

Ideology and Trauma in Allen Coulter's *Remember Me* and the Khaleej  
Times' Anti-smoking Campaign

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## Introduction

The attack on the Twin Towers on September 11th 2001 has evoked a large debate concerning its representation in the media and the impact it had on not only the citizens of America and other Western, “civilized” countries but also on non-Western countries. Not only did the tragedy of 9/11 mean the destruction of a superpower and the deaths of many innocent people, it also introduced the term “war on terrorism” into as much the daily life of modern and innovative New York as the whole of the American nation.<sup>1</sup> The nation suddenly had a “shared enemy”, namely the Al Quaida. This happening was not just a terrorist attack, a massacre, an attack on American society; due to its real-time broadcasts it was also a media event, an event on television, film and in commercials that included many different representations of 9/11. Conspiracy theories followed, reconstruction documentaries including timelines of when which plane hit what building, and a war. 9/11 was a term that covered headlines of multiple newspapers and TV channels. It got blown up to such an extent that every year that followed, the larger part of the week of September 11th would be commemorated by multiple TV channels in Europe, America, Asia and the Arabic world. National Geographic introduced a commemorative collection of 9/11 named *Remembering 9/11* with an unsettling “coming soon” as if the tragedy was something to look forward to.<sup>2</sup> Discovery Channel also put its main focus on 9/11 in that horrific week of September by showing documentaries such as: *The Falling Man*, *9/11 After the Towers Fell* and *Inside 9/11: Zero Hour*. Thus the term “post-9/11” or in mocking cases “you just got 9/11’ed” was introduced into (online) media.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The term “war on terrorism” was declared by the Bush administration not long after the attack on the Twin Towers, opening up a military campaign focused on security and financing concerning terrorism. This term was also addressed to by philosopher Jacques Derrida in his dialogue on the *Philosophy in a Time of Terror* by Giovanna Borradori on October 22, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> This video shows the TV spot of the “9/11 Week” of National Geographic in 2011: <http://vimeo.com/33248159>

<sup>3</sup> An example of “you just got 9/11’ed” is presented on the website of urban dictionary stating the following: “The act of flying/driving something into a building/vehicle and killing people in the process. ‘Dude that drunk guy 9/11’ed my friend last night on the road.....’.” Url: <http://nl.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=9%2F11ed>

Even as the temporal distance from this event grows bigger, representations of, and references to 9/11 still pop up in different media and contexts. The image of the Twin Towers and their collapse seem to have been ingrained in our collective imaginary to an extent that they can still be effectively mobilized for different purposes - aesthetic, commercial, and other. Such figurations of the images of 9/11 are not only found where one would expect them (eg. in films or documentaries that focus specifically on the attacks, or in regular commemorations) but also in surprising, unexpected contexts and at unexpected occasions, as is the case in the objects of study I will address below. Because of the commercial attention focused on the event of 9/11 - that for a fact wasn't apparently more tragic in number of deaths or danger than for example the war in Iraq or the ongoing war on drugs in Mexico - one tends to lose grip on which representation to believe in. I want to focus on these unexpected forms of representations. My thesis will therefore address two such recent unexpected figurations of the image of the Twin Towers, one in a film and one in that of a commercial campaign.

First, I will analyze the film *Remember Me* by Allen Coulter (2010) by addressing the way it turns a standard romantic drama into an unexpected tribute to 9/11. Second, I will focus on the representation of 9/11 in the infamous anti-smoking advertisement, posted in Dubai's largest English newspaper *Khaleej Times* (2007).

Most research on the representation of 9/11 is focused on commemoration, trauma, patriotism and conspiracy theories on terrorism, mainly including research on ideological issues or the politics surrounding 9/11. These topics have been mostly discussed in reference to literature, but less attention has been paid to representation in film or commercials. It is however exactly these two media that address an important discussion in how media intrude the topic of 9/11 into an unexpected genre, and manage to shape this genre to convey a temporal interaction between the two. The viewers of these two media are being confronted with the image of the two towers, an image that reminds them of something that has already taken place. The suggestion is therefore made that in the film, when the protagonist is standing inside one of the Twin Towers, he is doomed. As it is also implied that if the smoker will not stop smoking after having seen the dramatic advertisement, he shall also be doomed. These two images therefore explore a complex interaction between past and future; between the already taken place attack on the Twin Towers and the

continuous confrontation with it in the ongoing future. 9/11 is therefore not merely an event of the past, but is also used to construct a certain image of the future. It is this constant addressing of one and the same event, making it an applicable theme to different media items, that portrays how confused we still are by its unreal unexpectedness. Due to this need for constant repetition, as Derrida states, “for repetition always protects by neutralizing, deadening, distancing a traumatism” (7/8), media tend to apply the event of 9/11 to problematic frames in debatable constructs.<sup>4</sup>

In Chapter 1 I will lay a basis of the debate concerning the representation of 9/11 in the media by addressing theories on representation, framing and the “failed experience” (trauma). Following this I will clarify the position I take on in this thesis by discussing the two cases. These cases contribute to already existing discourses concerning 9/11 in that they at first sight seem two completely contradicting media items or genres to relate to one another, but serve the same purpose: bring across a message or moral lesson. In both cases 9/11 is being used as a catalyst to get a certain message across. This message is a warning, where the image of the towers is being used as a threat to the future. *Remember Me* attempts to bring the message across that one must enjoy every day and every moment, for it may just pass us by in an instant, just as was the case with 9/11.

The advertisement also tries to convey a message, which is the warning of what will happen to smokers if they continue smoking: death. The image of the two towers is used in both cases, serving as warning of what is to come. It is the image of the towers minutes, seconds, before the fall. Concerning the works under discussion I will argue that the theme of (inter)national impact through media representation is a contributing factor to the dramatization (the induced enlargement of a negative effect) of an event. In Chapter 2 I will therefore critique that the romantic drama *Remember Me* creates a bridge between nationalistic and domestic trauma. I will focus on the anti-smoking advertisement in my third chapter. Here I will portray how an advertisement can also form a node in the network of media representations concerning 9/11 and how this exact case conveys problematic meaning to the event of 9/11. I will tackle these cases by focusing on the following research questions:

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<sup>4</sup> Borradori, Giovanna. “9/11 and Global Terrorism: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida”. *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*. 2001. <http://www.press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/066649.html>

How do these cases use the image of the Twin Towers, and do the meanings as constituted by the cases fit into already existing frames of 9/11? Do the objects then form such new meanings that they can be placed in a new set of frameworks?

## Chapter 1

There has been a lot of debate regarding the event of the attack on the Twin Towers. Post-9/11 is nowadays such a broad genre that any field of discussion (e.g. psychoanalysis, trauma theory, literary discourse) can be related to it. The discussions forming the debate surrounding the 9/11 attacks and conspiracy theories concern issues such as representation, framing, repetition and trauma. By addressing the ideas of Lucy Bond, David Simpson, Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Derrida and Ernst van Alphen I will lay the grounds on which I will further my own analysis concerning the (mis)representation of 9/11 in the two cases.

I will critique the use of “framing” in my analysis concerning the attacks on 9/11, for there are different forms of framing which I want to distinguish from one another. In using the word “framing”, I refer to two different definitions; the definition as stated by Jonathan Culler (Culler xiv) and cited by Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson in their description of “context”:

Context, in other words, is a text itself, and it thus consists of signs that require interpretation.

What we take to be positive knowledge is the product of interpretative choices. The art historian is always present in the construction she or he produces. In order to endorse the consequences of this insight, Culler proposes to speak not of context but of “framing”: “Since the phenomena criticism deals with are signs, forms with socially constituted meanings, one might try to think not of context but of the framing of signs: how are signs constituted (framed) by various discursive practices, institutional arrangements, systems of value, semiotic mechanisms”.

(Bal and Bryson 175)

Second, I refer to a definition of framing by David Simpson in chapter 3 *Framing the Dead*.

(...) to frame means to set up, to place the blame and the punishment on an innocent person. In this sense also the dead of 9/11, and others, are being framed, exploited for purposes over which they and their families have no control. (Simpson 87)

I will use “framing” as a collective word for the insertion of a tragic event in the plot or storyline of a commercial, sellable item. Here I agree with Simpson, which means I use the word “framing” as a way of using a tragic event and exploiting it for purposes (either commercial, emotional

or in service of the nation) over which the victims and their families have no control. Framing not only exploits the tragic event and its aftershock, but it also attributes new meanings to the event. As said by Bal and Bryson, framing includes “forms with socially constituted meanings”. Therefore, the word “framing” not only refers to one meaning that is being attributed to an event, but rather refers to a whole set of meanings, interpretations and subjective insights. Subjective, seen the fact that the way the producer, creator or filmmaker thinks and feels, influences and manipulates the entire practice of his or her framing. This term refers to a certain field or scope of interpretation that is applied to 9/11. This field of interpretations, this frame, can be constituted through representations as presented in film or advertising. Aspects of different frames can however also be addressed in one single representation. In this thesis I will determine if the cases contribute to already set framings, simply repeat aspects of these framings or create a new framing of 9/11.

The victims of 9/11, either those directly affected or those traumatized by the event from a distance, have been confronted by mediated representations, framed by the media, starting from the moment the attack was broadcasted live on television. They were subjected to these mediations over which they had no control. The victims had no influence on the selection processes or choices that were made before broadcasting or publishing framed images of 9/11.

According to Simpson’s view we must argue for “more pictures and more words to go with them, to offer the dead and the dying, all of them, alternatives to the frames so far imposed upon and around them” (Simpson 116). So, in fact, Simpson is saying that we must provide tragic events with more representations so that we are certain everyone’s thought or emotion is being represented. I presume, however, that limiting or stopping altogether the amount of representations formed with negative implications concerning a traumatic event, is a better way of dealing with trauma. The more representations there are of 9/11, the more media attention this event receives and the more repetition and confrontation with it continue to establish themselves. This ever-growing urge to repeat that which we fail to comprehend is problematic. It is problematic, e.g. concerning the two cases I address in this thesis, because objects create new representations that fit into an already existing frame of “a 9/11 love-story” or “a 9/11-comparison to another

tragic event". This is a symptom of trauma and an act of commemoration that is seen as necessary.

We repeat this, we must repeat it, and it is all the more necessary to repeat it insofar as we do not really know what is being named in this way, as if to exercise two times at one go: on the one hand, to conjure away, as if by magic, the "thing" itself, the fear or the terror it inspires (for repetition always protects by neutralizing, deadening, distancing a traumatism, and this is true for the repetition of the televised images we will speak of later), and, on the other hand, to deny, as close as possible to this act of language and this enunciation, our powerlessness to name in an appropriate fashion, to characterize, to think the thing in question, to get beyond the mere deictic of the date: something terrible took place on September 11, and in the end we don't know what.  
(Derrida 7/8)

9/11 is kept alive through its repetitional representations, but also through the discussions concerning these representations. So even by debating the issue that repeating an event and placing it in different frames, in able to grasp the happening, the event still forms the main node in a never-ending cycle of representations. We base the knowledge we have of 9/11 on representation because we are still unable to "experience it fully" (Bond 740). By addressing this trauma in an indirect way we fail to face it directly. We are merely facing it through representations that fail to capture the attack as it was before it was represented. This "pure" notion of an attack as something that was once an event before its representations, however, is a discussion in itself. Has 9/11 ever been a pure event when it was already represented in the moment it took place? This question invokes a discussion that I will not address here. This however does mean that in the process all we can do is rely on mediated forms of the event, and thus fail to experience it without its frames. There is a "failed experience" of the event. By addressing it through representation we are blinded from the fact that we are ignoring it, pushing it further away, making it less and less graspable. By placing it in a framework we create the illusion of being able to grasp it as such, thus distancing ourselves from it even more. Due to the representations there is an "impossibility of accurately representing or remembering any given event" (Bond 740).

I am not proposing that there is a way to "accurately represent" 9/11, as posed by Lucy Bond. I however do agree with Bond on the impossibility of representing 9/11 at all. For no me-

dia item can fully portray what happened that day. No film or advertisement can explain the attack and the influence it had. There isn't a way to see this event as a pure tragedy without its mediated forms and representations, for representation is all that we rely on ever since the attacks were broadcasted live on television. What I am however suggesting is that we acknowledge the effects media exposure and repeating representations had on the victims of the tragedy as much as the American nation entirely.

If we never manage to comprehend 9/11 or be at peace with it, only more and more representations with the goal of creating a greater understanding will be formed and thus greater confusion will be the effect. The confusion of what it is that "really" happened and what is merely a manipulated image. The consumer, viewer or victim will never be freed from manipulated representations of 9/11. This causes confusion about what is right or wrong, which image or thought includes (parts of) the truth and which spreads lies. It is this confusion that blurs the way to a better understanding of 9/11. So instead of focusing on the alleged truth as represented in already existing frameworks (frameworks of trauma, terror, consumerism or ideology), I want to pose a way of letting these frames go and seeing them for what they are: mere interpretations of representations of a reality that can never be fully conceived without manipulation of the media. The contradictio in terminis here is however that I can never fully let go of framing, for by attempting to let the frames go I have to use representations of 9/11 and place this in a framework in able to form my own standpoint on the issue. This frame is that of my own research and thoughts on the attack on September 11th 2001. Hereby I attempt to form a better understanding of 9/11.

To maintain a more complete overview of the discussions surrounding 9/11 and the representations of the film *Remember Me* and advertisement in *The Khaleej Times*, the subject of trauma cannot be left unspoken. The trauma discourse is a personal, moral and problematic discussion. Problematic because the notion of trauma invokes a variety of contradicting interpretations. Patriotism and an idea of the traumatized fatherland form the heart of the discussion concerning trauma, mourning and commemoration. The idea of trauma is being radically broadened; as if the notion of trauma concerning 9/11 can be applied to the people of America as a whole. The idea of not an individual but a nation being attacked was also stated by Simpson in quoting

headnotes of *The New York Times*: “A Nation Under Attack” and “A Nation At War” (Simpson 96). This refers to the nation as a whole being attacked, and thus being burdened by trauma after the attack. It is evident that such an attack on New York’s day-to-day life affects more people than just the people that directly saw the planes crashing in real-time, those who lost friends, family or colleagues on this day, or the survivors. People that weren’t directly affected by 9/11 have a different trauma, a patriotic trauma. A trauma of losing the image of a nation as it once was, before the impact. This trauma is however completely different from the individual trauma concerning those directly affected.

Here I want to focus mainly on the idea of trauma as something individual, something that must remain untouched by theories about patriotism and the idea of American Homeland (as posed by Richard Crownshaw in his article on American Fiction after 9/11). Here I support Lucy Bond in that she critiques the following: “Their personal losses on 9/11 were the losses of “us all”; that the trauma of the attacks was shared equally by everyone, everywhere” (753). This quote refers to the Walking Tour of Ground Zero which aims at providing the victims some relief and comfort.<sup>5</sup> Bond does not support the idea of trauma being shared. There is not one shared trauma, but according to Bond there is a “domestic trauma”: a trauma that lies in personal homes. In this, I believe there are two completely opposing trauma’s.

I want to show that there is an apparent split between the American trauma and individual trauma. Therefor I support the viewpoint of Ernst van Alphen on trauma as “failed experience” (Alphen 24). Experience is a concept that can be felt by the individual as much as the masses, both in a very different way. So, before I continue the discussion concerning trauma, I want to clarify that in this thesis I will address the notion of trauma as a “failed experience” (Alphen 25). Here he proposes that the failure of experience is trauma and therefore trauma cannot be experienced. There is no wrong or right experience, however, it is important to acknowledge that there are different ways of understanding experience. The experience of an event felt by a subject is already a representation of it. There is no way of over-bridging the gap between what is the event and the experience.

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<sup>5</sup> This was a tour that was offered by the WTC Tribute Centre website, organized by 150 voluntary guides who shared their individual stories with visitors: <http://tributewtc.org/>

I shall argue that the notion of experience, as posed by Alphen, and the inability to grasp the experience, is not only applicable to the Holocaust but also to a more recent event, namely 9/11. In this case the failure to fully experience an event is not because of its distance from language or representation. The failed experience here results from the fact that it is represented through specific frameworks formed by the media (e.g. patriotic framework, moral framework). It is not “experienced” directly, for direct experience is not possible. Thus the event of 9/11 can only be experienced indirectly, through representations on television and in advertisements. This is a paradox in itself, because this proposes that there is no difference or distance between the experience of an event and its representations. They are linked to each other. The distance is lacking because there is none. Due to this lacking distance, the representation of an event is experienced so quickly and so directly that there is no time or space to experience it without mediation. In this case the inability to grasp a happening does not lie in the distance from it in language but the distance from it in media.

The overexposure to media representations create a distance between the individual experience and general experience created by the media. There are so many layered representations to try and understand and make one’s own, create an own perception of, that an inability to make individual choices in what to believe in is formed. Although these representations seem layered at first sight, they are all part of a limited amount of framings set by the media. They all focus on a certain perception of the event.

## Chapter 2

### *Remember Me: Representing Nationalistic or Domestic Trauma?*



Post-9/11 film is such a great subject that it has been constructed as an important part of cinema studies. This is also discussed by B. Ruby Rich in the *Cinema Journal*.<sup>6</sup> The section of post-9/11 cinema can be split into varying sub-genres, for any type of film has been in one way or the other altered into a commemoration of 9/11. Whether this was executed in the form of a documentary, to create empathy or awaken rage, or in the form of a romantic drama as was done in the film *Remember Me* (Allen Coulter 2010).

Tyler (Robert Pattinson) and Ally (Emilie de Ravin), the two main protagonists starring in the romantic drama *Remember Me*, are in love. They however get in a fight where Tyler leaves the building and heads off to his father's work. This is where the film makes a radical break between what first seemed a love-story and what turns out to be a reference to a tragedy. A melancholy music sequence starts to play, implying a sad turn of events. Anticipation is created due to the speeding up of the music sequence. A shot of Tyler standing in his father's office follows, and he brings back memories from his past by looking at photo's flashing by on a digital photo frame. After this his father's female colleague chuckles and says "what a day". The camera then turns from a shot from the inside of the building, facing Tyler's back looking out the window, to a counter-shot from the outside of the building where the front of Tyler is seen staring out of the window. A follow-up shot clarifies what day it is by featuring Tyler's sister sitting in a classroom and watching her teacher write the date in chalk on the board: Tuesday, September 11 2001. Here, the intertextual reference to a tragedy is made. This is cut by a shot back to Tyler, which is then first slowly but quickly escalated to a fast forward zoomed out from the window, broadening the sight of the building. The music fades and the chaotic sounds of New York city life follow, making a blur of noise altogether. The sounds change from distinct, single voices and laughter to a quickened sound altered in both volume and capacity of clamor. The zoom-out of Tyler's shot follows to the point where it is clear that he is standing in one of the Twin Towers. The film has taken a turn from any ordinary romantic drama to a pre-9/11 reference. After this aspect of the film is clarified, the noise of an airplane rushing sound follows. After this a short "ping" sound follows by means of closure and then a black screen. This implies the attack taking place.

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<sup>6</sup> B. Ruby Rich addressed the incorporation of the subject of 9/11 in film. For further information see: Rich, B. Ruby. "Documentary Disciplines: An Introduction". *Cinema Journal*, 46:1 (2006):108-115.

After the radical break that has been created by the black screen shot, the music sequence starts with bells tolling. People rush to look up to the sky. Suddenly the voice-over of Tyler fills the sequence, giving an impression of a feel-good speech altogether. Tyler tells the viewers how one should enjoy every day, and live life to the fullest, for it might just be too late:

Whatever you do in life, will be insignificant, but it's very important that you do it because nobody else will. Like when someone comes into your life and the half of you says you're nowhere near ready but the other half of you says make her yours forever. Michael, Caroline asked me what I would say if I knew you could hear me. I said I do know. I love you. God, I miss you. And I forgive you.<sup>7</sup>

This film exemplifies a representation of the attacks on September 11th by applying 9/11 as an intrusive semiotic symbol in a narrative, where the object or “signified” is the attack on the Twin Towers on 9/11, and the film is the “signifier” or sign, providing the viewer with a representation of this happening. The attack forms a radical break in the film, just like the actual attack on the Twin Towers formed a radical break between pre- and post-9/11 life in America. So here, 9/11 is coupled with the idea of rupture (Bond 735). On the one hand, this film portrays a small family situation being affected by the attacks. This places it within a frame described by Bond as follows:

A highly localized frame (both temporally and spatially) that deflects attention away from the global implications of the event, bestowing it instead upon the more intimate consequences of 9/11 for individual Americans, their families and their communities. (Bond 737)

On the other hand however, the general notion of “carpe diem” that is being implied in the voice-over of Tyler gives the film other meaning. This moral message frames 9/11 as something that must serve as a warning and aim to better the life of the viewer. This means a large range of people is affected: the viewers. These viewers can be people all over the world. Not merely addressing small intimate families, but rather addressing the masses, universalizing the subject of 9/11.

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<sup>7</sup> This quote refers to the words that were said in a voice-over by Robert Pattinson in the final scene of the film *Remember Me* (2010).

This is where the effect of 9/11 turns into a more general notion of affecting “all of us” instead of laying focus on the smaller communities that were affected. Here “a sheltered, domestic realm” is turned into a “wider, wounded nation” (Bond 738). However not only a nation is affected but an entire world. There is no national impact, as is implied by Bond, but a global impact.

The idea of a nation being wounded and having to deal with trauma isn't directly implied by the protagonist, whatever is implied is that one should escape sadness, and thus also the trauma caused by this, by enjoying every day. The viewer isn't being confronted with trauma but rather with a warning against trauma. The film tries to understand the media event that 9/11 is, and uses this understanding and interpretation of the event to send out a moral message to its consumers. The makers place the attack on the Twin Towers in a frame of morality, bringing out a moral lesson to the “nation” or the “universe” and thus laying this way of dealing with the tragedy upon the masses. “Media resist the complexity of the tragic event by addressing it in its own way and creating its own reality, its own representation of it” (Simpson 11).

The scene from *Remember Me* shows similarities, but mainly differences, with the short documentary film by Mexican filmmaker Alejandro González Iñárritu, viewed in the film collection *11'09''01 September 11* (Alain Brigand 2002). This short film presents the viewer with a long black screen posing the viewer with an “image of absence (...) accompanied by the sound of voices” (Young 241). The rupture formed in this film is however, in contrast to the rupture created in *Remember Me* by adding in a short black screen, the short image of a person falling from a tower. Both films use a black screen, but both screens serve a different function: one is a rupture and the other forms a continuous sequence in which ruptures or disturbances (the different short images of people falling off the towers) are placed. In both cases the black screens symbolize the inability to represent the attack on the Twin Towers and the actual attack itself is not shown. Whereas *Remember Me* uses a more subtle tactic, with the black screen as replacement for the viewing of tragic images, the short film of Iñárritu applies a more striking and shocking strategy. He does not show the attack, but does show the even more horrifying images of the aftershock. Here the black screen isn't a way of evading the confrontation with the tragedy of 9/11, but used to create an even more heavy effect when the black screen is cut by the images.

A similarity between the two films is the use of sound. *Remember Me* uses an increasing sound of street clamor or “acceleration of the narration of the event” (242), very much like the found sound segments (241) used in Iñárritu’s short film. In the former this sound is however incorporated *before* the implication of the attack is made, whereas the sound is incorporated *after* the attack in the latter, here symbolizing the chaos that was invoked after the attack took place. Not only the sound of street clamor is used in both cases, the sound of the plane roaring in the sky, heading towards the first tower, is also incorporated in both films. This sound represents the approach of imminent danger, serving as a warning of what is to come and cannot be withheld.

The black screen shown in *Remember Me* conveys deeper meaning. It not only symbolizes the inability to represent but also the trauma which is caused by this inability, this powerlessness. Iñárritu’s film differs in his use of the black screen by using the flashing of images that create a disturbance in the viewing of the black screen. Both films deal with the trauma of 9/11 by using a black screen in different ways; *Remember Me* by avoiding images of the attack by using the screen, Iñárritu by confronting the viewer with the aftershock and the final collapse of the burning towers. Both films do not use an image of the attack itself, and fill this in with a black screen, but exert this in extremely contradicting manners. The main trigger for trauma is not having seen the actual attack taking place or being a victim of it, and therefore having to fill in these images with re-enactments of what supposedly took place.

For Freud, it is in the very *missing* of physical injury that the event becomes traumatizing; only in their belated awareness of the proximity of physical disaster do individuals become frightened and develop their subsequent anxiety about the event. (Muntean 52)

The black screen represents trauma. Therefore *Remember Me* invokes a traumatizing image upon its viewer. The darkness, emptiness and un-representability that is implied by the black screen is forced upon the viewer. There is no image, merely blackness filling the screen. This shows the emptiness and inability to confront oneself with the tragedy. Even nine years after the attack on the Twin Towers, consumers of film are still being confronted with an event they are unable to grasp and comprehend. The inability to represent 9/11 is still being forced upon the viewer, enlarging the void that 9/11 already is. Enlarging the knowledge of not being able to justifiably

commemorate 9/11 since the viewer may have not been at the site itself. Having to rely on representations shown on television, never being able to know what *actually* happened. The intention of Iñárritu was to “put myself and the audience in the shoes of those who were inside the buildings, waiting for the unpredictable” (243). This notion of placing the audience *inside* the building is taken quite literally in the film *Remember Me* when noticing that protagonist Tyler is also first seen from inside the building, and then from the outside, giving the audience a very personal notion of the victims directly affected by the tragedy. It brings the audience closer to the event, to the inside of the buildings, instead of only looking at the fall of the towers from a distance. Both filmmakers represent this “closeness” in a different manner, but are similar in the way they believe confrontation is the best way to resolve the trauma. This confrontation is represented either by presenting the viewer with images that were withheld from the circulation of the media (243) in Iñárritu’s film or by presenting the viewer with a narrative that provokes a more personal approach to the commemoration of 9/11. The former uses a shocking approach, whether the latter applies a more subtle tactic.

This suggests that both films can be placed in the framework of nationalistic trauma discourse vs. the framework of personal trauma. This is also said by Heller: “Media and political representations of September 11 as a distinctly “national” attack frame it as an attack that was not only against New Yorkers and Washingtonians, but against all Americans” (Heller 35). The combination of these two frameworks involves questions of morality: which framework is more applicable and useful to the situation that erupted after 9/11 took place? And does this framework in reference to this case study add to already existing discourses on media items, or not? I will attempt to find an answer to these questions by discussing trauma in reference to *Remember Me*.

In *Remember Me* there is no direct confrontation with trauma but rather an implication of it. Actors are acting out how they were affected by the event directly, thus representing alleged representations of emotions felt by families in New York who were directly affected by it. Maybe not even representing existing emotions but confining these emotions of trauma and life expectation to the viewers, and thus putting this on a high scale of trauma felt by the masses.

“The date 11 September is recurrently portrayed not as an occurrence of historical magnitude, but as the catalyst for emotional private events” (Bond 750). The portrayal of the event

causes a “secondary traumatization” (LaCapra 81). Post traumatic symptoms of secondary traumatization can be relived even without having lived through the event itself. There is no resolving of trauma as the film doesn’t explicitly discuss 9/11 or address the attack itself but rather the effects it provoked. The viewer isn’t being faced with direct confrontation seen the fact that the actual images of the attack are left out, it is merely implied through cinematic aesthetics. The documentary film of Iñárritu *does* directly confront its viewers with the actual attack in the viewing of people and the towers falling. This trauma can be relived by any viewer, no matter at what distance the viewer was at the time of the attack on the Twin Towers.

The trauma of the tragedy will be hard to escape regardless of physical distance from the wreckage in New York or Washington D.C. People who saw it or were part of it will obviously experience some trauma... [T]rauma is experienced vicariously by those who are some distance away. (Heller 31)

Regarding this quote I do not agree with the usage of the term “experience”, also stated in chapter 1 in my reference to v. Alphen, as one cannot truly experience a tragedy when it has already been represented, and when it is at a distance. One is confronted by the tragedy and its effects. This trauma represents the inability to understand or grasp what has happened. At a distance viewers are more easily manipulated to believe in the framings media present them with. They cannot look around them to see if what is being told is true or not. They cannot rely on their own perspective or perception to give nuance to the situation.

The gap that trauma represents is visually translated in both films where the screen is covered in black. The trauma is turned into both personal and national, considering after the black screen in *Remember Me* images appear of people rushing out to the streets to see what is happening. It is not just the main protagonists anymore that are affected, but all the actors featured in the film. This shows the contradiction between individual vs. mass trauma. It was the nation as a whole that was affected, which is implied in this filmic representation of 9/11. I believe this notion of a tragedy being something of national proportions has been repeated far too often. This framing of trauma as something being nationalistic rather deters than facilitates public understanding of the event. Here, the film tends to feed the trauma that is already present in the vie-

wers' and the victims' state of mind. It does not give closure, offer new insights or provide the viewer with a new framework to place the event in. The viewer is not provided with a way to better understand what happened on the day of 9/11. This film simply joins the already overflowing mass of media items discussing nationalistic trauma in the disguise of a displayed personal trauma.

The film *Remember Me* generalizes the experience of trauma by placing 9/11 in three different frameworks; that of rupture, nationalistic trauma and domestic trauma. It takes aspects from these already existing frames but doesn't create a legitimate addition to the representations we have already seen. It forms a needle in the haystack of representations we already know. The film rather contributes to the "over-personalization of the American public sphere" (Bond 738) than facilitate domestic trauma, because it is merely a fictional film: a story featuring characters that didn't actually exist and weren't directly affected by the attacks. This doesn't give the affected closure, or a clear image of how to deal with it or in which frame to place it. It causes more confusion and feeds the idea of every American being victim of the attacks. The film attempts to incorporate domestic trauma by discussing one family, one couple, during the entire film. The film focuses on one person directly affected by it through death and one family affected by it through loss. This intends to make the happening easier to grasp and relate to, seen the fact that not a whole nation is addressed to as being affected by the attack on the Twin Towers. The downside to this attempt to address the domestic sphere is however that it doesn't discuss actual personal trauma but prefers "a retreat into a sentimentalized domestic arena where the attacks are contextualized not historically or politically, but by the intimate relationships of individuals, very few of whom have been directly affected by 9/11" (752). The intimate, small storyline is however not only fictional but also generalized in the end when the viewer is being addressed by the voice-over of Tyler. This extends the storyline from individual to mass trauma, and places the notion of trauma in a more broad framework. This film therefore derives attention away from the notions of "healing and redemption" (740), which should be the focus when addressing trauma concerning 9/11, and rather enlarges the void in the understanding of the traumatic event, thus enhancing trauma and a "culture of collective victimhood" (741).

**Chapter 3**  
**Anti-smoking and 9/11: Ideology and Trauma**

5.4 million die of smoking related causes every year.  
That's 2000 times a 9/11.



percept

Issued in public interest by **Khaleej Times**

“I thought it was an interesting take on the horrors of the terrible day, the same could happen to the human body too... if subjected to the terrors of smoking”.<sup>8</sup> These were the words of creative director Prashant Sankhe, who designed the anti-smoking advertisement in *The Khaleej Times* in 2007. It features two cigarettes burning, with smoke coming out of them, and it is overlaid by the text “5.4 million die of smoking related causes every year. That’s 2000 times a 9/11”. The advertisement was published by the advertising agency Perceptgulf in Dubai. This advertisement has evoked a lot of discussions concerning morality and ideological problematics of portraying and comparing 9/11 in this specific manner.

In this chapter I will analyze the advertisement by focusing on the term “appropriation”, after which I will analyze the case by referring to trauma in reference to the word “terror” and ideology. The term “appropriation” can be read in two different ways, of which I will only focus on the second definition as posed in advertising, namely;

1. (cultural appropriation) The adoption by one cultural group of some of the cultural forms of a different cultural group (including subcultures). For instance, ‘metrosexual’ fashions can be seen as a cultural appropriation of gay culture by heterosexual men.
2. (advertising) A ‘cannibalistic’ process drawing on widespread cultural and subcultural imagery and re-contextualizing this in advertisements for target audiences for whom such imagery may be particularly meaningful. For example, the imagery associated with existing representations of nostalgia, feminism, and homosexuality has been widely appropriated in this way, as have celebrities and stylistic fashions. In semiotic terms, this is the appropriation of signifiers and their re-contextualization in advertisements, where they acquire new signifieds and thus become new signs. See also meaning transfer; metaphor; compare condensation.<sup>9</sup>

In this advertisement the subjects of “9/11” and “smoking” are both re-contextualized. The cigarettes take on a new meaning by placing two exact same cigarettes in length in parallel next to each other, with dramatic smoke coming out of them. This smoke is clearly more than the smoke that would usually be exerted by a cigarette. The signifier of the event of 9/11 is hereby appro-

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<sup>8</sup> Farrukh Naeem, [www.copywriterjournalist.com](http://www.copywriterjournalist.com)

<sup>9</sup> Chandler, Daniel and Rod Munday: “Appropriation”. *Oxford: A Dictionary of Media and Communication*. Oxford University Press, 2011.

priated in a new context where it takes on the signifieds of cigarettes, smoke, death and terror. The cigarettes resemble the larger sign of death by smoking related causes, which is then used in comparison to the signified: the attack on the Twin Towers on 9/11. This form of semiotic imagery intends to be successful in regard to its target audience, because it serves as a shocking and confrontational symbol for smokers. This imagery works as a shocking representation of the causes smoking can have, because an immediate link is made with the event of 9/11. This event has been transformed into frames concerning national trauma, consumerism, death and terror. By making the comparison between an object of study (here: smoking) and 9/11, a web full of implications and possible meanings is constructed.

The advertisement is not just a sign linked to trauma, but also a confrontational way of performing remembrance. It uses this remembrance of the dead to refer to something that is implied to be even more dramatic. In the advertisement, the newspaper bundles up all the trauma and terror concerning 9/11 into one simple frame of number of deaths, and then compares it to diseases caused by smoking by which the whole world is affected on a daily basis. By using the word “terror” in reference to smoking, Sankhe indirectly refers to the terror caused by 9/11. This terror not only caused many deaths, but also a “war on terror” and the terror of trauma; both individually and (inter-)nationally. By confronting an individual suffering from trauma with this advertisement, the memory of terror is provoked, thus enhancing the effects of trauma even further. This causes the representation of 9/11 as presented in the advertisement to problematize the remembrance of 9/11 and the affected individuals rather than facilitate the commemoration.

The figure 9/11 is not a place (although New York plays that role in the national imaginary), nor yet even a time, since what is missing is the designation of the year, 2001. It will repeat itself every year, and it will remain an open designation, a communications channel for crisis, an emergency number. At one moment these numbers will be a sign of remembering the dead, at another the mandate for military adventurism, at another an architectural and civic opportunity. (Simpson 16)

The advertisement uses the figure of 9/11 as a “communications channel for crisis” and its numbers as “a sign of remembering the dead”. However, here not the numbers of the event itself are

used but the amount of deaths. The advertisement symbolizes anti-smoking in an opportunist fashion. It takes the trauma, memory and representation that were already communicated through mediations of 9/11 and places these in a marketing frame. The makers of the advertisement use 9/11 as something that invoked many deaths and caused great terror, and implemented it into a commercial framework to convey different meaning and use it for their own purposes. The event of 9/11 is therefore used as a strategy: “The image consumes the event, in the sense that it absorbs it and offers it for consumption. Admittedly, it gives it unprecedented impact, but impact as image-event” (Baudrillard 27). Just as Baudrillard states, the event has already absorbed varying meanings and frameworks which makes it applicable to almost any situation.

This representation of 9/11 in an advertisement is not the first example of an image that has been manipulated and transformed. Shortly after the tragedy had taken place, many images were being manipulated to convey nationalistic meaning such as the digitally altered version of *Freedom From Fear* by Norman Rockwell.<sup>10</sup> It is evident how 9/11 is repeatedly manipulated and altered, forming more of a commodity than a traumatic tragedy. The definition of “commodity” shows the similarities between a product and 9/11 as a commodity:

a. spec. in Comm. A kind of thing produced for use or sale, an article of commerce, an object of trade; in pl. goods, merchandise, wares, produce. Now esp. food or raw materials, as objects of trade. staple commodity n. leading article of trade.<sup>11</sup>

So here, the image of the Twin Towers is used to resemble a product that is used for sale and commerce. The towers now resemble cigarettes; they have been diminished to be nothing more but a product that is used for relief. The image of the Twin Towers is then brought down even further by having them serve as a warning against disease. In the advertisement the event of 9/11 is compared to a disease, a disease that spreads. Just like the trend of post-9/11 representations that are spreading; to which this advertisement shows a great contribution. Why is this represen-

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<sup>10</sup> This digitally altered version was published in the *New York Times* on November 2, 2001. It was based on the original painting by Norman Rockwell which was finished in 1943. The altered version intended to form an “emblem of sentiment, familial security and the nation under threat” (Heller 76-77).

<sup>11</sup> Oxford English Dictionary. “Commodity”. Oxford University Press: 2014.

tation problematic? It compares two completely different ideas, and attempts to justify this comparison by focusing on one aspect: number of deaths. This does not only diminish the effect of trauma it had, and thus ignore the affect it might have on the families of 9/11 victims, but also visualizes the Twin Towers as being two cigarettes. Cigarettes without content except the smoldering tobacco, where the tobacco symbolizes the burning victims. Also, by making the comparison between lung cancer victims and the victims of a terrorist attack, the advertisement shrinks the effects of the event of 9/11 into insignificance in comparison to the effects of lung cancer. This is done by a simple comparison between numbers. The contexts surrounding the issues of cancer and 9/11 are completely ignored. Altogether, this is a very ideologically problematic way of comparing a product to a human being.

A crisis of representation: a crisis engendered less by the traumatic nature of the event itself than by the way in which the attacks have recurrently been illustrated as defying comprehension. (Baudrillard 734)

As explained in the quote above, the crisis of representation resembles why there is so much trouble in justifiably representing this event; one does not know how to create an understandable construct surrounding the specter of 9/11. Therefore complicated discussions surrounding advertisements as such arise; but who determines if a representation does or does not do justice to the effects it imposed? “There is no ‘good’ use of the media; the media are part of the event, they are part of the terror. And they work in both directions” (Baudrillard 31). As stated by Baudrillard, the media are irrevocably part of the event and the terror deriving from it.

The advertisement and its ideological complications are part of the terror I want to shortly address here. To discuss the ideological aspects of the advertisement, I must first provide context. *The Khaleej Times* is a daily English-language newspaper, published in the area of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. Seen the fact that the Islam is the overruling religion of Dubai, it is clear that this places Dubai against the racist threats that were given by American institutions shortly after the attack and the war of terror that followed in Afghanistan. This shows the conflict that this had already created between America and Islam countries. The representation provided of the image of the Twin Towers in the advertisement, shows this conflict in the way the compari-

son is made between terrorist attacks and the terror of death imposed by smoking. This aspect of “terrorism” is a term that is here applied to two varying situations.

We try retrospectively to impose some kind of meaning on it, to find some kind of interpretation. But there is none. And it is the radicality of the spectacle, the brutality of the spectacle, which alone is original and irreducible. The spectacle of terrorism forces the terrorism of spectacle upon us. And, against this immoral fascination (even if it unleashes a universal moral reaction), the political order can do nothing. (Baudrillard 30)

Baudrillard imposes that it is the spectacle that terror brings with it, which makes it so applicable to different media and representations, and this spectacle causes much terror. If the representation of terror brings about ideological complications, this means that it thus also provides the audience with more spectacle, and more fascination derives from this representation. The target audience has knowledge of the objects that are being represented, which instigates an automatic process of ideological representation that activate itself within each subject. This ideology was best explained by political philosopher Antonio Gramsci who argued the following:

Dominant social symbols of the culture – civil society’s entire range of values, attitudes, beliefs, cultural norms, legal precepts – together constitute the dominant ideology, which he called hegemony (...) Gramsci viewed ideology not simply as “a system of ideas,” but as lived, habitual social practice that is largely unconscious and always institutional. Hegemony is not static; it has to be renewed, recreated, and defended. Elaborating upon Gramsci, the French Marxist Louis Althusser analyzed what he called “state ideological apparatuses” – social institutions that, in his words, interpellate or “hail” us to our place in the social order, so that we unconsciously assume our positions within it in a way that maintains the hidden relations of power(...) In the words of the Lacanian philosopher Slavoj Zizek, “We do not know it, but we are doing it” (Meyers, 2003: 63). (Hollander 162)

These insights help understand how the advertising company that made the anti-smoking advertisement used the scope of 9/11 to serve an ideology, not of patriotic Americanism as in the previous chapter, but of opportunist appropriation placed in a framework of 9/11 as a commodity.

The target audience of this advertisement immediately identifies the ideological claims implied by this marketing strategy. So, the audience is unconsciously supporting the ideological depictions of the marketing strategy played out by advertising company Perceptgulf. The ideology here “Has functioned to cover over the psychological experience of individual and group vulnerability and discontinuity and to protect us [hereby referring to the target audience of the advertisement] against the narcissistic injury of impotence and helplessness provoked by 9/11” (Hollander 163). This causes the audience to “forget” the actual victims and affected families that 9/11 caused who might find this ad insulting, and instead the audience focus on the message that the advertisement sends out: stop smoking or the terror of death might come to you.

## Conclusion

Representations of 9/11 as a rupture in historical understanding predominate in both the immediate response of the mainstream media and the later analysis of academics and authors. This raises the unwelcome possibility that, in representing unrepresentability so absolutely, limit narratives threaten to create the very void in understanding they lament. (Bond 735)

It is the trend of creating “false”, “immoral”, “problematic” representations of 9/11 that created a void in understanding. Media make the event of 9/11 even less comprehensible to the viewer by making this event even more ungraspable than it already was. By inserting this happening in completely different genres, media create a distance far from understanding. And in our inability to comprehend 9/11 we would rather just blur its entire existence by naming it “that event” or “that day” (Bond 734). By addressing this event as a void in time, a rupture in a continuous flow of temporality, we are distancing ourselves from it. Distancing is often referred to as something negative, therefore it is ever more logical that this event is placed in negative frames and comparisons. I continued this notion in my analysis of *Remember Me* and the advertisement which both use the event of 9/11 as a way to symbolize death and create a warning. The film uses 9/11 to symbolize the death of the main protagonist, whereas the advertisement uses 9/11 by way of comparison to the death of people by smoking-related causes. The attack on the Twin Towers is in both cases used to represent something that causes a rupture in a narrative. This event is used to refer to a death or multiple deaths because it is something we are all familiar with. The whole world of media was confronted by 9/11 and is familiar with the trauma, terror and deaths it caused.

How do these cases use the image of the Twin Towers, and do the meanings as constituted by the cases fit into already existing frames of 9/11? Do the objects then form such new meanings that they can be placed in a new set of frameworks?

I argue that the representations as posed in the cases are not wrong or bad, but rather part of an excess in representation. The cases form representations that either do or do not contribute to already existing frames. These frames could be any of the following, as these are the frames addressed in this thesis; moral framework (right or wrong), commercial framework (exploiting and selling tragedy to make profit), patriotic framework (9/11 as a trauma of the Homeland), domestic framework (including small, personal trauma's or domestic trauma), 9/11 as a rupture (rupture in time or understanding, rupture between pre- and post-9/11), ideological framework (9/11 as a war on terror: main focus on religion, terrorism and war).

I have chosen the objects of discussion in comparison to each other because they pose several similarities, which also provide answers to my main question;

1. The objects use a confrontational way of portraying 9/11: the film does this by addressing personal trauma, the advertisement by confronting the public with the terror of death.
2. Both cases use the image of the two towers as a symbol that conveys more meaning; *Remember Me* portrays the meaning of a warning to never take a day for granted and to “carpe diem”. In the advertisement the towers mainly serve as a warning for smoking-related death. So, here, both cases use the image of the Twin Towers as a warning for the terror that lies ahead.
3. As much the medium of film as the medium of advertising here combine two subjects that aren't easily put together, both in very different and varying corners, in unexpected framings. Film uses the genre of romantic drama, in the year 2010, and inserts 9/11 as a rupture in the narrative. The advertisement combines anti-smoking and 9/11, in the year of 2007, to create awareness.
4. As posed in my analysis of both case studies, both address trauma in an indirect manner. The film does this by implementing a voice-over in the final scene of the film, conveying a “carpe-diem”-message. The advertisement does this by using a shocking and confrontational way of bringing out a message, and thus addresses the terror of trauma invoked by 9/11.

The cases both fit in a bundle of already existing frames concerning 9/11. They form new frames in the sense that they do not discuss one aspect of 9/11 but combine several and form one narrative out of this. However, these aspects are taken from already existing frames. The film does not provide the viewer with a new insight but rather with a repetition of frames that had already been discussed: the framings of nationalistic trauma versus domestic trauma. The advertisement uses 9/11 as a commodity; a commercial, exploitative frame that has been applied to 9/11 ever since the attacks took place. This particular case only presents the audience with an innovative look on 9/11 in the way it compares anti-smoking to the event. This creates new meanings and interpretations, placing the event of 9/11 in a framework of “Anti-smoking and 9/11”. The question is however if this new frame adds to the overall experience of 9/11 as an event or can be seen as a sub genre to the frame of 9/11 as commodity. The latter is the case here, seen the fact that 9/11 is used as marketing strategy, and this is merely one way to perform this.

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