

Performance as Refrain: News Images, Lived Images and the Post-9/11 Landscape ¹

Gordon Coonfield

What does one do with these images? (Richard 211)



Watching the World Change

The eyes were everywhere. (Friend ix)

Like many, I remember where I was and what I was doing when I learned of what was happening on the morning of September 11, 2001. I was in my upstairs bedroom/office in Houghton, Michigan, working on my dissertation, when my partner shouted from downstairs: “Something’s happened in New York—you have to see this!” Like many, I spent the rest of the day watching. In disbelief I watched the second plane slam into the South Tower of the World Trade Center over and over again. I watched the smoke engulf Manhattan. I saw what I later learned were jumpers’ vague shapes plummeting through debris and smoke and paper. I watched as first one, then the other tower collapsed. I watched people run through the streets, fleeing before a cloud of dust that seemed like an ethereal embodiment of a horse of the apocalypse. Like many, I was horrified. Though I was a 20-hour, 1,000-mile drive from Manhattan (a safe distance by any standard) I felt horrified, traumatized somehow by the spectacle I was watching.

Like many, I watched these events unfold in live broadcasts punctuated by replays threaded on a string of comment and speculation and—occasionally,

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¹ The web location of this essay includes links to a number of photographs available on the world wide web related to the events of 9/11. See <http://liminalities.net/5-1/refrain-supplements.html>. I do not comment on these directly in the text of this argument and so have not included them herein. They are meant to operate paratextually, creating resonances between the argument in the text and the images.

eventually—revelation. With all who were “elsewhere,” experiencing them via the mediation of satellites and screens, and later prints and pages, the events of 9/11 were real for me insofar as they were photographed (Sontag 21). Not only those watching from a safe distance, but for those who lived and worked in New York City that day the images were central to experiencing and comprehending what happened. In *Watching the World Change*, David Friend recounts learning of the attack on the World Trade Center through the live feed being broadcast on the massive wall of monitors in Time Square. Later, he recalls retiring from the windows of the New York headquarters of Vanity Fair to watch alone, in a nearby office, as the events he had seen unfold in the distance were replayed on a television screen.

What is more, Friend observes that New Yorkers by the tens of thousands turned not only their eyes but their cameras upon the events of 9/11. They recorded what was happening using everything from daguerrotype plates to digital video, Friend argues, because recording had supplanted “seeing” as the necessary correlate to “believing”: “So inconceivable was the event that viewers doubted not their television screens but their eyes. . . . People with cameras understood immediately: only rendering this act visually would confirm its reality; only images, not words, would suffice” (xi). Being there, witnessing the destruction first hand was clearly not enough. Whether it is confirmation of Guy Debord’s thesis that the spectacle was a social relation mediated by images² or evidence of the triumph of the simulacra or not, even those who were there (and not elsewhere) depended on the image for confirmation. Thus, as one videographer who happened to be working at Trinity Church³ that morning and who recorded 25 minutes of silent video remarked, “I essentially saw it on TV, just like everybody else” (9).

My point is not to denigrate the experiences or emotions or losses of those who were there that day. Nor do I seek to elevate uncritically the experiences or emotions or losses of those who “watched the world change” from elsewhere, as images, as news. I simply wish to note what is common to both. For the many who were there that morning and the many who watched from a safe distance experienced something, felt something—was it a structure of feeling?—stretch, break, tear. This is what Zelizer has termed public trauma—large-scale “cataclysmic events” that “rattle default notions of what it means morally to remain members of a collective” (“Finding Aids” 698).

² HTML link to pop-up window which includes the text of Thesis #4 from Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* as caption. Above, a reproduction of a cartoon from a Situationist publication that shows an adult and child watching the sun rise on a television, while behind them it rises outside a window. Also includes link to the free online version of Debord’s book.

³ HTML Link to pop-up window which in turn includes a link to the Trinity Church website’s September 11 slide show and to a Google map of Manhattan showing the location of Trinity church in relation to 1&2 World Trade.

Clearly, watching and recording were one important way the cultural collective experienced that trauma. And Images have unquestionably played a role in the delicate path the cultural collective has taken toward the constitution of a “post-traumatic space” (Zelizer, “Photography” 49). However, I want to consider the limitations of our preoccupation with the visual spectacle of 9/11, in order to argue that watching and recording, however important they may have been then and continue to be now, are only part of the story. On 9/11, whatever else happened the most basic political element of collectivity, the territory, was breached. Watching and recording were but preludes to a much more widely pervasive set of performances, expressive enactments through which territory was remade. By way of cultural studies, I hope to connect performance studies and media studies in order to consider the relation of *news* images to *lived* images—the relation between images made, selected, edited, and circulated via the news process and the myriad ways in which images were experienced and taken up in the everyday performances through which, I argue, a post-traumatic landscape is (re)possessed, (re)marked, and maintained. In doing so, I draw on the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari to argue that public trauma constitutes a radical deterritorialization, one that compels the kinds of performances through which territory can be reconstituted. Performances, however traditional or novel, ritualized or improvised, operate as refrains: territorial assemblages that contract images and matters in acts of repetition and expression that are potent cultural forms in their own right.

The Visual Spectacle

Images of 9/11 and the influence of the news processes on their production, selection, narration, and circulation have been widely researched. The resulting images were and are indissolubly bound up in the American cultural collective’s experience and memory of the event. Zelizer observes that “images were everywhere” and that “the events of September 11 were shaped largely through their visual representation” (“Photography” 50). What is more, September 11 was arguably a spectacle made to be seen. As Richard suggests, it was “the aim of this destructive terrorist attack” to create “a monumental image” (211). It is unsurprising, then, that the world obliged to such an extent that the visual spectacle in many ways eclipsed, even as it endeavored to record what happened. So much so that Horst Faas, senior photo editor for the Associated Press in London, exclaimed he had “never seen photo coverage of any event like this. It was the best picture story there ever was” (Garret).

Scholarship on news images and their role in the events of 9/11 have reflected this emphasis on the spectacular, with the consequence that the “moment” of those images’ production has all but eclipsed their afterlife in the everyday. In maintaining that “recording” has supplanted “seeing” as a necessary correlate to believing, Friend privileges the producers of images—whose stories he tells—over those who, from the safe distance of miles and years, see the re-presentation of that

visual record. Zelizer has argued that the photographic image has played an especially potent role in transporting the cultural collective along “a delicate path from the trauma itself to some kind of post-traumatic space” (“Photography” 49). Zelizer argues that the medium of photography is particularly “well-suited” as a vehicle for this journey, because it freezes events and cultivates a “space of contemplation” that enables recovery (“Photography” 49-50). Sontag argues that in an era of media saturation, the photographic image is uniquely able to “apprehend” events and contract them into a form that serves as the basic unit of collective memory. Images are, Sontag suggests, the “quotation or maxim or proverb” of our times (22-23). Concerning the iconic photograph, Hariman and Lucaites have argued the still image “frames the event for close, careful examination” while simultaneously excluding anything outside that might disrupt collectivity (“Public Identity” 55), thus fixing particular meanings and organizing a “field of interpretations” (“Performing Civic Identity” 367).

It has also been argued that photographic structures serve not only to filter and capture events (Flusser), but also to “frame” them within widely shared cultural structures of sense-making (Kitch). This aspect of the image is crucial especially when events are of such a magnitude they defy belief in the very project of being a cultural collective. Zelizer shows, for example, that images of 9/11 drew on the “template” of images of the liberation of Nazi prison camps. Although they are “fundamentally dissimilar events,” the liberation images became the “pedagogical template” for moving collective sentiment from “shock and horror into a post-traumatic space demanding responsiveness and action” (“Photography” 51). Sontag argues that interpretations of images are based on the “splicing” in of scenes from the larger drama from which the image is taken. Like Kuleshov’s experiments, these scenes are external to what the image captures, but they can nevertheless trump the contents of the image as such.⁴ Thus the photographic structuring of content serves to organize that content meaningfully and to instruct viewers in how to interpret and respond to the events the image makes visible.

Not only the medium and structure of the photographic image, but also the ritual of photography and the acts of witness it implies have been shown to be significant for how a collective experiences and responds to traumatic events. The very act of photographing constitutes the individual as what Zelizer terms an “amateur presence” whose act of recording and witnessing “in turn shapes [the collective’s] ensuing collective appropriations” of those events via the images witnesses produce (“Finding Aids” 697). It is, Zelizer insists, via the “lynch-pin” of

⁴ Bill Nichols (1994) illustrates this phenomenon eloquently, though in different terms, with respect to the infamous Rodney King video. He notes that the prosecution took the visual for granted, assuming the images spoke for themselves. The defense for the officers on trial, however, “punctuated” the events differently, arguing the video was incapable of showing the dramatic context within which the arrest of King unfolded.

the individual witness that the collective can shape and respond to events. Friend similarly opens his book by proclaiming the primacy of the act of photography: “The eyes were everywhere. Witnesses were observing, and photographing, the deadliest terrorist strike in American history even before they realized it” (ix). And in the days that followed, he notes, “photography itself, like some potent virus, would permeate the crisis. . . All through that tragic week in September, the photograph did its work. And the city, the nation, and the human race looked on as one unblinking eye” (xiii).

Focusing on the medium, the structure of its images, or the act of photography, these scholars have looked with profound insight at the scope and role of images in the collective experience and aftermath of the events of 9/11. However, these approaches persist in taking and (arguably) reifying what Ang has termed the *institutional perspective* on the viewers of images. That is, with respect to news images, media analyses have tended to focus on consumption, effect, and interpretation. Perhaps in the ebb and flow of what Neil Gabler terms ordinary entertainments these conceptions of populations as audiences, as consumers, as readers or users suffice to make sense of a narrow and economically-politically interested range of relations, practices and meanings relevant to understanding the work images do. In each case, though to varying degrees, the population concerned is more or less passive, more or less abstract, and more or less homogenized by the meanings and practices that measure and “interpellate” them (Althusser). Even where studies of media have extended the potential range of involvement of populations in the meanings made of media, questions of what happens after the paper is read or the broadcast is ended remain largely beyond the ken of media studies.

On the contrary, I argue with Ang that it is necessary to consider what she has aptly described as “the uneven and variable everyday context” within which news images are taken up and transformed, extended, interpreted and contested (157). As Stuart Hall provocatively explains, before a message can “have an ‘effect’ (however defined), satisfy a ‘need’ or be put to a ‘use,’ it must first be appropriated as a meaningful discourse and be meaningfully decoded” (“Encoding, Decoding” 93). It is within the codes of decoding, the practices and relations of interpretation, that an image becomes capable of affecting, influencing, or persuading. Hall postulates, then, a “lack of equivalence” between the codes of encoding and the codes of decoding, and thus a relative autonomy of one from the other (94). More than mere cognitive activities, interpretations must be mobilized, connected not only to understandings and the codes through which meanings are accessed, but to those material practices and relations of power by which predominant meanings are impressed, negotiated, or resisted. These constitute what Hall describes as “the articulation of language”—and here I would add images, rather than watch disappear beneath the wheels of textualism—“on real relations and conditions” (95).

Rather than presuming a universal “spectator” structured as such via the operations of a patriarchally delimited, heteronormative unconscious, which Christine Gledhill terms the “cine-psychanalytic” approach (167). And rather than presuming to “read off” of news images the range of potential meanings delimited via processes of ideological signification (a structural-semiotic approach). And rather than attributing to the medium of photography (Flusser), the “ritual practices” of photographers (Zelizer, “Finding Aids” 698), or the particular “visual template” they employ to frame the visual spectacle (Zelizer, “Photography” 49) the sole power to determine the photograph’s role in inflicting trauma and conferring recovery on individuals who see those images. I follow Hall’s and Ang’s invitation to look to the uneven and variable everyday context, the real conditions and relations in which images come to do what they do. I would like to consider the rest of the story—what people did and the consequent lives of images beyond the news process.

“I wanted to do something”

There has been a time for shock and outrage. There will be a time for mourning and retribution. But today, its time to do something—something in the same way that given enough pebbles you’ll make a mountain; enough drops, you’ll fill an ocean.
(Albrecht)

The visual record, then, is only part of the story. I am less interested in the ubiquitous images and their well-documented conditions of recording than in what followed—how those images came to be lived, articulated on real relations and conditions. For however numerous and significant and potent the images of the destruction and chaos of 9/11, and however many in New York City and elsewhere contributed or attended to the visual record which unfolded in the days and weeks thereafter, there followed from those images something more than is allowed for in our usual conceptions of news images and their effects/uses/interpretations. People recorded, people watched, but everywhere there was a felt need to “do something.” The refrain “I wanted to do something” appeared over and over again in newspapers around the U.S.⁵ And it is worth a little space to sketch the scope of

⁵ The following narrative is constructed from print news coverage located via the LexisNexis General News and U.S. News databases. The search parameters were limited to stories published between September 11 and October 1, 2001. The refrain of ‘doing something’ appears in each of the articles cited, either in the reporter’s story or in quotations from those interviewed. While I searched both major publications (General News) and regional (U.S. News), I do not claim that this is a copious account. Nevertheless, by including both local papers and papers of record from all over the U.S., this narrative sketches the scope of this refrain.

behavior “something” indexed in order to consider what performance might have to do with the visual record of 9/11.

A September 12, 2001, article reported neighbors in West Greenwich Village standing in line to volunteer at the St. Vincent’s Medical Center. One woman reportedly “felt frustrated watching the carnage on television,” and opined—“people got up today and wanted to do something” (Schneider).

School children in Hernando County, FL, “not willing to sit idly by and do nothing,” created a memorial garden, sold American flag key chains to raise money for the American Red Cross, sent cards and pictures to other children living near the United Flight 93 crash site, and donated money. “I know it’s kind of small ,” said one student who set up a relief fund that raised \$750, “but if I sit back and I watch it, I feel completely useless” (King).

Prison inmates in California donated their commissary money. One inmate donated \$4.65—all the money he had. According to a prison spokesperson, “many inmates on their very own, from the moment this happened, wanted to do something” (Roth).

Rescue workers who felt the need “to do something” made the trek to New York to volunteer their services (Donatelli). Those who couldn’t help with rescue efforts found other ways to “do something.”

One reporter explained that “an urgent need to do something, anything.” drove people in Atlanta to begin lining up at a Red Cross center at 4:55 a.m. (2 hours before the doors opened) and wait up to 4 hours to donate blood (McKenna). An online donation center (www.FireDonations.com) went from raising \$10,000 in six months prior to 9/11 to handling \$200,000 per hour because, the Executive director said, “people want to do something to help” (Emling).

In addition to driving to New York to volunteer and donating blood and money, people organized car washes (Branigin) and set up lemonade stands (Twedt). Local celebrities in Las Vegas sold newspapers (Padgett) in area shopping malls and movie stars hosted telethons to raise money for the victims, their families, and their rescuers (“A Generous People”).

Editorials were quick to exhort their readers in what to do. They urged people to vote (“Stand Up”). They urged people to display the full-page color U.S. flags printed on their back pages (Wickham). They urged their readers to attend public patriotic rallies and participate in “mass showing(s)” of the American flag (Albrecht). They insisted it was “downright patriotic” to “buy something, spend some money”—on anything from towels and televisions to plane tickets and rototillers (Anderson). And Americans did. In addition to all the lemonade and key chains and car washes, sales of guns and ammunition spiked (McKinnon); bookstores sold out of books on prophecy, war, and terrorism; and retailers sold out of U.S. flags and anything emblazoned with its colors (Reide, Fish, and Read).

People gathered to pray. They held candlelight vigils, held hands, sang songs, and cried. People posted missing persons flyers even two days after the attacks, when there was little chance that anyone missing was alive—because “they had to

do something, anything, that at least appeared to be useful” (Usborne). Artists made art (Bordelon). Poets wrote poems (Potts). And from Latin musician Edwin Pabon (Wildman), to Jackson Browne (“Singers and Athletes”), to the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra (Kinzer), musicians made music. People marched (Davis) and held public protests for peace (Heredia and Lelchuk) as well as for war (Honawar).

While I have sketched in broad strokes the scope of performances covered by the news, I’m sure this account shows what would be born out by a finer hand. People did not just record and watch. Nor did they in watching simply become the more or less passive bearers of a primary witness, one structured by the acts of recording in which those who were there engaged. Whatever else these may be, however traditional or novel, however carefully organized or spontaneous, whatever their degree of aesthetic competence or cultural status, each constitutes a performance. This multiplicity of performances is clearly related to the news and the visual record it made available in the hours and days and weeks following the attacks. Taken together, they suggest something far more than the passivity one might be led to expect. On the contrary, both the variety and scope of these cultural performances suggests a great deal of activity.

In fact, the post-9/11 landscape seems to have been traversed by a series of what Joseph Roach terms behavioral vortices. Roach explains that places like Exchange Alley in ante-bellum New Orleans were “hot spots” of performance constituted by a “permanent, spatially induced carnival” and sustained by the confluence of spectacle and consumption. Here, what could be construed as the everyday milieu of behavior and values was suspended, and “under such conditions the most intolerable of injustices may be made to seem natural and commonplace, and the most demented of spectacles ‘normal’” (53). Like the antebellum marketplaces Roach describes, the events of 9/11, the flows of images and the cultural force of those flows seem to have created a series of vortices, “hot spots” of cultural performance. The vortices that swept across the post-9/11 landscape were produced by the confluence of loss and mourning. They were organized around a collective trauma and the collective work of repairing that public that felt itself traumatized by the attacks. The difference seems to be that the terrorist attacks suspended normalcy. In Turner’s terms, they constituted a massive *breach* that precipitated a large-scale cultural *crisis*, one which the ritual of (photo)journalism and the drama of news were profoundly insufficient to redress.

Moreover, while the news clearly “portray(ed) an arena of dramatic actions and forces,” as James Carey claims, public “participation” was far from conditioned by its assumption of “vicarious, social roles” (21). The cultural performances produced in the vortices that swept the post-9/11 landscape *became* the news. This suggests a profound deviation from the norms governing news value. As Zelizer notes, drawing “from and upon the public” rather than depicting the events being witnessed, constituted a deviation “from the normal journalistic routine” (“Photography” 48). This deviation and the facilitation of public witness it enabled

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are evidenced by the shifting focus of the visual record: from recording the attacks (with a hierarchy organized by the first plane striking the tower) and their immediate result (the fireball from the crash, the plummeting bodies and debris, the plumes of smoke, the towers' collapse) to the people fleeing and wounded, to the immediate reactions of eye witnesses, and finally to the reactions and responses of all those who were elsewhere.

I want to suggest that in attending to the visual spectacle of 9/11, media scholarship has focused on the more or less passive "public viewing position" created *by* the news, while failing to note that cultural performance *was* the news. From the perspective of performance, it seems public trauma might be understood as something whose experience is bound up in important ways with the news process. It is after all as news that many, perhaps most, experienced the public trauma Zelizer describes. However, the refrain to do something was not something that existed as news prior to its enactment. It became news as a result of its enactment. In order to consider the significance of this refrain and its relation to public trauma, I turn to the work of Deleuze and Guattari to talk about these cultural performances as refrains.

Of the Refrain

The expressive is primary in relation to the possessive; expressive qualities, or matters of expression, are necessarily appropriative and constitute a having more profound than being. Not in the sense that these qualities belong to a subject, but in the sense that they delineate a territory that will belong to the subject that carries or produces them. These qualities are like signatures, but the signature, the proper name, is not the constituted mark of a subject, but the constituting mark of a domain, an abode.
(Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 316)

Deleuze-Guattarian thought emphasizes what Grossberg has termed a "pragmatics of concepts," a "certain refusal of the necessary and determining power of formal systematicity" over the concrete force of the lived (1, 2). Their thought insists, in other words, on a dynamic encounter between concepts and the lived that facilitates a pursuit of alternative modes of conceptualizing the relation between media and cultural performances in the uneven and variable milieu of the everyday. Deleuze and Guattari open their discussion of the refrain with three vignettes that embody some central features of the concept. These are not, they insist, "three successive movements in an evolution," or successive stages in a unilineal process. They are rather "three aspects of the same thing," the refrain. Paired with examples of critical-cultural studies scholarship that deploy the refrain in analyses of the "concrete force of the lived," I hope to make the move from explication to considering the concept's implications for the relation between news images and performance, in both the experience of public trauma and the constitution of a post-traumatic landscape.

1. Mobile Territory: *Infra-assemblage*

In the first vignette, Deleuze and Guattari describe a refrain taking shape when a child, gripped by fear, perhaps lost, feeling threatened and alone in a strange place, whistles a tune in the dark.⁶ The song organizes a mobile territory, a fragile, mobile center against the forces of chaos that threaten to undo him. He takes shelter in the song while using its rhythm to hasten or slow his pace as he moves through a strange and uncertain space. Perhaps a less extreme example might be the sorts of mobile territories frequently deployed by urban commuters. They tune in to iPods, or conspicuously rustle the pages and hide behind their newspapers, or talk loudly on their cell phones to create rhythms and regularities that enable them to pass through the “non-places” (Auge) of trains, buses and terminals, or even through territories being marked and held by menacing others. Slack elaborates a parallel example in an analysis of the cultural formation of adolescence as it is articulated in the critically and popularly acclaimed film *The Matrix*. Slack argues that “adolescence may work like a ‘refrain,’ an aggregate of matters of expression that draws a territory and develops territorial motifs and landscapes” (37, original emphasis). Such refrains, Slack explains, effectively “fix a fragile point as a center” in the chaos that seems so characteristic of adolescence in contemporary American culture (27). Here the refrain constitutes what Deleuze and Guattari term an *infra-assemblage* that moves from chaos to the threshold of a mode of organization that responds to forces that threaten to disorganize or undo a fragile mode of existence (*A Thousand Plateaus* 313).

2. Domestic Territory: *Intra-assemblage*

In the second vignette, Deleuze and Guattari describe the sort of refrain through which a home-territory, or *intra-assemblage* is constituted. Here many different components—whistling a tune, music or talk from a radio, the rhythmic chatter and flicker of a television, as well as the many other activities we associate with a domestic milieu—serve as rhythmic markers organizing and holding a space. As with the child’s song, all the elements marking home serve to stabilize a point around and from which home-space is arranged. This point serves as the basis for selecting, eliminating, and extracting from the surrounding milieu all the rhythmic and sonic elements necessary to keep “the forces of chaos” outside “as much as possible” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 311). Otherwise, those cosmic forces would threaten to undo both “creator and creation.” The boundaries of this domestic territory are fluctuating and permeable (otherwise it would be a prison):

⁶ I have maintained the genders as they appear in the passages referenced from Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* (hereafter referred to as ATP).

doors and windows are arrayed as “screens” around this relatively stable center, permitting sunlight and fresh air to come in while keeping debris and other intrusions to a minimum. Extending this aspect of the refrain to what he terms “global nomads,” Wise describes the organizing of affect, sensation, and belonging for those—children of diplomatic or military personnel, over-the-road truck drivers, individuals whose jobs require constant travel—who live out dispersed, mobile, and often fragmentary domestic lives. While the hegemonic form of home life is largely untenable for such global nomads, they nevertheless constitute home as a mobile, sometimes fragile territory that emerges in singular organizations of rhythms and patterns to “fend off chaos” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 114).

3. Collective Territory: Inter-assemblage

In the third vignette, an enclosing, domestic territory can be stabilized sufficiently to risk an opening onto other milieus in order to connect and communicate with them, thus becoming an *inter-assemblage*. A song in this instance is not a matter of creating a fragile, mobile territory, nor of drawing a relatively stable, if still somewhat tenuous, domestic territory. The song is a call to another milieu, or it becomes an improvisation that permits communication between territorial milieus. Jackson (“Discovering”) illustrates the movement from intra- to inter-assemblage as it applies to political landscapes. On one hand, he explains, nineteenth-century America was comprised of vast tracts of land contained by rectangular boundaries that had nothing to do with the contents or natural landscape. The boundaries operated like packaging or envelopes to contain and protect. “What mattered,” he notes, “was that a territory was established in which certain political institutions could begin to function without outside interference” (14). Territories as “isolated” intra-assemblages. Eventually these gave way to the modern landscape we know, in which the boundaries are like a skin meant to correlate as closely as possible the area (a nation) with its content (a people). The skin becomes a permeable boundary intended to establish an effective relation with the outside. The landscape as communicating inter-assemblage. In this connection, Charles Stivale has written extensively about the performances which occur under the conditions of the Cajun dance arena. The “differences in repetition” of musical elements and dance steps organize the dance arena as an event (*Disenchanting* 118-19). Here, a refrain passes through and propels the collective performances anticipated, enabled, and constrained by exchanges and encounters between music (rhythm, melody, vocal and instrumental arrangements), musicians, space, aggregates of dancers (individuals, couples, or groups of dancers), and their collective affections, anticipations, and actions.

Refrain as Territorial Assemblage

From these it is possible to elaborate the conceptual terrain of the refrain. First, a refrain is always involved in a *process of territorial assemblage*. Deleuze and Guattari explain that “every assemblage is territorial,” and that in any territory one can find a refrain (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 504; Deleuze, *Negotiations* 146). The first principle of analysis, then, is “to discover what territoriality they [assemblages] envelop,” and thus what refrain(s) circulate(s) within them and relate(s) them to which other assemblages (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 503). Despite the numerous connections in which it occurs in their work, territorial assemblage consistently designates not a thing but an open, ongoing process of arranging or organizing heterogeneous elements and forces. This mode of organizing is comprised of a form of expression—a “*semiotic system*” of percepts or a “regime of signs”—and a form of content—a “*pragmatic system*” involving “actions and passions” (504). A territorial assemblage is not a thing, nor is it simply a product or producer of behaviors or environments (in the psychological or ethological sense). It operates as the abode which makes possible the formation of a singular mode of existence. It thus serves not as a product of but as the basis for all expressive acts. As Deleuze and Guattari explains, refrains constitute “a having more profound than being. Not in the sense that these qualities belong to a subject, but in the sense that they delineate a territory that will belong to the subject that carries or produces them” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 316). Or as Wise puts it, “the space called home is not an expression of the subject. Indeed, the subject is an expression of the territory” organized by a refrain (114). To whistle a tune or dance with a partner or mosh at a concert is both to be seized by a rhythm and to mark and possess a space in ways that simultaneously express a territory and create a way of inhabiting it, even “in the heart of chaos” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 311).

Since chaos lurks in all of these examples it deserves some elaboration. Chaos is not understood as simply a negative condition, the anomalous other of order. Neither is it something external that occasionally “leaks” in to ruin an otherwise hermetic, well-structured process. The rhythmic organization of territorial assemblage occurs “in between” a territorializing movement of fixity, order, and viscosity (what Deleuze and Guattari elsewhere associate with “striated” space and the “molarity” of identity and the State—extreme forms of territorialization); and a volatile movement of deterritorialization that tends toward fluidity and non-order (associated with “smooth” space, the nomadic, and “molecular” flows of becoming). Chaos serves as “the milieu of all milieus”: not a totality as such, but that upon which all milieus consist. The refrain is, in effect an “answer to chaos,” to the forces and flows which viewed from within threaten to undo, break up, and carry away creator and creation (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 313). Just as the rhythm and organization of a refrain can be seized “in between” milieus

that are transcoded and repeated in the work of territorialization, it can also be transcoded in turn, undone or unraveled by processes of deterritorialization.

Thus, a refrain clearly also involves an element of recurrence. But recurrence is neither mimesis nor simulacra. It is not a repetition of the same or a copy of a copy without original, but a positive production that is singular—a *repetition with a difference*. While the child's song may certainly be taken as signifying something, the song's significance as far as the refrain is concerned lies neither in its referential potential nor with its original composition, nor even with the conditions under which the child first heard the song. It's significance lies with the work it does in a particular instance and with the way in which its qualities become expressive under the particular conditions in which this repetition occurs. Even highly formal or ritualized performances, insofar as they can be grasped as territorial, involve refrains. Stivale notes, for example, that the constraint of tradition upon claims of authenticity among Cajun musicians, which tends to limit themes and compositions predominantly to two-steps and waltzes, nevertheless serves as a "firm basis" for the exploration of new themes and influences within which traditional refrains yet circulate (*Disenchanted* 49). While such tradition-bound cultural performances seem to preclude creativity, the repetition with a difference of a refrain is an *essentially creative and expressive act*. The "code" organizing even the most highly ritualized cultural performance is constantly in a state of "transcoding." According to Deleuze and Guattari, even art is fundamentally territorializing. In its activity of creating "affects" and "percepts," art involves the selection of a property, a component of a material milieu (a color, a mark, a texture, a rhythm) which is made expressive (Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* 163-99).

The association of refrains and their territorialities with affect is equally significant. All the above examples describe moments of intense emotions, feelings, passions and desires. In the infra-assemblage of the child's tune this takes the form of fear, but in many of these examples the feelings or desires involved are neither so readily nor easily identifiable. Nevertheless, whether the refrain organizes the affective complex of adolescence, that of home, or the intense and affable flows of actions and passions circulating in those "spaces of affect" characteristic of the Cajun dance floor (Stivale, *Disenchanted* 21), affective organization is key to the possessing, expressing, and arrangements of belonging that constitute the uneven and variable milieus of everyday life. As Seigworth explains, there are three inter-related senses of the term affect that are important to understanding the refrain. In its most territorialized mode, affect (*affectio*) is a body's capacity to affect and be affected by other bodies. The body is here understood not as a pre-formed unity, defined by its identification (genus or species), but solely by these affective capacities, with their intensive and extensive qualities and relations, which answer to the question: "what can it do?" (Coonfield). In its second sense, affect (*affectus*) names "a line of continuous variation in the passage of intensities or forces of existence" (Seigworth 166). This "line" may incline or decline toward "greater or lesser degrees of intensity or potentiality" as a body enters into relations with other

bodies. For example, the Cajun dance arena is a site of affective organization comprised of vectors, of lines and relations between lines of force. A competent dancer may join with a novice, with the result that her line declines while the novice's line inclines; as they enter a relation of becoming-body, they draw an aggregated line of intensity as a new dancer-assemblage circulating through the space amidst other dancer-assemblages. Third, affect can be said to operate in its autonomous mode or smooth state, "at its most concrete abstraction from all becomings and states of things" (167). Here affect is radically deterritorialized (smooth as opposed to striated), and becomes synonymous with chaos, the "milieu of all milieus" of pure or virtual potentiality.

Refrain and Performance

To summarize: a refrain consists in a repetition with a difference of qualitative or creative-expressive blocs that respond to chaos by organizing a territorial assemblage. As with much Deleuze-Guattarian thought, the effort here to explain the refrain is made more useful when subordinated to the more important question of what a refrain *does*. To explore what a refrain can do in the context of cultural performance, I want to briefly explore some resonances between them.

In so far as performance concerns situated, embodied expressive enactments, all of the examples discussed can be viewed as performances. The child whistling the tune, the acts of display and domesticity associated with home, dancing: all of these territorial assemblages have their refrains which obtain in situated expressive, embodied acts. Whether it is a collective performance that constitute a landscape as inter-assemblage or an "individual" performance that constitutes a mobile territory, this enactment is expressive of a mode of being within an abode which that being enacts. From the perspective of the refrain, any performance could be said to have its territorial dimension—it is a matter of addressing the methodological question Deleuze and Guattari pose: what territorialities does a performance constitute and what refrains can be found circulating within them?

A second connection concerns the element of repetition involved in both the refrain and performance. In his discussion of Schechner's definition of performance as restored behavior, Roach notes that "no action or sequence of actions may be performed exactly the same way twice; they must be reinvented or recreated at each appearance" (125). The performance of displaying the American flag has become a widely practiced expression of patriotic feeling since September 11, 2001. And in its most highly segmented or ritualized form—as when a military color guard displays the flag at a funeral—the quasi-religious cultural performance is highly regulated and formulaic. Every action and movement, all aspects of dress and decorum, the number and position of the color guard, even the flag's design and the materials of which it is constructed aim at precise (idealized) embodiments of specific rules governing this ritual. Nevertheless, each instance of this performance constitutes a singular event. What many scholars of performance term

the “situation” of such acts of display (Goffman; Kapchan; Butler) enfolds or envelopes a performance in a specific time, place, and cultural location that both defines and is defined by the acts that take place therein. No matter how formally flawless a color guard’s performance, no matter how perfectly it seeks to embody those rules whose ambition it is to transcend the individual act, a performance connects with the singularity of a day, an occasion, an audience, and a particular space and time. The consequence is the creation of a singular event (one that is *highly* territorial) which becomes uniquely invested with the “actions and passions” of all who participate in and witness it—even the weather (Deleuze, *Negotiations* 25-26).

Thus, while such cultural forms are indeed highly regulated and formulaic, they do not involve the recapitulation of experience, but the “transformation of experience through the renewal of its cultural forms” (Roach 125). Both performance and refrain are citational or “intertextual” (Kapchan), in that they can repeat and “restore” meanings and behaviors, but both exhibit an “emergent” quality that “resides in the interplay between communicative resources, individual competence, and the goals of the participants, within the context of particular situations” (Bauman 302). Deleuze and Guattari associate this emergent quality with the power of “becoming,” that which occurs when one enters into transversal relations, not to move between two forms of being (from being animal to being human). Rather, it is to follow a line that passes between points (animal, human) to unleash all the potentiality connected to both but fully contained by neither (becoming-animal). As Patty Sotirin explains, becoming marks an emergent, “positive ontology” that

explodes the ideas about what we are and what we can be beyond the categories that seem to contain us: beyond the boundaries separating human being from animal, man from woman, child from adult, micro from macro, and even perceptible and understandable from imperceptible and incomprehensible. Becoming moves beyond our need to know . . . beyond our determination to control . . . and beyond our desire to consume or possess . . . So becoming offers a radical conception of what a life does. (99)

In a videotaped interview Deleuze explains that a hunter, for example, enters not a human but an *animal* relationship with an animal. In tracking, a hunter enters into a relation that pushes beyond the limit that separates human and animal: “at that point, they are animal, they have with the animal an animal relation,” which constitutes a new “animal-world” within which the hunter can move and exist (Boutang, *L’Abécédaire*, “A as in Animal”).⁷ Importantly, in this same portion of the interview, Deleuze comments on the significance of territory to becoming. Insofar as becoming is a transversal passage “in between,” it is a “vector of exiting” by which “one leaves the territory.” This is at the same time accompanied by “an

⁷ Translation of this interview from *L’Abécédaire* was undertaken in consultation with Professor Charles J. Stivale.

effort of reterritorializing oneself elsewhere,” of passing in-between in order to create a new “world” or horizon which delimits new possibilities of living. Insofar as performance is territorial, it involves a mode of creating that constitutes “a having more profound than being” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 316). That is, performance that is territorial is profoundly constitutive of both individuated and collective life. It precedes not only the formation of any (phenomenal or social or psychical) subject. As the enactment of an abode that at once comprises a mode of subjectivation, the possibility of expression, and the potentiality of becoming, performance as territorial refrain is the condition of possibility of communication and sociality.⁸

A third connection between what a refrain does and performance concerns the creative-expressive dimension of both. As Kapchan argues, “performances are *aesthetic practices*—patterns of behavior, ways of speaking, manners of bodily comportment—whose repetitions situate actors in time and space, structuring individual and group identities” (479, my emphasis). Bauman extends this aestheticization to the performance of what he terms verbal art—displays of verbal competence before an audience. In so doing, he endeavors to release performance from its subordination to textual modes of expression in order to consider the “artistic action” of such displays occurring within the “artistic event” defined by performer, art form, audience, and setting (290). Thinking in terms of performance involves an active resistance to what Conquergood terms textocentrism—the tendency to subordinate all cultural phenomena to the logic of representation. In describing performance as “a kind of communicative behavior,” Richard Schechner (3) points to the expressive dimension of performance. However, it is not a simple conduit of information. Performance is simultaneously a way of being in and a way of knowing the world that is a constitutive dimension of human experience and expression (Conquergood, “Communication as Performance”; Chvasta). Kapchan describes it as a “multi-semiotic mode of cultural expression” because performance not only fabricates symbols and meanings, it also “comments on those meanings, interpreting them for the larger community and often critiquing and subverting them as well” (480).

This connection is important for revaluing performance in the face of the visual spectacle of 9/11. There is a tendency to think performance has been displaced, somehow, by visuality. Lucaites and Hariman (“Visual Rhetoric”) define performance as “aesthetically marked and intensive communicative behavior displayed for an audience” and directed at maintaining collective life. They argue that performance is “the primary medium through which the ‘unsayable’ (typically the sacred) is enacted and given presence” in *illiterate* societies, whereas “iconic photographs and the journalistic practices they animate” have replaced performance in *literate*, liberal-democratic societies (41). However, this dichotomy—between photography and performance, literate and illiterate—

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becomes difficult to maintain in the face of 9/11, when “just watching” clearly was not enough. Iconic photos take time to accrue to themselves sufficient cultural capital to displace (or rather contract into themselves) performances as routes to enacting collectivity. It seems, rather, that watching and recording as well as a host of other “doing” takes on a kind a potent role—as performances—in the constitution of a post-9/11 landscape. It is via the many expressive acts sketched above (and the many others that followed in the months after September 2001) that the boundaries of that landscape were and are refashioned.

Conclusion: Public Trauma in the Post-9/11 Landscape

The most basic political element in any landscape is the boundary. (J. Jackson 13)

I want to consider then the implications for thinking performance as refrain in the context of the post-9/11 landscape. In *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*, Jackson defines a landscape as “a composition of man-made or man-modified spaces” that “serve as infrastructure or background for our collective existence” (7-8). It is neither purely “natural” nor “constructed” but synthetic, deliberately designed to speed up or slow down natural processes, in order to make them comport with the rhythms and requirements of the collectives who create and inhabit them. Thus, at its basis, a landscape is made to serve two human “identities” which are perpetually in tension: human as “political animal” and as “inhabitant of the earth.” For any landscape to be operative, it must serve the multiple mixtures of and be able to compensate for the tensions between the needs at which these two identities gesture. These needs, ethological and political, appear to culminate in what Jackson terms the demand for gregariousness, the requirement for collectivity or communal belonging. That is, we endeavor to create collectivities, not landscapes. But the landscape, its boundaries and territory, are its “visible manifestation . . . simply the by-product of people working and living, and sometimes coming together, sometimes staying apart, but always recognizing their interdependence” (12). Even when that collectivity is dispersed, it is nevertheless the territory through which that collectivity can be understood. “A nation,” writes Jackson, “is not simply a collection of people,” nor is it simply a discursively constituted community of “strangers,” as Warner terms it. “It is also a territory they occupy” and, I would add, the refrains through which that territory is enacted (14). The projects—of being an individual and being a collective, of being of the earth and being a “political animal”—are thus intimately bonded to one another through this conception of the landscape.

While there are resonances between them, Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of the refrain compels a re-thinking of aspects of Jackson’s definition. The subject (in either identity) is not that which constitutes a territory, but is a product of the territory constituted. A landscape, then, is the territorialization of an “environment,” produced in a process of social assemblage whose refrains sweep

multiple territorialities into something much larger than what can be taken in at a glance. Social assemblage organizes dividuated aggregates: of sub-personal elements (from molecules to buildings), individuals and networks, organizations and governments, cities and nations (De Landa). A landscape, then, is no mere by-product, it is rather the precursor both for the kind of collectivities that make a landscape its abode and for the subjectivities that find that landscape habitable.

The terrorist acts of 9/11 radically deterritorialized a number of the component assemblages whose collective rhythms and cycles constituted the cultural landscape prior to 9/11. These attacks transcoded networks of air travel, “rules” governing both the hijacking of airplanes and how those involved were ideally to act in such situations, systems of education, networks of transnational migration, and many others. As a result those acts decomposed social assemblage processes—networks, buildings, individuals, and organizations, even cities and, if the press is to be believed, a whole nation. As Richard puts it, 9/11 saw the creation of a “cluster” of shifting images which displaced, decomposed, and emptied a host of well-established images (a cluster whose net effect might be described as “domestic tranquility”). In the face of this radical deterritorialization, a new landscape, with new boundaries constituting a new territory had to be fashioned. Of course, watching and recording were aids and agents implicated in stabilizing the prior landscape, as well as in its demise and in the constitution of a new landscape. But this post-9/11 landscape, first and foremost, is collectively performed.

The three dimensions of the refrain—infra-assemblage, intra-assemblage, and inter-assemblage—might be taken to describe the various ways of performing collectivity and subjectivation through which this post-9/11 landscape was and is created. The desire to “do something” marked the boundaries of this landscape and constituted the “visible manifestation” of the collective that felt itself traumatized. The chaos which the attacks injected touched not only the image-clusters of a prior collective and its territory, it touched the intensely personal inter-assemblages through which people connected to one another and stabilized the “I” that felt that connection. “Do something” marks not a stage of mourning but a range of oscillations through the various dimensions of infra-, intra-, and inter-assemblage that comprised the territory that was breached and the structure of feeling that was traumatized that day. This refrain marks at once an intensely personal and variable enactment of connection that was necessary to life in a post-9/11 landscape, and a frantic effort to recompose that landscape, the political consequences of which are continuing to reverberate not only across the U.S. but around the world.

The individual has been placed as the “lynchpin” through which public trauma is witnessed and, by extension, the vehicle through which healing may vicariously take place. Zelizer explains that “photography, and the ritual practices it involves, helps individuals establish moral accountability in a way that helps them move on and in so doing they reinstate the collective after traumatic events temporarily shatter its boundaries” (“Finding Aids” 698). However, it is important to examine

critically the tendency to presume the individual as the starting point of analysis, the prime mover in this explanation. As Stuart Hall argues, “news” require “consensus knowledge” about social reality, which is expressed in terms of values which translate “the legitimation of the social order into faces, expressions, subjects, settings and legends” (“Determinations” 181). In other words, news reproduces the categories and assumptions essential to maintaining a particular social formation by reproducing its basic terms. Among these, the individual subject is foremost. In order to reproduce that subject and the social formations organized around it, what is diffuse and collective must be represented as focused and individual. “A newspaper can account for an event or deepen its account,” Hall explains, “by attaching an individual to it, or by bringing personal attributes isolated from their social context, to bear on their account as an explanation. Individuals provide a universal ‘grammar of motives’ in this respect” (183-84). Thus socio-cultural problems, such as inner-city homicides or globalization, become individualized and personalized through attention to victims and their families and the vilification of the individual aggressors. Similarly, news coverage of post-9/11 performances individualized collectively-experienced trauma and those who inflicted it. It focused attention on individual affective expressions (patriotic fervor, a sense of fear or loss) through culturally potent acts (amassing to sing “God Bless America,” buying a gun, putting up Missing Person flyers), and in so doing the news renders individual and personal what was and is collective and shared.

This, then, is what media do. Their “strong effect” is to constitute not communities (imagined or otherwise) or publics but *collectivities*, while also shaping (pedagogy in the most ancient sense) people to be part of them. This is no idealized unity found, for example, in the utopian rhetoric typical of writing about online “communities,” because one of the central functions of news, like terrorism, is to generate, organize and exploit vulnerability. If all of this writing about images and 9/11 is to be believed, the image did not simply record what happened, it entered into it at every level: at the level of the attack’s conception and execution; at the level of collectivization through which the trauma was inflicted; and at the level at which that collective made sense of, related to and remembered what the visual record insisted happened.

I am arguing to press further than the usual rhetoric of constructionism, such as Anderson famously articulated in *The Imagined Community*. Further, too, than Warner’s insistence that a public is discursively (textocentrically) organized out of strangers who come to be organized as an audience through structures of address and attention. The community, the audience, the public are all held to be an organization composed of pre-existing individuals. While this may be axiomatic and certainly has the feel of common sense about it, and while this notion is reiterated often (Lucaites and Hariman, “Visual Rhetoric”; Zelizer, “Finding Aids”; Warner), I want to argue for the value of a contrary position. There is first collective, territorial assemblage which has as its first order of business the production of individuals via processes of subjectivation (Althusser; Hall, “Determinations”;

Deleuze, *Foucault*). There exists first a collective that feels itself traumatized, and then the individuals whose expression of that trauma make the news. Connection comes into awareness precisely when a boundary is breached, when a structure of feeling is damaged in some way, such that both collectivity and the “I” are endangered and rendered tenuous. It is then that “we” are compelled to “do something”—to remember, to buy, to vote, to pray, to sing, to donate blood, to display, to organize, but most importantly to say “I.” “I remember.” Dividuations—both collective and individual—are ongoing accomplishments. It is through performance that refrains circulate, that constitutions of expressive space, and territorial assemblage are undertaken. The individual, and the sense of the collective as a group of them, is an after-effect, an after-image.

I cannot claim to have exhausted Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of the refrain or its potential for thinking performance in media culture. Such a goal is neither consistent with Deleuze-Guattarian thought nor, in my view, particularly desirable. I have argued that the visual spectacle of 9/11 and its aftermath has eclipsed that which it purports to record, and that this is reflected in media studies scholarship. I have suggested that the images are only part of the story of how a collective feels itself traumatized and engages in the messy, fraught, and indeterminate work of recovery. I have drawn on Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of the refrain to consider the particular, potent work of performance in the constitution of a post-traumatic, post-9/11 landscape. I have argued that public trauma is collectively experienced but dividuated through performance, and that performance (at least as much as the ritual of photography) is a critical way in which the delicate path to recovery is traversed. I have argued that Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the refrain can be construed as privileging performance in relation to other modes of communicating and knowing. Whether performance is taken to be the “doing” or the “thing done” (or both), whether the refrain is considered at the level of sub-personal, subjective, or massively collective territorial assemblage, there remains a great deal to be considered about those places and moments where the two converge.

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