

9/11¹

Walter Benjamin makes a striking observation about the capacity of certain dramatic events to act like a flash bulb and imprint particular architectural environments on the 'photosensitive' plate of our minds. It is as though buildings sink into the recesses of our consciousness as a form of background landscape – almost unnoticeable because of their very familiarity — unless some event happens there that leaves them indelibly imprinted on our minds, such as a tragic accident or a death in the family.

'Anyone can observe that the duration for which we are exposed to impressions has no bearing on their fate in memory. Nothing prevents us keeping rooms in which we have spent twenty-four hours or less clearly in our memory, and forgetting others in which we have passed months. It is not, therefore, due to insufficient exposure if no image appears on the plate of remembrance. More frequent, perhaps, are the cases when the half-light of habit denies the plate the necessary light for years, until one day from an alien source it flashes as if from burning magnesium powder, and now a snapshot transfixes the room's image on the plate. Nor is this very mysterious, since such moments of sudden illumination are at the same time moments when we are beside ourselves, and, while our waking, habitual, everyday self is involved actively or passively in what is happening, our deeper self rests in another place and is touched by the shock, as is the little heap of magnesium powder by the flame of the match.'²

The events of 11 September seem to have had a very similar effect on the twin towers of the World Trade Center.³ The twin towers had been a prominent part of the familiar New York skyline, but they remained somewhat anonymous. This was in part a result of their architecture. Although clearly the tallest buildings in New York, the twin towers were relatively featureless, and, as individual buildings, did not seem to capture the public imagination as did the Empire States building with its iconic associations with King Kong, or the Chrysler building with its splendid art deco ornamentation. They were, in Rem Koolhaas's terms, a perfect example of the lessons of 'Manhattanism' unlearned.⁴ The exteriors of Manhattan skyscrapers, which had once conveyed so vividly their rich and diverse occupancy, had become increasingly homogenised, so that they concealed that diversity. Indeed the deep load-bearing mullions of the twin towers, designed — or so it was thought — to withstand the impact of a 747 jet,

¹This paper is dedicated to the memory of those who lost their lives in the tragic events of 11 September. I myself visited the World Trade Center on 9 September. That same day I flew from JFK to LAX on American Airlines, on the same route and with the same carrier as a flight that was to crash into the Pentagon some 36 hours later. I cannot help but feel that some of those who were working at the World Trade Center while I was there, or who staffed my flight may not have survived 11 September. At any rate I feel sure that those individuals, if they did not perish themselves, must have known colleagues who would have done.

²Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, London: Verso, 1979, pp. 342-3.

³There is an extensive body of literature on the attacks of the twin towers on 11 September 2001. Some of the most theoretically informed analyses include: Noam Chomsky, *9-11*, New York: Seven Stories, 2001; Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!*, London: Verso, 2002; Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, London: Verso, 2002; Paul Virilio, *Ground Zero*, London: Verso, 2002.

⁴Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1994, p. 291.

and also to allow the interiors to be column free, helped both to obscure any impression of what was going on inside the buildings, and also to obscure the view out.⁵

Moreover, through their sheer scale the twin towers were an example of a radical approach to urbanism, the ultimate response to Le Corbusier's critique of New York skyscrapers, which he criticised for being too small and too numerous. In their architectural language the towers were reportedly inspired by the minimalism of Mies van der Rohe, but somehow lacked any of his sensitivity.⁶ And certainly their architect, Minoru Yamasaki, did not have a reputation, following the demolition in 1972 of his Pruitt-Iggoe housing project, which had failed on sociological grounds, of being the most sensitive of designers. Eric Darton goes even so far as to describe their aesthetic impression as 'terroristic', and compares the insensitivity of the design and what they represented in sociological terms to the insensitivity of those terrorists who attempted to blow up the twin towers in 1993.⁷ Not everyone took such a negative stance. Indeed the towers had their vociferous supporters, such as Ada Louise Huxtable, and yet it would probably be fair to say that they remained curiously anonymous within the eyes of the general public.

Of course, the towers played an important role in the social fabric of New York — any vast structure that accommodates so much office space cannot fail to do so — and, on occasions, had caught the world's imagination, such as when French high-wire artist, Philippe Petit, walked on his tightrope between the two towers in 1974. Moreover, there were a number of high profile political scandals associated with their planning and construction.⁸ Yet their symbolic presence did not match their physical presence. Tourist shops, crammed full of miniature replicas of the Statue of Liberty and the Empire States building, offered relatively few models of the World Trade Center. It was as though the primary role of the twin towers lay in providing viewing platforms and vast receptacles of office accommodation, whilst contributing at a collective level to the dramatic Manhattan skyline.

All this changed, however, as a result of what happened on 11 September. The twin towers of the World Trade Center have been suddenly etched on to the minds of the world. They have taken on a different status, and lost any anonymity which they may once have possessed. Through their very destruction they have become recognisable and identifiable objects, symbols of the dangers of terrorism.

⁵As Darton comments: 'From inside the WTC, its closely spaced columns produce odd vertical window forms that feel prisonlike and chop the expected panorama into dissociative strips. . . From the outside, under most conditions, it is hard to tell whether, above plaza level, the towers have windows at all.' Eric Darton, *Divided We Stand: A Biography of New York's World Trade Center*, New York: Basic Books, 1999, p. 129.

⁶See Darton, p. 115.

⁷'What the trade center's design prefigured has since become an operative mode: an all-consuming global market, polarized wealth and resources and fragmenting cultural life into a thousand unpredictable mutations. When this myriad of seemingly random energies, multiplying autonomously, shows its destructive face, we experience it as terrorism.' Darton, p. 130.

⁸For a relatively comprehensive account of the twin towers' history, see Eric Darton, *Divided We Stand: A Biography of New York's World Trade Center*, New York: Basic Books, 1999.

I want to argue, however, that these events did more than just transform the twin towers from tourist observation platforms and office blocks into icons of a new world order. I want to argue that the destruction of these towers has had a radical impact on the American psyche, and that it is against the backdrop of the now absent twin towers that a new sense of American national identity seems to have been forged. In so doing I hope to elucidate certain general principles about the potential of buildings and monuments — through either their presence or their absence — to symbolise a set of common values and define a collective sense of identity.

Identification

How, then, can a building — or rather newsreel images of the destruction of a building and its associated events — come to serve as a mechanism of identification for an American sense of self? Indeed, how can any building play a role in the formation of an identity? The answers perhaps lie in exploring how identity itself is constituted through processes of identification, and inquiring as to whether the visual domain has any influence in this process. Here it would be profitable to turn to psychoanalytic theory. For psychoanalytic theorists view identity as a consequence of identification. Identity, as Freud once remarked, is like a graveyard of lost loves and former identifications. Moreover, psychoanalytic theorists would argue that the image plays a crucial role in any moment of identification. Indeed, for them, identity is forged out of an interaction with the visual domain. But how exactly does this identification take place?

One of the key pieces of writing on the formation of identity is Jacques Lacan's essay on the 'mirror stage', where he famously describes the moment when a child recognises its own reflection in a mirror.⁹ From this moment the child begins to formulate a coherent sense of self and to develop some coordination by identifying with its own reflected image. The child recognises itself as an object in a world of objects, and, having established its own autonomy, is able to forge identifications with other persons and objects. It is this moment, then, that serves both to consolidate the identity of the individual, and also to set the scene for all subsequent identifications.¹⁰

Lacan's insightful essay on this crucial stage in the development of the individual has become a seminal text within psychoanalytic theories of identification. But although his model of identification premised

⁹'This event can take place, as we have known since Baldwin, from the age of six months, and its repetition has often made me reflect upon the startling spectacle of the infant in front of the mirror. Unable as yet to walk, or even to stand up, and held tightly as he is by some support, human or artificial. . . he nevertheless overcomes, in a flutter of jubilant activity, the obstructions of his support and, fixing his attitude in a slightly leaning forward position, in order to hold it in his gaze, brings back an instantaneous aspect of the image.' Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: Norton, 1977, p. 1-2/93-94.

¹⁰For further discussion of the mirror stage, see Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, London: Routledge, 1996, pp. 114-116.

on the mirror stage is clearly a visual one, Lacan does little to extend its application into the visual arts.¹¹ Yet the potential is obvious. The model presupposes a spatialised sense of visual awareness grounded in the notion of the image. Of the visual arts it is film theory, in particular, rather than architectural theory, that has developed a framework for exploring these possibilities. It is therefore to the work of Christian Metz on film theory that we might turn to understand the mechanism by which identification takes place in the aesthetic realm.¹²

What Lacan's model seems to suggest is that identification is always specular. It is always a question of recognising — or mis-recognising — oneself in the other. Christian Metz outlines a series of mirrorings that occur within the cinema. The screen, as site of the imaginary, replicates the real as a form of mirror. But at the same time it never reflects the viewer's own body. On certain occasions, then, the mirror turns into a transparent window. It may therefore be contrasted with Lacan's notion of the mirror-stage. Yet viewing a film depends upon the mirror stage. The spectator must have recognised him or herself already as an object within a world of objects, and can therefore accept his or her absence from the actual screen.

This produces a series of identifications with actors in the film, and so too with the camera itself. In the former case, by being absent from the screen the spectator does not identify with him or herself as an object, but rather with 'objects which are there without him.'¹³ Here the screen patently does not serve as a mirror. But from the point of view of the spectator as viewing subject there is indeed a form of mirroring in that the 'perceived-imaginary material' is 'deposited' in the viewer as if on to a second screen: 'In other words, the spectator *identifies with himself*, with himself as a pure act of perception (as wakefulness, alertness): as the condition of possibility of the perceived and hence as a kind of transcendental subject, which comes before every *there is*.'¹⁴ In the latter case, the identification is with the camera, since the spectator identifies with him or herself as viewing subject, 'the spectator can do no other than identify with the camera, too, which has looked before him at what he is now looking at. . .'¹⁵ More precisely, perhaps, there is an identification between the movement of the spectator's head and the movement of the camera.

What we encounter here is the 'double-movement' of vision — its projective and introjective nature. As one casts one's eye (in a projective fashion) one receives and absorbs (in an introjective fashion) what has been 'illuminated', as it were. Consciousness therefore serves, in Metz's terminology, as a 'recording surface':

¹¹See, however, the chapter 'What is a Picture?' in Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, London: Penguin, 1991, p p. 105-119.

¹²Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, Celia Britton, Annyl Williams, Ben Brewster and Alfred Guzzetti (trans.), London: Macmillan, 1982.

¹³Metz, p. 48.

¹⁴Metz, p. 49.

¹⁵Metz, p. 49.

There are two cones in the auditorium: one ending on the screen and starting both in the projection box and in the spectator's vision insofar as it is projective, and one starting from the screen and 'deposited' in the spectator's perception insofar as it is introjective (on the retina, a second screen). When I say that 'I see' the film, I mean thereby a unique mixture of two contrary currents: the film is what I receive, and it is also what I release. . . Releasing it, I am the projector, receiving it, I am the screen; in both these figures together, I am the camera, which points and yet records.¹⁶

The spectator is both 'screen' and 'projector'. Likewise the spectator is both absent from the screen 'as perceived', but so too present there 'as perceiver'. 'At every moment,' Metz notes, 'I am in the film by my look's caress.'¹⁷ What happens, then, in the process of viewing is a series of mirror-effects. And through these mirrorings — the recognition of the self in the other, the recognition of the other in the self — a sense of identification emerges. There are, in other words, a series of specular identifications that take place in viewing a film, identifications that are connected with the mirror as the original site of primary identification. What we have in the case of the cinema, however, is a combination of what Metz calls 'primary cinematic identifications' with one's own look (as distinct from 'primary identifications' as such, which they cannot be for 'identification with one's own look is secondary with respect to the mirror'), and secondary or tertiary 'cinematic identifications' with characters.

Architectural Identifications

We might attempt to develop Metz's theory for an architectural discourse by looking for equivalent processes of 'mirrorings' that take place within a specific architectural environment. These processes would themselves be dependent on the 'introjection' of the external world into the self, and the 'projection' of the self on to the external world, such that there is an equivalence — the one 'reflects' the other — and identification may take place.

The sense of 'introjection', of the absorption of the external world, described by Metz, is echoed within an architectural context in the work of Walter Benjamin, who presents the mind as a kind of *camera obscura*, a photosensitive 'plate' on to which certain interiors are etched in moments of illumination. Benjamin, however, adds a crucial gloss to these processes of introjection and projection:

¹⁶Metz, p. 51.

¹⁷Metz, p. 54.

'Buildings are appropriated in a twofold manner: by use and by perception — or rather, by touch and sight. Such appropriation cannot be understood in terms of the attentive concentration of a tourist before a famous building. On the tactile side there is no counterpart to contemplation on the optical side. Tactile appropriation is accomplished not so much by attention as by habit. As regards architecture, habit determines to a large extent even optical reception. The latter, too, occurs much less through rapt attention than by noticing the object in incidental fashion. This mode of appropriation, developed with reference to architecture, in certain circumstances acquires canonical value. For the tasks which face the human apparatus of perception at the turning points of history cannot be solved by optical means, that is, by contemplation, alone. They are mastered gradually by habit, under the guidance of tactile appropriation.'¹⁸

In Benjamin's terms, buildings are 'appropriated'. They are introjected — absorbed within the psyche not just through vision, but also through touch. We should perhaps extend this to include the full register of senses. Moreover, for Benjamin, these 'appropriations' are reinforced by habit. Here memory plays a crucial role. Over a period of time the sensory impulses leave their mark, traces of their reception. These traces are themselves not forgotten, but constitute a type of archive of memorised sensory experiences. Indeed life itself can be seen to be conditioned by these impulses, such that it is these that constitute our background horizon of experience.

The second part of the 'double-movement of vision' in Metz's terminology is the projective one. This remains a crucial aspect of the process of identification which involves a two fold mechanism of grafting symbolic meaning onto an object and then reading oneself into that object, and seeing one's values reflected in it. The environment must therefore serve as a kind of 'screen' onto which we would 'project' our own meaning, and into which we would 'read' ourselves. We need to project something of ourselves on to the other in order to recognise — or *mis*recognise — ourselves in the other. This reveals the subtlety of a psychoanalytic account of identity, in which the mechanisms of projection and introjection work in tandem, in a model that replicates the operations of the cinema, in which we become the 'projectors' and the environment the 'screen'.

This projection of personality or intentionality onto an object is one that is overlooked by much mainstream architectural commentary. The investment of meaning not only explains the creative potential of seeing oneself in the other in moments of identification, but it also illuminates the problematic foundation of any discourse of architecture and politics that, as it were, attempts to 'project' a range of political values on to an edifice as though they were a property of that edifice. This would further extend to the question of memorials, and serve to undermine the naïve claims that buildings can be in and of themselves the 'sites of memory'. What I would claim is that buildings, monuments, or indeed any form of memorial, are essentially 'inert'. As Fredric Jameson observes, they

¹⁸Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, London: Fontana, 1992, p. 233.

do not have any inherent meaning. They need to be 'invested' with meaning.¹⁹ They have to be inscribed within an allegorical narrative that gives them their meaning. This meaning is simply 'projected' on to them.

If we are to look for a model of the way in which content might be understood as a kind of 'projection' we could consider the work of the Polish-Canadian public artist, Krzysztof Wodiczko, who literally projects politically loaded images on to buildings as a commentary on the politics of use of those buildings. The projection of the swastika onto the building raises some interesting questions about the relationship between buildings and politics. His projection of 'content-laden' images on to monuments and buildings echoes the process by which human beings 'project' their own readings onto them, as though onto some blank cinematographic screen.²⁰ In the hermeneutic moment one tends to read that projection as though it were a property of the object.

Identification with a particular place could therefore be perceived as a mirroring between the subject and the environment over time. Here we might understand the subject, in Metz's terms, as both 'screen' and 'projector'. For in moments of identification we effectively see ourselves in objects with which we have become familiar. At the same time we have introjected them into ourselves. The registering of impulses as a kind of introjection leads to one type of 'reflection' — the recognition of the other in the self. Meanwhile the projection of the self on to the external world leads to a second type of 'reflection' — the recognition of the self in the other. The recognition of the 'other' in the self or the self in the 'other' are — in effect — two sides of the same coin. In either case what results is a form of mirroring.

From this two-way process a fusing between self and other is achieved. And here we can recognise a second order of mirrorings. For mirrorings occur not only in the engagement between the self and the environment, but also between that engagement and memories of previous engagements. There is an originary experience that is replicated in all subsequent enactments. And in that process of replication there is a reinforcement of the original moment of identification. In this sense habit — as a ritualistic replication of certain experiences — is, as Benjamin observes, precisely that which consolidates the process of identification.

Body Building

¹⁹Fredric Jameson in Neil Leach (ed.), *Rethinking Architecture*, London: Routledge, 1997, pp. 258-59.

²⁰On the work of Krzysztof Wodiczko, see 'Public Projections' and 'A Conversation with Krzysztof Wodiczko', *October*, 38, 3-52.

In principle, then, the processes of introjection and projection may be replicated in our engagement with the built environment. Yet, while Metz's model offers a persuasive account of the processes of identification within the cinema, at first sight it seems to be an inadequate mechanism for dealing with an identification with architecture. Firstly, as Metz himself acknowledges, there is a significant difference between a medium such as film that includes sound, time and movement, and other static, silent media such as photography, sculpture or architecture. Secondly, Metz privileges a sense of identification with the camera or characters within a film rather than the film set or architectural backdrop.

We need to bring into consideration, therefore, an understanding of how identification may take place with a world of architectural objects. The initial potential for this is already established by the fact that, according to Lacan, at the mirror stage humans recognise themselves as *imagos* — as frozen images or statues of themselves. From this point of view it matters little that architecture is primarily static. If individuals recognise themselves as 'frozen' statues, it is no great step for them to recognise themselves as 'frozen' buildings, even though buildings do not possess human features.

The next step would be to acknowledge the potential for individuals not only to identify with characters in a film, but also to identify with 'buildings'. Here one might posit two distinct, yet related, operations: the potential for human beings to see themselves in terms of buildings, and the tendency for them to see buildings in terms of the self. The first operation could be exemplified by the tendency of human beings to respond to the built environment as though it were a reflection of the self — the tendency, for example, to stand up straight in front of an upright building, and so on. Here it must be recognised that the mirror in the mirror stage is not a literal mirror, in the sense that it does not need to reflect our *actual* image. Rather, it acknowledges our capacity to see ourselves in the expressions of others, so that we adjust our behaviour according to their approving or disapproving glances, rather as we adjust our clothes or hair in front of an actual mirror. Nor need there be a literal reflection as in the response of others to our behaviour. We might speak also of the potential for human beings to register the properties of the 'other' — even an expressionless, mute 'other' — and see themselves in terms of those properties. A blank wall may therefore serve as a form of 'mirror', in that we register its straightness, hardness, verticality and so on, and replicate these properties in ourselves.

The second operation would be the capacity for human beings to see buildings *as* the self, to anthropomorphise them, and to incorporate certain proportions or features based on the human body within their designs. To be sure, human beings will always be prone to recreate the world in the own image, such that they inevitably fashion their gods on themselves, and incorporate within their buildings characteristics traceable to the human form. Hence we find, for example, in the drawings of Francesco di Giorgio tell-tale signs of the inscription of human figures in the plans and elevations of buildings. And hence, equally, we find the urge to fashion buildings according to the principles of human proportions.

As Samuel Butler comments, 'Every man's work, whether it be literature or music or architecture or anything else, is always a portrait of himself.'²¹

There are, moreover, numerous examples of architects posing as their buildings.²² In the context of New York we might point, for example, to the parade of architects dressed up as the skyscrapers they designed. In 'Fête Moderne: A Fantasy in Flame and Silver', a ball held in New York in 1931, seven architects lined up posing as their buildings. The centrepiece was William Van Alen dressed up as his design for the Chrysler Building in a dramatic display in which architect and building become interchangeable. Van Alen is the Chrysler Building and the Chrysler Building is Van Alen.²³ This scene has been re-evoked recently in *Vanity Fair* with images of Michael Graves and Peter Eisenman impersonating their buildings.²⁴

The corollary to reading the self as a building is the potential to read buildings as the self. In the context of New York, Salvador Dali's famous 'paranoid' interpretation of the skyscrapers as representations of Milet's *Angelus*, as animated creatures coming alive at sunset 'ready to perform the sexual act' speaks of this opposite moment. It is this image, surely, that inspired the highly anthropomorphised illustration by Madelon Vriesendorp, *Flagrant délit*, in Rem Koolhaas's *Delirious New York*, depicting the Empire States Building and the Chrysler Building in bed together in a state of post-coital bliss, while the other skyscrapers of New York look on from outside in true paranoid fashion.²⁵

New York, for Dali, was not a city of impersonal, rational architecture that Le Corbusier had wanted it to be.²⁶ For Dali despised Le Corbusier, whose 'abject architecture, the Swiss heaviness of which gave

²¹Samuel Butler, quoted in Louis Hellman, *Archi-têtes*, London: Academy, 2000, p. 7. An obvious example of this essentially narcissistic principle is to be found in the series of 'archi-têtes' cartoons by Louis Hellman. These are caricature portraits of famous architects in the manner of Arcimboldo, based on features from their own buildings. Thus the portrait of Le Corbusier, for example, is composed of elements from the plan of his church of Notre-Dame du Haut at Ronchamp. Although these cartoons are clearly fictional they illustrate well the principle that what we create is a reflection of the self, and that a narcissistic urge lies at the base of all artistic creativity.

²²Vitruvius provides us with one of the earliest of these with his story of Dinocrates, who dresses himself up as a model of his own project for Mount Athos in order to present it to Alexander the Great. Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, Morris Hicky Morgan (trans.), New York: Dover, 1960, p. 36.

²³'The entire costume, including the hat, was of silver metal cloth trimmed with black patent leather; the sash and lining were of flame-coloured silk. The cape, puttees and cuffs are of flexible wood, the wood having been selected from trees all over the world. . . The costume was made possible by the use of 'Flexwood', a wall material of a thin veneer of wood with a fabric backing. The costume was designed to represent the Chrysler Building, the characteristic features in the composition being carried out by using the exact facsimile of the top of the building as a headpiece; the vertical and horizontal lines of the tower were carried out by the patent leather bands running up the front and around the sleeves. The cape embodied the design of the first floor elevator doors, using the same woods as were used in the elevator doors themselves, and the front was a replica of the elevator doors on the upper floors of the building. The shoulder ornaments were the eagles' heads appearing at the 61st-floor setback of the building. . .' *Pencil Points*, February 1931, p. 145, quoted in Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1994, p. 129.

²⁴On this see Mary Macleod, 'Everyday and 'Other' Spaces', in Debra Coleman, Elizabeth Danze, Carol Henderson (eds.), *Architecture and Feminism*, Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996, p. 26.

²⁵Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1994, p. 160.

²⁶For a discussion of Le Corbusier's vision for New York see Koolhaas, pp. 246-261.

indigestion to thousands of young architects and artists.²⁷ 'The world,' Dali noted, 'has had enough of logic and rationalism as conceived by Swiss schoolmasters. I have nothing against Swiss bankers or cuckoos, on the contrary, but the country ought to stop exporting architects!'²⁸ The future of architecture, Dali predicted, would be 'soft and hairy'.²⁹ And in contrast to Le Corbusier's 'tidied up', rationalised proposals for rebuilding New York, Dali revelled in its visceral, fleshy forms:

'The poetry of New York does not lie in the pseudo-esthetics of the rectilinear and sterilized rigidity of Rockefeller Center. The poetry of New York is not that of a lamentable frigidaire in which the abominable European esthetes would have liked to shut up the inedible remains of their young and modern plastics! No!

The poetry of New York is old and violent as the world; it is the poetry that has always been. Its strength, like that of all other existing poetry, lies in the most gelatinous and paradoxical aspects of the delirious flesh of its own reality. Each evening the skyscrapers of New York assume the anthropomorphic shapes of multiple gigantic Millet's Angeluses of the tertiary period, motionless and ready to perform the sexual act and to devour one another, like swarms of praying mantes before copulation.'³⁰

Yet within Le Corbusier's architecture there is also an attempt to read the human into the architectural. His inscriptions of the proportions of the Modulor Man into the fabric of his buildings speak of an urge to identify with the tectonic materiality of construction. So too, Yamasaki's declared aim to design the twin towers taking account of the human scale — whether or not he succeeded — signal an intent, at least, to foster a sense of identification with the World Trade Center.

²⁷ Salvador Dali, *The Unspeakable Confessions of Salvador Dali*, Howard Salemson (trans.), London: W H Allen, 1976, p. 229.

²⁸ Dali, *The Unspeakable Confessions*, pp. 229-230.

²⁹ Dali, *The Unspeakable Confessions*, p. 230

³⁰ Dali continues: 'It is the unspent sanguinary desire that illuminates them and makes them all the central heating and the central poetry circulate within their ruginous bone-structure of vegetable diplococcus. The poetry of New York is not serene esthetics; it is seething biology. The poetry of New York is not nickel; it is calves' lungs. And the subways of New York do not run on iron rails; they run on calves' lungs! The poetry of New York is not pseudo-poetry; it is true poetry. The poetry of New York is not mechanical rhythm; the poetry of New York is the lions' roar that awakened me the first morning. The poetry of New York is an organ, Gothic neurosis, nostalgia of the Orient and the Occident, parchment lampshade in the form of musical partition, smoked façade, artificial vampire, artificial armchair. The poetry of New York is Persian digestion, sneezing golden bronze, organ, suction-grip trumpet for death, gums of thighs of glamour girls with hard cowrie-shell vulvas. The poetry of New York is organ, organ, organ of calves' lungs, organ of nationalities, organ of Babel, organ of bad taste, of actuality, organ of virginal and history-less abyss. The poetry of New York is not that of a practical concrete building that scrapes the sky; the poetry of New York is that of a many-piped organ of red ivory — it does not scrape the sky, it resounds in it, and it resounds in it with the compass of the systole and the diastole of the visceral canticles of elementary biology. New York is not prismatic. New York is not white. New York is all round; New York is vivid red. New York is a round pyramid. New York is a ball of flesh a little pointed toward the top, a ball of millennial and crystallized entrails; a monumental ruby in the rough — with the organ-point of its flashes directed toward heaven, somewhat like the form of an inverted heart — before being polished!' Salvador Dali, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dali*, trans. Haakon Chevalier, London: Vision, 1968, pp. 334-336.

Architecture and National Identity

Buildings, then, may be read as the 'self', just as the 'self' can be incorporated into their design. The built environment may therefore serve as a form of 'ground' with which we might identify.³¹ Through this process of identification, identity itself is formulated, as those identifications leave their traces, like tide-marks on the shoreline. We are, according to this argument, the sum total of the places we have visited, lived in, and formed attachments to.

This process of identification may also operate at a group level, spreading like a virus as individuals identify with other individuals and replicate their behaviour, and in so doing forging a collective identity. At the same time, collective identities will always remain 'contested' identities — hybrid, fractured, conflictual. A mediation will therefore operate between the individual and the group behaviour, such the individual may either 'buy into' or reject the dominant trends. An obvious example of a collective sense of identity would be national identity. We might therefore ask what role the built environment comes to play in the forging a sense of national identity.

Lacanian psychoanalytic theory would hold that national identity is based on more than just symbolic identification. National identity is borne of a relationship to a Thing — towards an *incarnation* of Enjoyment, which is structured through fantasy.³² In common everyday terms this 'Thing' might be understood as a 'way of life', a somewhat mysterious practice that remains accessible only to a certain group, and that is consequently always under threat from those that do not belong to that group, and who do not subscribe to the same 'way of thinking'. It may be circumscribed by the various rituals and practices that hold that community together. It emerges out of a common commitment to a 'way of life', and therefore shares certain properties with religion itself, in that its only real base is a 'belief' in or 'commitment' to certain shared values that are themselves no more than 'beliefs'. Like religion, national identity amounts to a 'belief' in a 'belief'. As Slavoj Zizek observes:

'The national Thing exists as long as members of the community believe in it; it is literally an effect of this belief in itself. The structure here is the same as that of the Holy Spirit in Christianity. The Holy Spirit is the community of believers in which Christ lives after his death; to believe in Him is to believe in belief itself — to believe that I am not alone, that I'm a member of the community of believers. I do not need any external proof or confirmation of the truth of my

³¹ Like Metz's 'primary *filmic* identifications' these are 'primary *architectural* identifications', which likewise operates within the overall realm of secondary identification. As such, architectural identifications may prove to temporary, strategic identifications. This is what allows us, for example, to transfer the notion of 'home' from one architectural environment to another.

³² For a discussion of the 'Thing', see Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire VII*, Paris, 1986.

belief: by the mere act of my belief in others' belief, the Holy Spirit is here. In other words, the whole meaning of the Thing consists in the fact that 'it means something' to people.³³

What role, therefore, might architecture play in such a set-up? How might the very material condition of architecture relate to what amounts to little more than an immaterial belief system? The answer, it would seem, lies in understanding how the material world is itself inscribed within an immaterial belief system.

National identity is an essentially fantasy structure. National identity, — in Lacanian terms — cannot be symbolised. It can only be perceived through an alternative symbolic structure. And for this purpose it relies upon the fantasy structure of the homeland, which becomes, as it were, a vicarious vehicle of identification. To quote Renata Salecl:

In the fantasy structure of the homeland, the nation (in the sense of national identification) is the element that cannot be symbolized. The nation is an element within us that is 'more than ourselves,' something that defines us but is at the same time indefinable; we cannot specify what it means, nor can we erase it. . . It is precisely the homeland that fills out the empty space of the nation in the symbolic structure of society. The homeland is the fantasy structure, the scenario, through which society perceives itself as a homogeneous entity.³⁴

The 'myth of the homeland' therefore becomes a mechanism by which society perceives itself. It becomes the embodiment of that which cannot be symbolised. As Žižek puts it: 'The national Cause is ultimately nothing but the way subjects of a given ethnic community organize their enjoyment through national myths.'³⁵ From this perspective, in order for any national identity to be perceived, it must take some form of material expression. National identity is therefore *cathected* on to objects. It must be embodied. Hence objects such as national flags come to embody that identity through a process of symbolic association. While national flags themselves have little inherent meaning, they become physical articulations of a certain 'way of life'. The stars and stripes flag comes to stand less for a register of the number of states in the union than for the way that people live within that union. It comes to embody all that it is to share an American 'way of life'. This principle would extend beyond the American flag to all other icons associated with an American lifestyle — the hamburger, the baseball cap, the shopping mall, turkey at Thanksgiving, and so on — all of which collectively signify what it is to be American.

³³Slavoj Žižek, 'Eastern Europe's Republics of Gilead', *New Left Review*, vol. 183, Sept. – Oct. 1990, p. 53.

³⁴Renata Salecl, 'Ideology of the Mother Nation', in Michael Kennedy (ed.), *Envisioning Eastern Europe*, Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1995, p.94.

³⁵Žižek, p. 53.

Buildings would fall into precisely this category. Potentially they may become the visible embodiment of the invisible, the vehicle through which the fantasy structure of the homeland is represented. There are obvious examples of this when we consider the way in which certain buildings have come to symbolise a city, or even a country, such as the Golden Gate bridge in San Francisco, or the White House in Washington D. C. Indeed the term 'White House' is now used metonymically to refer to the United States presidency. But in terms of national identity it is perhaps more likely that the common, everyday buildings, the familiar streetscapes of our cities and villages, the farmsteads and the landscape of our countryside, will become the embodiment of what we know as 'homeland'.

Such an argument would also account for the tendency to attack an enemy's physical possessions in times of war, to rape and kill its citizens, to plunder their possessions, and to destroy its buildings and bridges. For to attack an enemy's possessions is not only to symbolically attack the enemy itself. It is also to undermine the very Thing around which the enemy has organised its own Enjoyment, and therefore through which it constitutes itself as a community. To attack an enemy's possessions is to attack the very root of its self-definition as a community. It is to attack its very sense of self. Hence one can understand the logic of destroying an enemy's buildings as a vicarious mode of attacking the enemy itself.

It is here, then, that we can understand national identity as an identity which is forged around certain objects. This highlights and exposes the necessary role of the aesthetic in the formation of national identity. The nation, in effect, needs to read itself into objects in the environment in order to articulate that identity. What we have here, then, is a two-way process whereby a nation projects on to the environment certain values as though on to some blank screen, and then reads itself back into that environment, and sees itself symbolically *reflected* in that environment, invested as it now is with certain values. This reveals how, in a narcissistic fashion, national identity comes to be grounded in a reflection of the values assigned to aesthetic objects around us, in which architecture plays an important role.

Identification and Loss

From this we can begin to understand the principle of any identity being forged gradually against a backdrop of familiar architecture, such as the New York skyline. We can also begin to comprehend the tendency to 'anthropomorphise' buildings, and to read them as the self. Human beings can equate themselves with buildings and identify with them. And once a sense of identity has been forged against a backdrop of a certain architectural environment, any damage to that environment will be read as damage to the self.

Here I recall an observation made by the author, Douglas Rushkoff, who witnessed the collapse of the twin towers. He recounted how, as one of the buildings collapsed, he felt as if his whole spine was also collapsing. By extension, one could argue that the attack on the World Trade Center was an attack on the American people as a collective. For although there were a significant number of casualties in this tragic event, the attack struck beyond those suffering as a direct or indirect result of the collapse of the twin towers — those who were killed, and those who were bereaved. The attack struck at the very heart of the American psyche, since it was an assault on one of the very iconic references around which an American ‘way of life’ had been formulated. The attack on the building was equally an attack on American national identity.

This principle could also explain how a new sense of identity could be forged gradually against either the New York skyline now without its twin towers, or even against the very images of their destruction. But it could not account for the sudden reinforcement of a specifically American nationalistic identity that seems to have occurred as a direct result of the events of 11 September. I therefore now want to turn to the role of ‘loss’ as constitutive of any process of forging an identity.

The curious repetitive nature of the coverage of 11 September within the US media where recorded shots of the impact of the aircraft on the twin towers and the subsequent collapse of those towers were repeated over and over again, can be understood within the logic of psychoanalytic theory, in which the compulsion to repeat remains a fundamental, if problematic concern. One interpretation of this compulsion posits repetition as a means of miming and thereby controlling trauma. Just as the child in Freud's famous example of the *fort-da* game seeks to overcome the anxiety of being abandoned by the mother by ‘miming’ the process of departure and return in various games involving the throwing away and ‘retrieving’ a spool attached to a piece of string, so repetition of certain visual traumas can amount to a kind of overcoming of those traumas. Repetition can lead to a normalisation and consequent familiarisation.³⁶

At another level the mere act of trying to comprehend such an incident through the lens of historical precedent — the attack of 11 September as the ‘second Pearl Harbour’ — speaks of a need to conceptualise and frame the incident within a landscape of familiar incidents. Even if such actions can never fully explain these incidents — for Pearl Harbour remains largely incomprehensible to American eyes — it at least offers the potential of figuring the event within some more generalised tradition of terrorism or aggression towards the American people.

But while psychoanalysis might point to mechanisms for overcoming ‘loss’, we should not overlook the importance of ‘loss’ within the process of forging an identity. Psychoanalysis tells us that the

³⁶Repetition, in this sense, would be linked to the death instinct, the urge to discharge tensions and return to a state of oneness, evoking the nirvana of the womb. On this see Richard Boothby, *Death and Desire: Psychoanalytic Theory in Lacan's Return to Freud*, London: Routledge, 1991, pp. 2-3; 74-75; 79.

development of the identity of an individual is founded on the principle of loss. As Julia Kristeva puts it: 'Psychoanalysis identifies and relates as the indispensable condition for autonomy a series of separations: birth, weaning, separation, frustration, castration. Real, imaginary or symbolic, these processes necessarily structure our individuation. Their nonexecution or repudiation leads to psychotic confusion.'³⁷ Such a process is an essential part of the development of the subject. 'It is well known,' Kristeva notes, 'that the so-called "depressive" stage is essential to the child's access to the realm of symbols and linguistic signs. Such a depression — parting sadness as a necessary condition for the representation of any absent thing — reverts to and accompanies our symbolic activities unless its opposite, exaltation, reappropriates them.'³⁸

What this suggests is that loss, whether it is actual or imaginary, or experienced vicariously, can serve to reduce this confusion and reinforce an identity. To some extent these mechanisms are replicated in conventional religion. It is the sacrifice of Christ, Kristeva would argue, that gives Christianity its force. The death of Christ offers Christians a vicarious mechanism of loss. The Christian need not experience that loss directly, but by identifying with Christ's own suffering, may empathise with that suffering, and benefit from the sense of loss that it evokes. In this respect the success of Christianity lies largely in acknowledging the necessity of loss or rupture and recognising that this may be acted out within the realm of the imaginary through an identification with Christ. As Kristeva notes: 'On the basis of that identification, one that is admittedly too anthropological and psychological from the point of view of a strict theology, man is nevertheless provided with a powerful symbolic device to experience death and resurrection even in his physical body, thanks to the strength of the imaginary identification — and of its actual effects — with the absolute Subject (Christ).'³⁹

This introduces a new dynamic into our understanding of identity. For it suggests that identity is built upon a process of identification, but is consolidated as those identifications are severed or come under threat. For identity is ultimately as much about a process of distinction as it is about identification. It is about relating to, but then — importantly — *distinguishing oneself from a given background*. One can therefore understand identity in terms of *gestalt*, as a figure/ground relationship, a sense of separation that cannot be enacted without first establishing a sense of connection.

The notion that identity is based on loss extends to whole communities. In psychoanalytic theory, as the Slovenian theorist, Slavoj Žižek, has observed, even the identity of a nation is based on the 'theft of its Enjoyment'.⁴⁰ If, as noted above, a nation perceives itself in terms of a nation Thing — as a

³⁷Julia Kristeva, 'Holbein's Dead Christ', in Michel Feher (ed.), *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, New York: Zone Books, p. 261.

³⁸Kristeva, p. 261.

³⁹Kristeva, p. 262.

⁴⁰Slavoj Žižek, 'Eastern Europe's Republics of Gilead', *New Left Review*, vol. 183, Sept. – Oct. 1990, pp. 50-62. 'Enjoyment', here, as Žižek notes, is not to be equated with pleasure: 'enjoyment is precisely 'pleasure in unpleasure'; it designates the paradoxical satisfaction procured by a painful encounter with a Thing that perturbs the

community of individuals who organise their Enjoyment around a certain concern — as opposed to those others who fail to appreciate that concern and are therefore a threat to it, the very being of a nation is based on the ‘possession’ of a certain sense of Enjoyment. Or, put another way, that very being of a nation is defined by the threat to its Enjoyment. If the ‘other’ is a threat to the collective self, the potential threat to the Enjoyment of the collective is effectively that which articulates and constitutes the ‘other’ — the way that the ‘other’ organises its own ‘perverse’ Enjoyment. As Žižek observes:

‘What is therefore at stake in ethnic tensions is always the possession of the national Thing. We always impute to the ‘other’ an excessive enjoyment; s/he wants to steal out enjoyment (by ruining our way of life) and/or has access to some secret, perverse enjoyment. In short, what really bothers us about the ‘other’ is the peculiar way it organizes its enjoyment: precisely the surplus, the ‘excess’ that pertains to it — the smell of their food, their ‘noisy’ songs and dances, their strange manners, their attitude to work (in the racist perspective, the ‘other’ is either a workaholic stealing our jobs or an idler living on our labour; and it is quite amusing to note the ease with which one passes from reproaching the other with a refusal of work, to reproaching him for the theft of work).’⁴¹

Not surprisingly, then, a nation is defined most clearly, when it is at war, and its very ‘way of life’ is at risk. Nothing will therefore foster a sense of national identity more than a perceived external threat, whether actual or imaginary. For a threat need not be an actual threat. Just as communities are always ‘imagined’ communities, so too threats to those communities can be ‘imagined’ threats.⁴² But this extends beyond moments of actual conflict to periods of peace when, in order for some sense of national identity to be preserved, a new threat has to be imagined. Thus in Eastern Europe, following the collapse of the Cold War, a replacement threat had to be found. Inevitably according to a logic of the soil, or of the community, it is the outsiders — Jews, gypsies, wanderers, anyone not bound to the soil — who are perceived as a threat, fluid insurgents that cannot be controlled. Jews, therefore, become scapegoats in Eastern Europe even if there are few Jews to be found there any longer.

So too, within an American context, once the Eastern Bloc had collapsed, the communist ‘other’ had to be replaced by an alternative ‘other’. Although references to a ‘crusade’ were soon dropped from official rhetoric, there is ample evidence within popular culture to suggest that 9/11 has begun to foment a significant split between the world’s religions. Postcards of the Statue of Liberty in Crusader outfit, and porcelain models of fire officers in overtly Christian poses in souvenir shops around Ground Zero reinforce the presence of a steel memorial cross on Ground Zero serve to illustrate that, in the

equilibrium of the ‘pleasure principle’. In other words, enjoyment is located ‘beyond the pleasure principle’. [Žižek, p. 52]

⁴¹ Žižek, pp. 53-54.

⁴² On ‘imagined communities’ see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London: Verso, 1983.

eyes of many, this is seen as an attack on the Christian world. The US support of Israel and the high number of Jewish inhabitants in New York itself have ensured that this has been expanded into a unacknowledged opposition between a predominantly Judeo-Christian United States and a Muslim 'other'.

Within a postmodern world in which old-fashion racist values must never be acknowledged, a new p/c racism has evolved — or 'metaracism' as Etienne Balibar has described it — in which ethnic or racial factors cannot be 'named', and yet in which alternative cultural values cannot be accepted.⁴³ Hence the convenient slogan of the 'war on terror', in which freedom fighters of different ideological persuasions can only be construed as 'terrorists'. Such a definition exposes its own fragility when the understandings of 'freedom' and 'terrorism' are culturally defined. For the United States, Muslim freedom fighters are 'terrorists', and the United States 'the land of the free', while for Muslim extremists suicide bombers are volunteer 'martyrs', while the United States is tainted for supporting the 'terrorist' state of Israel. Such arguments are inevitably circular, yet it is worth recalling the title of Stanley Fish's book, *There's no such thing as free speech — and it's a good thing too*.⁴⁴ There is no cultural platform that is not constrained by some ideological imperative, and it is precisely because it is issued from some ideologically freighted platform that a statement has any force. However heavily invested they may be with moral conviction, any definitions of the 'other' must be founded inevitably on a mere belief system — an understanding of what constitutes the self inscribed within its own ideological position.⁴⁵

USA, USA

It is important, then, to recognise that national identity depends on opposition. And the same applies to sport. The recent chants of 'USA, USA' from the debris of Ground Zero in New York — only too reminiscent of the collective chants at a basketball match — reveal how the logic of nationalism follows closely the logic of sport. A team is forged around competition. A nation comes together when under threat. And it is around the victims of this threat — the lost heroes and martyrs — that a kindred sense of identity is forged. Likewise the destruction of the twin towers — the 'sacrifice' of the WTC — seems to have helped to give the United States a new identity. And just as the sacrifice of Christ gave

⁴³On this see Etienne Balibar, 'Is there a "Neo-Racism"?' in Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (eds.), *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, London: Verso, 1991.

⁴⁴Stanley Fish, *There's no such thing as free speech — and it's a good thing too*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

⁴⁵Within an American context, the scripting of films organised around the theme of rescuing American POWs still alive in Vietnam, in films such as *Rambo II: Missing in Action*, becomes a further articulation of a sense of what it is to be American defined in terms of post-Vietnam, anti-Communist sentiment. As Žižek notes: 'The fantasy-scenario supporting it is, however, far more interesting. It is as if down there, far away in the Vietnamese jungle, America lost a precious part of itself, has been deprived of an essential element of its very life-substance, the essence of its potency; and as if this was the ultimate cause of its decline and impotence in the post-Vietnam War, Carter years, so that recapturing this stolen, forgotten part became a component of the Reaganesque reaffirmation of a strong America.' Žižek, pp. 55-56.

others life and provided the basis of Christianity as an identifiable movement, so too around the heroes of the New York City Fire Department there seemed to coalesce a new vision for the United States.

To this extent, we might begin to understand the way in which events of 11 September seem to have been prefigured by Hollywood. It is as though the 'terrorists' were writing the ultimate movie script, a combination of *Towering Inferno*, and any of a number of other disaster movies where the well-being of the average citizen is at threat from some dark force of evil, all performed in front of the camera with the most realistic of special effects. The United States is a nation obsessed with its own disaster movies. We can recognise, however, that over the years these disaster movies have served as a key factor in forging a US imaginary identity. Movies of 'cops versus robbers', just as the now discredited 'cowboys versus Indians', serve only to illustrate the need within the United States to delineate a sense of self in terms of good versus evil. Thus it is that within these terms of reference the identity of the actual protagonists is less important than the roles they play.. The 'goodies', no less than the 'baddies' are relatively interchangeable. They may be substituted at will. It matters less who represents the forces of good and evil, than the fact that those forces exist, in serving as a mechanism for defining the United States as a force of good. Furthermore, the fact that such scenarios might be acted out within the fictive space of cinema serves only to reinforce the role of fantasy in the forging of national identities.

Osama Bin Laden and the al-Qaida network have therefore come to represent the force of evil that now define the United States, along with others in the so-called 'Axis of Evil'. Clearly there is a certain reductive process at work here, in the tendency for bin Laden, like Saddam Hussein, to be perceived as embodying all that is a threat to the United States 'way of life'. (And, indeed, to some extent bin Laden has succeeded, in that throughout American culture a dominant refrain has been that 'things will never be the same' after 11 September. It is not simply that the United States self-perception must, by definition, be in a constant state of process. Rather, a radical realignment not least in terms of security has been engendered by events of that day.) At a straightforward strategic level it is clear that any 'network' — as opposed to a hierarchical system — is not dependent upon a dominant figure. Aside from the fact that it is the mark of a network to be self-supporting and to retain its integrity even if one of its members are removed, bin Laden was clearly not the only figure of authority within the Al-Qaida network, even supposing that he was a central figure in the first place. Rather this attempt to fetishise bin Laden as the figure responsible for the attacks points towards the urge to 'symbolise' the world, and to locate recognisable icons to act as substitutes for and to represent more nebulous concepts.

This thinking is what grounds the attack on the World Trade Center in the first place. The motives for this attack are surely many and various, but presumably one would have been that it was intended as an attack on the values of global capitalism that underpinned Western culture in general and United States society in particular. On the face of it the attack — if indeed it was an attack on global

capitalism — was absurd. To attack a building is hardly to undermine the force of global capitalism. Better to think the logic of a viral network. It is Microsoft, perhaps, which best epitomises the diffuse, dispersed, gaseous nature of power today. Forget the all-seeing panoptical eye of control. Think the deterritorialised, rhizomatic force-fields of credit. Capitalism exerts its power, as Deleuze and Guattari observe, not through the burrows of the molehill, but through the coils of the serpent. Insidious, invisible, capitalism is everywhere and nowhere. The attack on the World Trade Center can therefore be seen as an attack not on capitalism, but on the symbols of capitalism. But just as Al-Qaida's attack on the World Trade Center seems perverse in the context of an attack on Global Capitalism, so too the immediate American response to single out and 'demonise' bin Laden speaks of a parallel urge to symbolise and 'envision' the enemy, as though 'terrorism' could be reduced to so simplified a set of symbols. Both the attacks of 11 September and the subsequent war on terrorism have been 'wars of symbols'. In all aspects of life there is a tendency to reduce the world to a set of identifiable symbols, or at least to icons that constitute temporary, strategic manifestations of a continuous, dynamic process of symbolisation, and this tendency also lies at the heart of the formation of national identity.

What we find, then, in the context of the United States, and, specifically, New York, after 11 September, is that the sense of alterity, which is a necessary precondition of any definition of the self — the distinction of the self from one's surroundings — shifted from being an 'internal' alterity of a society fragmented on race and other lines, to become an 'external' alterity. The sense of opposition that defined identity in the United States shifted from being an internal opposition to an external one. Thus New York seems to have lost its 'meanness', as the external threat transcended all internalized factions to bring a nation together. As a result previously unheard of incidents began to be reported, such as the case of African-American kids helping an old Jewish man to cross the road. A nation came together not under God — for in truth the United States embraces a range of religions — but under an external threat.

This new sense of identity can then be 'projected' on to images of the destruction of the twin towers, and reflected back off them. For the built environment, we must recall, is, in essence, inert. It serves as a 'screen' on to which we 'project' our meaning. Such a 'cinematographic' model of meaning challenges the traditional assumptions about how buildings — or indeed any works of art — can be 'read'. For once the built environment is perceived as 'mute' or 'inert', it replicates the role of the analyst, who remains largely silent, as the analysand talks about his/herself. In other words, in our supposed 'readings' of the built environment, we are in fact not reading the built environment, so much as reading *ourselves*. For the gaze is never innocent. We project a certain 'intentionality' on to the environment as though it were a blank screen. We invest it with something of ourselves. And, as that projection is reflected back off that screen, it serves to reinforce that original sense of intentionality.

Hence one might recognise a certain 'performativity' of the gaze when rereading such events, where performativity is recognised as being a constitutive component of identity — in a contemporary world

of theming and role playing, where we 'are' the roles that we play.⁴⁶ For performativity also operates in modes of perception, such as the 'gaze' which, as it were, 'colour' and frame our view of the world, but — importantly — also constitute it. To be 'black' is to view the world with a 'black' gaze.⁴⁷ But so too what is 'received' by that gaze serves precisely to reinforce that identity. To be American is therefore to gaze at those newsreel images of the destruction of the twin towers with a sense of being American, but equally to gaze repeatedly at those images is to reinforce the sense of what it is to be American.

The destruction of the twin towers and its reception within the media therefore seem to have played a crucial role in the formation of a new US identity — an identity that is, by definition, always in a state of re-negotiation and never totalising. Not only did the 'loss' of the buildings seem to furnish the United States with a mechanism of self-redefinition as a nation, in a manner that echoed a new sense of British identity that seemed to emerge with the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. But the image of the New York skyline without the now absent twin towers may also presents itself as a projective screen on to which that nascent identity might be projected, and in which it might be seen to be reflected.

This is not to limit the forging of identities to the introjection and projection of architectural spaces — for clearly there are other factors — people, gestures and events — that will also contribute to this process. Indeed, human gestures can be far more dominant, in that they can be inscribed within a process of identification more effectively than the built environment. Such gestures may be replicated and serve as clear models of 'good behaviour'. Here one thinks, for example, of the New York City firemen and police officers, many of whom perished in the incident, who served not only as 'forces of good' doing battle with the 'forces of evil', but also later as templates for American forces in their subsequent action in Afghanistan and more recently Iraq.

Nor is this to privilege architectural concerns — the iconic potential of a building to symbolise a set of values — above others in analysing the events of 11 September. Indeed the whole range of human factors — the sheer loss of life, the individual narratives of distress and so on — must be included within any *comprehensive* account of the events of that tragic day. Rather it is to recognise the capacity of the built environment to serve as one of the complex threads that may contribute to notions of national identity, and, in the context of 11 September, to recognise how the destruction of an iconic building — made even more iconic by its destruction — might contribute to a radical realignment and reconfiguration of a sense of United States national identity.

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⁴⁶On this see Neil Leach, 'Belonging', *AA Files* 49, pp. 76-82.

⁴⁷On the 'racing' of the gaze see 'Belonging', p. 78.