policy as a traumatic repetition with no end to the cycle.
- 35 Such awareness on Kalaidjian’s behalf crystallizes how contemporary “art”—in all of its variations—has the potential both to convey and problematize, paradoxically, those historical atrocities of the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries that we have never fully witnessed in the first place. In his epilogue considering the emergence of photographs from Abu Ghraib, Kalaidjian underscores the significance of his project, a book focused on what he refers to as “The Edge of Modernism”, when he explains that:
- Trauma, as we have seen, plays havoc with time. Haunting the new millennium, the legacy of loss bequeathed by modernity makes an uncanny claim upon the present. Modern genocide, total war, as well as modernism’s unresolved social antagonisms of race, class, and sexual difference remain charged with the traumatic affect of histories that, because they cannot be fully known, are subject to endless repetition. (189)
- 36 For Kalaidjian, poetry offers a crucial response to atrocity in its ability to offer one way out of this cycle of endless repetition. This repetition is further exemplified by what Caruth has recently suggested in “Confronting Political Trauma”, as wars waged in the name of American patriotism and spurred on by the government’s refusal to acknowledge

the injustice of the previous generation. Taking the lead from Kalaidjian, and influenced as I am by Hirsch and other theorists of photography, we might say the same about photographs because of the claim they make on the viewer-turned-witness.

- 37 Kalaidjian argues that because of the difficulty in confronting these cultural artifacts, our reaction becomes a “necessarily belated [...] response to what otherwise goes missing from the conventional regimes of representation regulating the ‘breaking news’ of the day” (196). Kalaidjian’s use of “regime” in the book’s epilogue about Abu Ghraib is telling here, as it acknowledges that more alienating representations of trauma may reject the limiting conventions of “everyday” language, in favor of offering important commentary on the actions of dictatorial regimes.
- 38 The “thumbs-up” photos of Graner and Sabrina Harman, in particular, might offer a special case in the proliferation of photos that first came to light in 2004, with several more following in 2008: the “thumbs-up” sign at once signifies as an “indexical sign of victory” as Kalaidjian would have it (195); but it is also a gesture of the carefree American adolescent corroborated by Harman’s fresh and smiling face. As Gourevitch and Morris reported in 2008 of Harman’s photography, it was originally explained away as something soldiers do to show mastery, desensitized as they are to dead bodies all around them. However, there seems to be something else here, too: “The pictures of Harman and Graner with the corpse may have been taken as a gag—‘for personal use’, as Frederick said of his photos of Gilligan—but they are starkly at odds with Harman’s claim of a larger documentary purpose. By contrast, her grisly, intimate portraits of the corpse convey her shock at discovering its wreckage” (Gourevitch and Morris 10).
- 39 This understanding of the photography that emerged out of Abu Ghraib in terms of their “grisly” nature and shock value seems to work against many of the theorizations that have emerged about photography in the wake of 9/11. Traditionally, the power of the photograph lies in its ability to step in—to record history anew—when imagination fails. However, the Abu Ghraib photographs present a very specific problem: they testify to a reality that ordinary Americans may want to deny; they embody a memory function in their own right—even though this particular historical moment is one that we may choose to forget. If anything, they require the viewer not simply to bear witness to the event of torture, but also to put herself into the photograph—not only to pay homage to the tortured victims, but also to see herself in the place of the torturers making the thumbs-up sign as well.
- 40 In her now famous work, *Family Frames*, Hirsch explains how the foundation for her ideas comes, in part, from Roland Barthes, particularly his theorization of the photograph in *Camera Lucida*, photographs that embody what he calls *punctum*: “that prick and shock of recognition, that unique and very personal response to the photographic detail that attracts and repels us at the same time” (Hirsch 4). For Barthes: “*Punctum* is also a stick, speck, cut, little hole—and also a case of the dice. A photograph’s *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is also poignant to me)” (qtd. in Hirsch 4). Barthes’s association of the effect of looking at traumatizing photographs with the very tangible “prick” or “bruise” helps articulate what, precisely, is at stake when looking at a photograph—particularly the photographs of Abu Ghraib that capture such traumatic and traumatizing images in the first place.
- 41 The photograph generally, and also, I would argue, the particular photographic images chronicling the circumstances at Abu Ghraib are “prickly” in that they rely on the

figurative quality of *prosopopoeia*: “the ‘thou’ we accord a body of writing” (Chase 70); the “hallucinatory” power of art to “make the invisible visible” (de Man 49). It is this speaking “face”—the faces in the photographs looking back at us—one dead, the other living, that demands a witness and represents the residue of personal and collective guilt. In this way, the photographs of Abu Ghraib seem to demand that we confront such figures; but the reality is that we cannot possibly confront them adequately.

- 42 What’s at stake here, particularly in confronting the photographs of Abu Ghraib, is the simultaneous demand to recognize the torture, on the one hand, and the warning against mastering the knowledge of what the photographs record—because, in that mastery, comes a comfort and forgetting. A similar point could be made with regard to Junod’s interest in Drew’s falling man photograph, as he seemed to want to master a certain kind of knowledge related to the photograph—such as the man’s identity—but ultimately was satisfied with not knowing.
- 43 The Abu Ghraib photographs not only require us to face the figures of those who died under torturous circumstances, but also require us to face the killers themselves—who turn out to be, unlike the perpetrators of 9/11, very like ourselves. For Hirsch, then, the “arresting anti-narrative wound of the *punctum*” helps understand photographic works as ethical not simply in their demand that we confront the radical otherness of the image looking back at us, but also in their critical rejection of more dominant cultural models for grief. What these photographs demand of the ethical witness is a full attempt at recognizing the complexity of the situation, despite the psychically wounding effects of these photographs that make us want to turn away.
- 44 But they also say something important about the process of grieving in the twenty-first century: whereas dominant models of grief such as the traditional elegy or funereal procession help witnesses process loss by offering solace, these photographs require viewers to process loss through the less traditional “anti-narrative wound” (Ramazani iii-ix). After viewing these photos, there is no way to feel better about the American soldiers’ involvement in Abu Ghraib and the possible complicity of American citizens; there is no way one can look away—both in the literal sense of turning one’s face from the photograph, but also in the figurative sense of feigning ignorance or indifference.
- 45 In keeping with this idea of rejecting dominant cultural models for grief embodied by the funeral, wake, elegy (or any other healing response to mourning), I would like to propose here that the photographs of Abu Ghraib are singular in their refusal of reparation—either in the sense that they reject the idea that “something can be learned” from this moment, or that they fail to comfort us in their mere presence as historical artifact. Jahan Ramazani articulates this anti-reparative tendency in the modern elegy as an attempt to “reopen the wounds of loss”. We could say the same about these modern photographs in the twenty-first century given the discomfort they have elicited around the world.
- 46 This effect occurs, in part, because the dual nature of this photograph, and other photographs taken by Harman featuring cloaked corpses and naked bodies not only point back to the traumatic legacy of the U.S. and its similar involvement in Vietnam, the lynchings in the U.S. South, and the U.S. failure to intervene in the Holocaust until it was too late; they also point a finger at the viewer of the photograph, to ask what “evil”—to borrow from Philip Zimbardo, author of *The Lucifer Effect*—is lurking in all of us, stressed as we could be under the duress of war. In fact, Zimbardo was called as an expert witness in the defense of an Abu Ghraib guard and gained access to many photographs of abuse for the case. According to Zimbardo: “The college students role-playing guards and

prisoners in a mock prison experiment conducted at Stanford University in the summer of 1971 were mirrored in the real guards and real prison in the Iraq of 2003" (Zimbardo 20).

47 Such a take on these photographs seems very different than the way such authors as E. Ann Kaplan and Marianne Hirsch "frame" the U.S. photographic responses to 9/11 and 9/11 related wars in Judith Greenberg's collection, *Trauma at Home: After 9/11*. Perhaps what makes these prior reflections so reparative is that the volume appeared in 2003, a full year before the first Abu Ghraib photographs came to light.

48 As Kaplan reflects: "Did we hope that pictures of the towers could undo the trauma of their collapse or that they would write over the haunting, unforgettable scenes of the plane driving straight into the second tower and of the bright flames bursting forth into the pure blue sky—scenes that have returned again and again into nightmares?" (Kaplan 98).

49 Even Kaplan's language here is poetic—the vivid language, paradoxically, beautifies a scene that Kaplan ultimately admits causes nightmares. However, the key words here are "hope" and "undo"—as if the photos of 9/11 themselves had a kind of restorative power.

50 The same tendency is found in the 9/11 photography writing of Hirsch (2003), who argues:

But perhaps the flatness of the images is precisely what we need. The photographs might enable us to look at an indescribable event, to make it manageable, frame it, bring it home, show it to friends, make it small enough to fit into our living rooms or even our pockets. Flattening and miniaturizing death is a coping strategy—we look at the remains of the towers, at the missing people, through the viewfinder rather than straight on. (Hirsch 77)

Here, too, Hirsch represents these photographic images as necessary for making the trauma of 9/11 "manageable", a "coping strategy". Hirsch continues by suggesting that "[t]hrough photography I can become a witness in my own right, a witness not so much of the event as of its aftermath, a witness to the other acts of witness all around me [...]. The proliferation of books, photographic displays, and exhibitions allows everyone to share in this act of witnessing and working through" (Hirsch 78-79).

51 For Hirsch and Kaplan, then, the proliferation of photographs related to 9/11 helps with the act of witnessing, sometimes a second time, with new perspective, a traumatic event. Crucially, participating in the scene through photography aids with a kind of "working through", a phrase now associated with Sigmund Freud, who privileges in his canonical paper "working through" as a mourning function over "acting out", since working through explains how healing or reparation would be possible.

52 However, these Abu Ghraib photographs that began emerging a year after Greenberg's groundbreaking collection are fundamentally different in that they refuse closure or working through. Instead, they point up a kind of guilt that most Americans would perhaps want to deny. What nearly every article about the torture photos from Abu Ghraib would state, by way of warning, is that the photos are graphic in nature, traumatizing in their very gore and realism. However, there is something else going on here, too: another traumatic shock comes from the recognition that the American faces looking back at us could very easily be us, how eagerly we may have responded the same way under similar circumstances. What would it mean to think of ourselves, the witnesses to these atrocities, as fully capable of perpetuating the same horrific treatment, or simply the innocent posturing that has now become the legacy of U.S. practices at Abu Ghraib?

- 53 The faces offering the “thumbs-up” sign in the torture photographs are also the Americans of the past who turned a blind eye to previous atrocities; and they are the individuals we *are* in the present time who, as Hannah Arendt, Stanley Milgram, and, now, Philip Zimbardo have explained, have the banal capacity for evil ourselves if it is demanded of us. After reminding her audience of images from the Spanish Civil War, Woolf wondered in the 1930s whether war photos have the potential to make war real for us, to bring the war home by asking: “whether when we look at the same photographs we feel the same things” (qtd. in Sontag 4). As the Abu Ghraib photos of Harman show, the war is closer than we like to believe—it is at our fingertips, writ large in the blink of an eye.
- 54 But this personal connection, I would argue, is crucial to a conscious refusal to forget. To return to the Richard Drew example, when Paula Zahn for CNN asked Drew how he feels about taking the photographs of the people falling, he responds:
- I look at it in that there are images that we have seen in our newspapers—we’ve seen AP photographer’s Nick Ut’s picture of the little girl running from the napalm in Vietnam, we’ve seen AP photographer Eddie Adams’s picture of the Saigon police chief executing the man on the street; then we see the AP photographer John Filo’s picture of the girl bending over the fallen student at Kent State. Those are all images that we all thought we didn’t want to see, and there was controversy about them all, but it’s part of the story. You have to tell the story. You can’t just turn your head and stop.
- 55 By extension, the same can be said for his photograph of the Falling Man and the Abu Ghraib torture photos. As Sontag has argued: “The photographs are a means of making ‘real’ (or ‘more real’) matters that the privileged and the merely safe might prefer to ignore” (Sontag 7). You can’t just turn your head and stop looking. These photos were made to be *seen*.

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NOTES

1. By “witness” Junod here means “testimony”.

ABSTRACTS

With a focus on Tom Junod's *Esquire* article of 2003, Henry Singer's 2006 documentary *9/11: The Falling Man*, and the Abu Ghraib photography that appeared as a generic attempt to understand the treatment of that prison's detainees, this essay details the powerful reactions against these images as evidence for a broader claim about the relationship between traumatic events and representation. By juxtaposing the reception of Richard Drew's photograph of the falling man with U.S. soldiers' photographs of torture at Abu Ghraib, this essay seeks to articulate the vexed nature of reading a photograph linked inextricably with trauma and the claim it makes on the viewer.

En s'appuyant sur l'article de Tom Junod paru dans *Esquire* en 2003, sur le documentaire de Henry Singer datant de 2006 et intitulé *9/11: The Falling Man (Le 11 septembre : l'homme qui tombe)*, et sur les photographies d'Abu Ghraib apparues dans le cadre d'une tentative plus large pour comprendre la façon dont les prisonniers étaient traités dans cette prison en particulier, le présent article détaille les réactions très vives d'opposition qu'ont suscitées ces images, réactions qui étayaient un argument plus général sur les rapports complexes entre les événements traumatiques et leur représentation. En juxtaposant la façon dont la photo de l'homme qui tombe prise par Richard Drew a été accueillie et les photos des tortures commises par les soldats américains à Abu Ghraib, cet article cherche à articuler la nature problématique de la lecture d'une photographie liée à un traumatisme et l'effort particulier que cette lecture requiert de la part de celui qui la regarde.

INDEX

Mots-clés: esthétique, éthique, chute, journalisme, photographie, témoignage, traumatisme

Keywords: aesthetics, ethics, fall, journalism, photography, trauma, witness

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