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When Things Fall Apart, and the Centre Cannot Hold

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Abstract

The tarot card *The Tower* has never felt more relevant. When it appears in a reading, it signifies disruption, change, and catastrophe. Over the years, I have come to see its presence as a harbinger of transformation—albeit one often met with resistance. In this chapter, I begin with the symbology of *The Tower* to reconsider the fall of the Twin Towers in 2001 and turn to W.B. Yeats's poem "The Second Coming" (1919/1997, 39) to reflect on the moment when "things fall apart; the centre cannot hold".[1] Revisiting my PhD research, completed in 2017, I will remember the trauma of 9/11 while considering the idea of the second coming as a necessary stage for renewal and rebirth.

In *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, theorist Donna Haraway suggests that in the throes of spiralling ecological disaster and its ensuing suffering, we must find new ways to reconfigure our relationship with the earth and each other.[2] Similarly, Catherine Malabou reformulates the Freudian notion of plasticity as a "new kind of exposure of the nervous system to danger and, consequently, a new definition of what 'event,' 'suffering,' and 'wound' mean".[3] In this context, I present two moving image artworks: "Six Fragments"

[1] W.B. Yeats, *Everyman's Poetry*, ed, John Kelly. (J.M Dent, 1997), 39.

[2] D. Haraway. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

[3] C. Malabou, C. *Ontology of the Accident, An Essay on Destructive Plasticity*. (Polity Press: 2012), 28.

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(2015–2017, 35 min), which emerged from my personal assumption that the events of September 11, 2001, unfolded in silence, and "Remembering" (2014–2017, 18 min).

Keywords

The Tower, The Twin Towers, W.B. Yeats, trauma, falling, ghosts, haunting

***Six Fragments* (2015–2017, 35 min)**



***Remembering* (2014–2017, 18 min)**



When Things Fall Apart, and the Centre Cannot Hold

Introduction

It would be remiss to write about the tarot card *The Tower* without acknowledging the turbulent world we continue to navigate. When I first wrote this in 2022, we were emerging from the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, while geopolitical crises unfolded across Ukraine, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, and beyond. Now, years later, upheaval remains a constant—wars persist, economies fluctuate, and the climate crisis accelerates. It feels as if we are still living through a time of the Tower—*through* being the key word, as Alejandro Jodorowsky describes the Tower as an opening, a release of what has been imprisoned, and the beginning of transformation.[4]

It would also be remiss of me not to acknowledge that my focus on the destruction of the Twin Towers is deeply embedded in the Western-centric nature of my inquiry. The events that unfolded on September 11, 2001 affected me profoundly because I was there—my use of this example emerges from that first-hand experience, not from any sense that it represents the most traumatic or significant destruction of cultural icons. I am acutely aware of how the media attention and cultural gravitas afforded the collapse of the Twin Towers far exceeded that given to equally devastating destructions and loss of life elsewhere: the obliteration of ancient religious buildings and sacred texts in Syria, entire levelled cities in Iraq, Afghanistan, Vietnam, Ukraine, and Gaza—many involving Western culpability. This disparity reflects not the relative significance of these events, but the charged nature of discourse when Western symbols of capitalism come under attack.

Briefly, *The Tower*—or *La Maison Dieu* (*The House of God*) in the Marseilles Tarot—is the sixteenth card in the deck (fig. 1). The image depicts a bolt of lightning, shaped like a tongue

[4] A. Jodorowsky. *The Way of the Tarot, The Spiritual Teacher in the Cards*. (Destiny Books: 2004), 21.



Figure 1 – Claude Burdel, *The Tower (XVI)*, 1751, Universal Tarot of Marseille, (Torino: Lo Scarabeo, 2006). All rights reserved, used by permission.

of fire, striking a brick tower. The walls are breached, two figures plummet from the heights, and stones tumble to the ground. The tower's toppled roof resembles a crown, while the base is surrounded by hills and plants. It is a dramatic scene, a battle between heaven and earth. Associated with the element of fire, *The Tower* connects the two lowest Sephirot, Hod and Netzach evoking the biblical Tower of Babel—built by Nimrod in a doomed attempt to storm heaven.[5] In her essay "Yeats, the Tarot and the Golden Dawn", Kathleen Raine traces the lineage of the card to these origins, writing: "The Tower […] is, above all, the Tower of Babel struck by the lightning of divine wrath, and signifies catastrophe and downfall".[6]

Yet in this particular version of *The Tower*, ambiguity lingers. The tower, with no visible door, could be a prison or a refuge, a hospice or an asylum. The two falling figures may be cast out—or liberated. The lightning bolt could signify destruction or life-giving power. In its feathery form, it either shatters or cracks open the tower's hardened shell, allowing its inner kernels to fall, seed, and bring forth life. And the strange balls that dance across the sky? They could be the remnants of magic and miracles, the divine celebration of a breakthrough—or the laughter of Zeus bubbling up to fill the heavens before he slays Asklepios.[7]

In other decks such as The Thoth tarot, Rider-Waite-Smith and the Golden Dawn, the lightning in the Tower card emanating from the sky is jagged, and menacing (fig. 2). Its meaning much more directed towards breakdown and destruction. In the Tower of the Golden Dawn, a man and a woman appear to fall to their demise on the rocks below, while flames flicker from the windows and lightning strikes the crown that serves as a roof into the sky. While, in the Thoth version, fragmented figures are thrown from the tower and fall towards a gaping mouth of

5 Sephirot Hod is Hebrew and relates to the Kabbalah and the tree of life. Sephirot meaning level, Hod meaning majesty, splendour, and glory. Hod is the eighth level. Netzach is Hebrew for eternity and sits at the seventh level of the Kabbalistic tree of life.

6 K. Raine, *Yeats, the Tarot and the Golden Dawn* (Dolmen Press: 1969),146.

7 To be struck by lightning is to be touched by the hand of God or the gods. Aklepios was slain by Zeus' thunderbolt and later became known as the god of medicine and honoured as such.

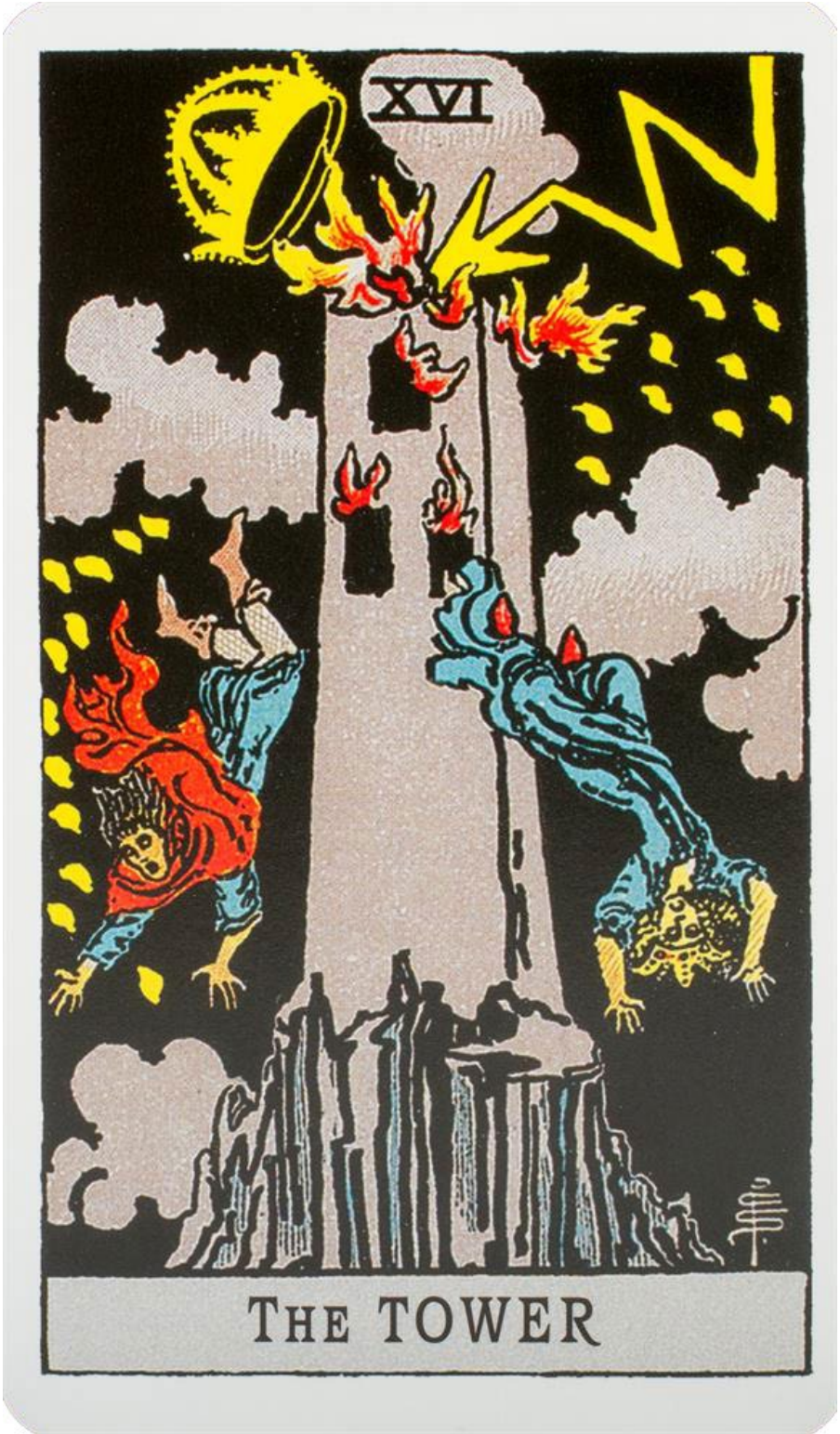


Figure 2 – Pamela Coleman Smith, *The Tower (XVI)*, circa 1909, Rider-Waite-Smith Tarot.

fire. The Tower is associated with the Hebrew letter פ, Pe,[8] which also means mouth, in this instance it is the mouth of Dis, the Roman God of the underworld, which corresponds to the Greek God Hades or Pluto.[9] The omnipresent eye of Horus or Shiva looks down from above as the walls of the tower collapse.[10] The Tower is our last chance to break free from old restraints and address the pride of the ego in preparation for the next stage of our journey, the Star, (number 17). To return to Raine, "In each Misfortune (the lightning-struck Tower) he will see the star of Hope (key number seventeen) shine through the twilight of Deception (the Moon): and ultimate Happiness (the Sun) will be the Result (the Last Judgement)."[11]

Which brings me to the title of this chapter, a line from the poem: "The Second Coming" by William Butler Yeats. Fascinated by magic and the symbology of the tarot Yeats was an active member of the Golden Dawn for over 30 years (1890-1922). For the poet, it wasn't so much that magic was a kind of poetry, rather that poetry was magic.[12] He writes, "Now as to magic. It is surely absurd to hold me 'weak' or otherwise because I choose to persist in a study which I decided deliberately four or five years ago to make, next to my poetry, the most important pursuit of my life."[13]

In his poems "The Tower" (1926) and "The Black Tower" (1939) there is significant mention of six Major Arcana symbols: the Fool, Death, the Tower, the Star, the Moon and the Sun. In 1917, Yeats purchased a tower in Ballylee, County Galway, declaring, "I declare this tower is my symbol; I declare this winding, gyring, spiring treadmill of a stair is my ancestral stair."[14] It

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8 *Pe* pronounced Pay is the 16th letter of the alphabet.

9 A. Crowley. *Goetia: The Lesser Key of Solomon the King*. (Samuel Weiser: 1995), 78.

10 "The dominating feature of this card is the Eye of Horus. This is also the Eye of Shiva, on the opening of which, according to the legend of this cult, the Universe is destroyed." (Crowley, 1995, 79)

11 K. Raine, *Yeats, the Tarot and the Golden Dawn* (1969), 126.

12 He recorded a recitation of four of his poems for the BBC in 1932, listening, I am lulled into the rhythm of his words, as if he was reading incantations or prayers. https://youtu.be/u2FT4_UUa4I ; Raine, (1969), 130.

13 W.B. Yeats in "Early Education of W. B. Yeats," in *A Review of English Literature* ed. A. N. Jeffares, VIII, 4 (Oct. 1967), 77.

14 W.B. Yeats, *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (Macmillan and Co.: 1993), 5.

was to Ballylee that he later retreated to reflect and write, and it was here that he composed "The Second Coming." Written in 1919, the poem emerged in the aftermath of World War I and at the onset of the Irish War of Independence. It is also linked to the 1918–1919 flu pandemic, as Yeats's pregnant wife, Georgie Hyde-Lees, contracted the virus and nearly died. As she convalesced, Yeats confronted a world in turmoil—both within his own home and further afield. How could her brush with death not affect him, in all likelihood it intensified the poem's apocalyptic tone, its sense of impending collapse, and its meditation on the fragility of order in the face of chaos.

Also present in Yeats's poems was evidence of the well-known occultist Aleister Crowley.[15] In Crowley's commentary on the seventeenth Tarot trump (*The Star*), he includes a passage that echoes the imagery Yeats uses in *The Second Coming*, where the falcon moves "turning and turning in the widening gyre."[16] Crowley writes: "It will be seen that every form of energy in this picture is a spiral. Zoroaster says, 'God is he, having the head of a hawk, having a spiral force'".[17]

Their rivalry was well known—Richard Ellmann even described it as a genuine war between competing forms of practical magic.[18] In the last lines of *The Second Coming*, some have speculated that the rough beast represents Crowley himself:

> Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
> And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
> Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?[19]

[15] Raine, *Yeats, the Tarot and the Golden Dawn* (1969), 33.

[16] A. Crowley. *The Equinox, (Volume III, Number I)*. (Ordo Templi Orientis: 1919/1997), 39.

[17] A. Crowley, F. Harris. *The Book of Thoth: A Short Essay on the Tarot of the Egyptians*. (Samuel Weiser: 1969/1944), 13.

[18] R. Ellman. "Black Magic Against White; Aleister Crowley Versus W.B. Yeats." *Partisan Review,* Issue 9. September (1948), 1049-1051.

[19] Yeats (1997), 39-40, line 20-23.

This poem has haunted me since September 11, 2001. Much like Yeats's vision of an unravelling world, 9/11 marked a moment when the centre failed to hold, and history seemed to shift irrevocably.

The Twin Towers

September 11: I walked towards the towers, everyone was running away from them, swimming against the tide, hundreds of people moving in the opposite direction. I got as far as Franklin Street before being turned away. I don't know why I wanted to be closer, to put it into context perhaps, to understand what was going on. I stood for a long time motionless on a street corner, there were others doing the same, eyes upward, mouths slightly open, expectant but hesitant. I slotted myself unseen between two Chinese women, who clutched orange plastic bags tightly to their frozen gasping bodies. We witnessed small dots leaping into the sky, I thought they were birds, marks like dirt smudges that I erase from my own photos, I found out later that they were people, falling, tumbling, dying jumping people. I watch the towers fall one by one, just disappear, crumble from view, smoking into the blue sky. I turned and walked away, continue to walk, regretting the trousers I had worn, the shirt. Perhaps I should go back, redress, wipe it away, start again, start-right. Start-rite was the brand of shoes my mother used to make me wear, thick black-soled shoes that the other girls laughed at.[20]

In 2001, Helen Cixious wrote,

> At Windows on the World one could believe for a few instants one was equal to the gods. Image of triumph, soaring, jubilation, beauty, detachment. And: trembling. I only went there with a person I love. Fearing for life.[21]

[20] Walker 2001. I have kept a journal for many years. In 2012, I returned to the pages written on the days before, during and after 9/11. It was the beginning of unravelling a traumatic memory that has taken over a decade to disentangle. (Walker, A. (2017) "In and Out of Memory: Exploring the Tension Between Remembering and Forgetting When Recalling 9/11, a Traumatic Event." PhD diss., University of Plymouth.)

[21] H. Cixous, "The Towers: Les Tours, Signs," in *Gender and Cultural Memory* Ed. Marianne Hirsch and Vivian Smith, 28.1 (2002), 431.

The Twin Towers played an important role in the architectural fabric of New York. They held a commanding position: 110-floors of glass and steel and four million square feet of office space. Like severed limbs, they rose skyward, dwarfing everything else in their wake. In *What do pictures want?* W.J.T. Mitchell suggests that the Twin Towers assumed the role of "living images or animated icons", the moral imperative of which was "to offend the images themselves, to treat them as if they were human agents or at least living symbols of evil and punish them accordingly."[22] For Mitchell, the concept of the towers as living objects is deeply rooted in our way of thinking about buildings, connected to the ancient analogy of the body as a temple for the spirit.[23] In their status as icons, as "symbolic pillars of the New World Order", the towers were to be feared and despised for what they represented: globalised capitalism and America's desire for dominance in the world's economic market; but marvelled at for the sheer audacity of two towers tall enough to touch the clouds.[24] Destroying them was as much symbolic as literal, an act so momentous that it shocked not only Americans, but the world. In hindsight, it was a wholly disproportionate response when we consider what followed.[25] Jean Baudrillard described it as: "the absolute event, the 'mother' of all events, the pure event uniting within itself all the events that have never taken place."[26]

In 1974, artist Joseph Beuys, in a shamanic ritual, playfully and subversively baptised and named the newly built Twin Towers, Cosmas and Damian, after the wandering Arab Christian twin brothers. Patron saints of medicine, they were thought to be responsible for miraculous limb transplants, finally suffering martyrdom in Syria during the persecution of the Emperor Diocletian. As Levi Strauss writes: "To Beuys, the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center were already a 'death zone': rigid, cold, dedicated to the accumulation of money and world

22 W.J.T. Mitchell. *What do pictures want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (University of Chicago Press: 2005), 15.
23 Ibid, 5.
24 D.L. Strauss, *Between Dog & Wolf: Essays on Art and Politics in the Twilight of the Millennium* (Autonomedia: Brooklyn, NY, 1999), 6.
25 See note 32.
26 J. Baudrillard. *The Spirit of Terrorism and, Requiem for the Twin Towers.* (Verso Books, 2001), 4.

domination under Capital."[27] A humorous gesture by Beuys, but nevertheless uncannily poignant in the unfolding narrative. Beuys was later quoted: "When I do something shamanistic, I make use of the shamanistic element—admittedly an element of the past—in order to express something about a future possibility."[28]

As early as 1970, Lewis Mumford was writing about the skyscraper that represented the over-reach of a Faustian pact with the devil, the "purposeless gigantism and technological exhibitionism… eviscerating the living tissue of every great city,"[29] of which the World Trade Center was a characteristic example. Such size brings exposure, looming large and unprotected for all to see, nakedly positioned facing outwards past Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty, northward to the Empire State building and on. I visited the towers many times in the years I lived in New York and both loathed and revelled in their phallic mystery, fascinated by their size, the sheer scale and tremulous height, doubled, repeated, dwarfing the human body, my body, not once but twice over. To return to Cixious, she writes,

> And yet what caused the seduction of the T.T., the fascination they exerted in the entire world? Sexual ambiguity. The representation at once obvious and hidden of the mystery of the Phallus. The towers embodied phallic power in all its ever disquieting complexity: there is nothing as fragile as the erection, properly or figuratively.[30]

And then they were gone!

September 11: The first plane flew over my building while I was on the phone with my brother in London. He had just found out he was to be a father, mid-sentence the loud and heavy drone of a low flying 767 filled the room. 'What was that noise?' he asked. In the near

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27 L. Strauss. *In Case Something Different Happens in the Future: Joseph Beuys and 9/11* (Documenta, (13): 2012), 12.

28 L. Strauss. *Between Dog & Wolf: Essays on Art and Politics in the Twilight of the Millennium*. (Autonomedia, 1999), 27.

29 L. Mumford. *The Myth of the Machine: The Pentagon of Power.* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: 1970), 344.

30 H. Cixous (2002), 431.

distance, there were the sounds of an explosion, my building shook. NPR (National Public Radio) was on in the background, a man shrieked "Oh my God! Oh my God! A plane has just flown into the North Tower." The phone went dead, the radio followed. Everything changed.[31]

These are the facts: on September 11, 2001, at 8.46am, Flight 11 crashed into the north face of the North Tower of the World Trade Center. The Boeing 767 ploughed through the building core between the 93rd and 99th floor and severed all the three encased stairwells. Fox 5 News (WNYW) televised the first report of the incident at 8.48am, and from 8.51am until 10.28am, when it collapsed, it is thought over 200 people jumped to their deaths primarily from the North Tower—exact numbers remain unknown. The South Tower was hit at 9:03 am and collapsed at 9:59 am. The number of recorded dead or missing is 2,996.[32]

So, what did the complete destruction of the Twin Towers symbolise? Richard Boothby writes, from a Lacanian perspective, that, "reference to castration serves to remind us that the cut that issues in the objet a, if it is primitively figured in the body of the other, is also a cut internal to the subject itself."[33] It was as if the Twin Towers were symbolic of the Lacanian *other,*[34] upon which an attack elicited deeply personal responses not just from New Yorkers, but nationally and internationally too. Beyond the feeling that the United States deserved this for past transgressions, there existed the deeper instability in the knowledge that this could very

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31 Journal Entry from 2001.

32 The total number of direct deaths in major war zones in response to 9/11, in Afghanistan, and Pakistan from October 2001 - October 2018, and Iraq from March 2003 - October 2018: 480,000 - 507,000. (Not including the 500,000 deaths from the war in Syria, raging since 2011, which the US joined in August 2014). (Crawford, Human Cost of the Post-9/11 Wars: Lethality and the Need for Transparency. *Watson Institute International & Public Affairs*. (Brown University: 2018).

33 R. Boothby. *Freud As Philosopher, Metapsychology After Lacan*. (Routledge: 2001), 273.

34 Lacan revisited Freud's theories of the unconscious, the dialectic of Self and Other. To this he added the big Other *(Autre)* and the small other *(autre)*. The former is a separate entity from the self, while the latter is the dialogue within the self. In this instance, the other is the symbolic sense of security that the towers represented that Americans internalised as a state of being. The demolition of the towers therefore became an attack on the internalised sense of safety and security.

well happen to any of *us*.[35] According to Žižek, this violation should not have come as a shock. In *Desert of the Real* (2002), he points out that "the landscape and the shots of the collapsing towers could not but be reminiscent of the most breath-taking scenes in big catastrophe productions," and posits that the real shock was that the fantasy of the unthinkable had become a reality.[36] Layered into this shock was the psychoanalytical idea that the falling towers shattered symbolic certainties and triggered a primitive anxiety of obliteration, where the ash and debris raining down on the city signified not only castration but disintegration and annihilation.[37]

In the traumatic aftermath of the towers' destruction, Freud's concept of the uncanny feels particularly relevant. As Terry Smith observes, the World Trade Center "invited its own obliteration, that prefigured it, even foretold it."[38] In *The Arcades Project* (1999), Walter Benjamin describes how buildings are appropriated, absorbed into the psyche through sight and touch. He also connects Freud's uncanny to the phantasmagoria of urban life, describing a haunting presence in which "the stone phantom takes possession of you for a few minutes and commands you, in the name of the past, to think of things which are not of the earth."[39]

For Anthony Vidler, "the uncanny finally became public in the metropolis," evolving into a generalized condition of modern anxiety.[40] As a concept, it found its metaphorical home in architecture—within the haunted house and, more broadly, in the city, where it emerges through the "spatial incursions of modernity."[41] Art historian Terry Smith asks:

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35 *Us* being primarily the West, but incorporating all first-world countries characterized by advanced economies and high industrialization. These include the United States, Canada, Western European nations, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand.

36 S. Žižek, *Welcome to The Desert of the Real: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates*. Verso Books. (2002, 15.

37 C. Kahane. *Trauma at home: after 9/11*. Edited by Judith Greenberg. (University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 112.

38 T. Smith. *The Architecture of Aftermath*. (University of Chicago Press: 2006), 34.

39 W. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Harvard University Press,1999), 289.

40 A. Vidler. *The Architectural Uncanny, Essays in the Modern Unhomely*. (The MIT Press 1994), 6.

41 (1996), 11.

> Is it only the hysteria of aftermath that suggests that it may make sense to speak of buildings which, while designed as actual and symbolic destinations, as architectural iconotypes, have somehow also built into them a fate that is in some sense predestined? Is there, then, an architecture of predestination?[42]

Lest we forget, the World Trade Center was first targeted in 1993, when terrorists detonated a truck bomb in the basement of the North Tower, killing six people (CNN 1993). Was this act also a phantasm, uttering a prophetic warning of what was to come?

Pause…

Falling

In 2012, during the second year of my PhD research, I attended a conference at Plymouth University where Salomé Voegelin played the work of noise musician Merzbow (b. 1956, Masami Akita) at full volume. I had a flashback—the past became present, and the current-present vanished. I was back in New York, watching the Twin Towers fall, hearing their collapse for the first time, despite having been there on the day. Voegelin describes noise as a force that compels interaction with the trauma of the real: "Noise is the autistic revelation of war, speechless but focused, producing a heavy weight in a fleeting time."[43] Merzbow's work transgresses boundaries with ferocious dissonance, describing noise as the "unconsciousness of music."[44] Steven Wilson suggests that Merzbow's expressive noise pushes us beyond structure, beyond the Symbolic, into the realm of *jouissance*, where we confront "the terrifying and endlessly enticing unknowable beyond."[45] For Voegelin, noise music enacts the

[42] T. Smith, "Currents of Contemporaneity: Architecture in the Aftermath" (2001), 30.

[43] S. Voegelin, *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art* (Bloomsbury: 2010),43.

[44] Quoted by Hensley, C. The Beauty of Noise: An interview with Masami Akita of Merzbow. (*EsoTerra #8*. 1999), 60.

[45] S.A. Wilson, "The Radical Music of John Zorn, Diamanda Galas, and Merzbow: A Hermeneutic Approach to Expressive Noise." PhD diss., University of Illinois (2014), 372.

trauma of the twentieth century, acknowledging the "abject and contemptible consequences of technological and societal advancements."[46]

Flashbacks are privileged moments located within the permeable space where memory and history intertwine.[47] Memory surges forward to strengthen and protect, or alternatively, repeat and haunt. Maureen Turim argues that if flashbacks give us images of memory—the personal archives of the past—they also give us images of history: the shared and recorded past. Cathy Caruth believes that to be traumatised means to be possessed by the image or the event in which the flashback functions as a foothold or trace back into the event, "a form of recall that survives at the cost of willed memory or of the very continuity of conscious thought."[48] She writes of the traumatised containing an impossible history, where "they themselves become a symptom of the history that they cannot entirely possess."[49]

Embedded within this flashback was the impulse to restore, to regulate and integrate the past. Thus, began a search for the sounds of traumatic remembering, the outcome of which was the sound and moving image work: "Six Fragments" (2015-2017), 33 mins. The artwork is comprised of 6 separate pieces and was created for a large cinematic screen, with surround sound. I am not going to go into detail about each fragment here, rather just mention the second moving image work: "Falling",[50] which lends itself to Freud's concept of the uncanny and embodies the Tower card. Created in 2016, just 1.12 minutes in length, it marked the beginning of an endeavour to understand noise and embody a silence that, unbeknownst to me, had not existed since September 11, 2001. Through the breakdown of silence into noise and the breakthrough of the explosive sounds, the hidden and the inaccessible began to surface and so too the differing qualities and layers of silence into which the loudness of the

[46] S. Voegelin (2010), 43.

[47] M. Turim M. *Flashbacks in Film, Memory & History*. (Routledge: 1989), 1.

[48] C. Caruth, (ed.) *Trauma, Explorations in Memory* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 152.

[49] Ibid, 5.

[50] Anna Walker, "Falling". 2016, 1 min 12 sec. Available at https://vimeo.com/664881212/a923b95142

falling towers had been buried. The work was the first step of forming a language outside of words to express what was indescribable, what was unspeakable. Registering the noise of the past was also to acknowledge an internal violent blocking of the sound, a rejection and spitting out of the event as it happened. In the discovery of such absence, it was necessary to *re*-discover not only the violence of the sound of the trauma, but the original violence that it took to void this aspect of the past. In other words, it was necessary to recognise the inner defence mechanisms in play to protect against the violence of the traumatic event and therefore the fierceness of its safeguarding, a violence unto the self that on some level must be undone and relived for the trauma to be integrated.

The visuals for "Falling" were edited from hours of footage filmed with a macro-lens directly from the computer screen to represent a visual rendering of the explosive noise of the towers falling, while the sonic component was an attempt to describe the uncontainable loudness of their disintegration. The noise symbolises and represents the wound. In *Noise Matters* , Greg Hainge builds on Roland Barthes concept of the *punctum* to understand noise. [51] He writes, "For noise, much as we might try to contain it, reduce it, sublimate it, eradicate it, has the potential to affect us, to pierce us in this way", and this could explain the not remembering, or the rejection of the noise of 9/11 for over a decade.[52] For such a rupture has the power to conjure up a vision of the future, questioning the security of the present as it moves the listener forward, perhaps to a place where the listener does not want to go. The *punctum* of the artwork "Falling" calls upon the listener to remember, and in so doing continues to wound but justifies the wounding as necessary for it connects perception and cognition, which goes far beyond its representation. Noise creates an intensity and depth of image from which there is no escape. It constitutes a force beyond the parameters of film and sound and awakens the whole event of the past in an instant. As Hainge goes on to write:

51 The punctum is that "accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)." "It is what I add to the photograph and what is nonetheless already there." It is the odd contradiction, the floating flash that acute yet muffled cries out in silence. (Barthes 1981, 27/53)

52 G. Hainge. *Noise Matters, Towards an Ontology of Noise*. (Bloomsbury: 2013), 147.

> In Barthes' terms, noise, like the *punctum*, can bring into being a similar phenomenological event, breaking the s*tudium*, dissolving the thetic, piercing the perceiving subject who is henceforth unable to contain it or sublimate this part of expression within an aesthetic or hermeneutic apprehension or appreciation.[53]

There is no voice in "Falling", no speech just pulsating and elongated rawness of sound. Noise breaches the boundaries with the potential to bring the listener deeper into their body and paradoxically thrust them out. There is no choice now but to hear. "Falling" has no beginning or end, for once experienced, the resonance of the sound affects everything that follows and once preceded it. The imagery,[54] shot in black and white flickers from abstract glimpses of a body falling into a digital abyss of clouds, space, and darkness. The sound is an extended and manipulated recording of the Twin Towers collapsing and was extracted from YouTube footage of their actual falling. Certain qualities of the extraction were heightened and deepened, until they resonated through my body, until they could be felt as well as heard. Until they filled the empty space in my memory. The loudness of the sound interrupts the imagery and breaks it apart into further distortion, and still the body falls, never quite landing yet never fully breaking apart. Noise has pierced the boundaries of the past and the present, turning the body inside out as it tumbles into a future threatened by the impossible realisation of the past. The sound takes possession, isolating the listener, extreme in its loudness, it engulfs and takes over, with the boundaries breached, the rupture takes hold. How long will the falling last? How long must this loudness be tolerated? The only choice is to give in, to listen. And no sooner does the listener relinquish, they are just as quickly ejected and thrown into the next experience, the sound piece "Walk II" (2015).

"Falling" is a violent arrival and a violent expulsion in which one is forced to confront the violence of the event, mirroring the Tower card's meaning. It is, as Catherine Malabou writes, a "suddenly deviant, deviating form," it is "explosive plasticity."[55] It is the ultimate destructive

53 Ibid, 150.

54 The imagery for *Falling* was animated from YouTube footage of Joseph Kittinger, *The Man Who Fell from Space* (1960).

55 C. Malabou (2012), 1-3.

void, which Freud describes as both "[…] a mythological phenomenon and as a biological force."[56] So, can something new be created out of this disintegration? And if it can, what language is needed to convey the violence, and the conflict between the falling apart and the coming together?

Consider…

A one-ton beam dropped from a height of 1312ft will fall for 9 seconds and hit the ground at around 200mph. It will expend a noise, vibration, and heat twice the energy of a stick of dynamite. How long does a body take to fall? What noise does it make when it hits the ground? In the nights that followed 9/11 these were the questions I asked, wanting to know whether the falling people died before they hit the ground or died on impact, whether they saw the ground looming up towards them or closed their eyes. [57] Their stories flowed through New York in the days after the towers fell. Most of the falling jumped alone, although eyewitnesses talked of a couple that had held hands as they fell. One woman was reported, in a final act of modesty, to hold down her skirt. Yet others tried to make parachutes out of curtains or tablecloths, only to have them wrenched from their grip by the force of their descent. The fall took about ten seconds at 125mph, varying according to the body position; those who fell headfirst, as if in a dive, fell at 200mph.

When they hit the pavement below, their bodies were not so much broken as decimated. Unofficial estimates put the number of jumpers at around 200, but it is impossible to say because their bodies were indistinguishable from any others after the collapse of the Towers. The first *jumper* is recorded plunging from the North Tower's 149th window of the 93rd floor on the north face of the building at 8.51am, 3 minutes after it was hit by the first hijacked plane. At times, the fallers were separated by an interval of just a second. At one point, nine

56 D. Laub, "Thanatos and Massive Psychic Trauma: The Impact of the Death Instinct on Knowing, Remembering, and Forgetting," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association 51*.2 (2003), 435.

57 A. Walker. "Falling (1)." *Body Space & Technology, (BST*). Volume 12, 2013.

people fell in 6 seconds from five adjacent windows; at another, thirteen people fell in 2 minutes. The last jumper fell just as the North Tower collapsed 102 minutes after the building had been hit.

A witness watching from the South Tower's 78th floor as people started to fall from 'the hole' the aircraft had ripped in the North Tower, told reporters that it looked like the falling were disorientated and blinded by smoke, they would just walk to the edge and fall out. Another witness watched with stunned colleagues, unable to comprehend the falling as human. For those down below, the bodies landed with sickening and explosive thuds. A firefighter reported she felt like she was intruding on a sacrament as the bodies fell. "They were choosing to die and I was watching them and shouldn't have been. So me and another guy turned away and looked at a wall and we could still hear them hit."[58]

Remembering

Karen Barad articulates in *Meeting The Universe Halfway* (2007):

> Memory does not reside in the folds of individual brains; rather, memory is the enfolding of space-time matter written into the universe, or better, the enfolded articulations of the universe in its mattering. […] Remembering is not a replay of a string of moments, but an enlivening reconfiguring of past and future that is larger than any individual.[59]

Reflecting on Barad's words, "Six Fragments" gave way to the making of "Remembering," also created for a large theatre screen with stereo sound and finally completed in 2017. Through this artwork, I was researching whether it was possible to find resolution to the traumatic experiencing of 9/11. Approximately 18 minutes in length, shot in black and white, "Remembering" traces the moment the planes hit the Twin Towers, their downfall, the

[58] M. McArdle-Schulman. "'We saw the jumpers ... choosing to die.' Excerpts from the testimonies of emergency workers in New York on September 11." (*The Guardian*, Saturday 13 August. 2005)

[59] K. Barad, Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning (Duke University Press, 2007), ix.

devastation at Ground Zero and the clean-up. The imagery was taken from the hundreds of hours of footage of 9/11 videos on YouTube. Again, shot through a macro lens, the intention was to reveal a close-up, distorted and abstracted perspective of that time to accompany the stripped-back simplicity of the soundtrack, my voice. Alone, 14 years after the event, sealed in a soundproof room, I stood in front of a microphone, remembering all that took place on September 11, 2001, and the days and weeks thereafter. The moments that surfaced were personal and intimate and resonated through my body, a re-visitation of the past rather than a fragmented layering of imposed memories onto the past. In this way, my body and my memories served as a constant point of arrival and departure. The spectral moved through me, spoke through me to be heard by others. The words unsettle and create a link backwards in time, perhaps to the listener's own memories, connecting their invisible world of fragmented imagery and noises. My voice now becomes part of them, part of their memories. It is an uncanny transmission. The uncanny seeking restitution. "Remembering" signifies a necessary search for a subjectivity to accommodate the multiplicities of voices and temporalities required to place meaning on this traumatic experience. The ghost, "the double (and its various manifestations such as mirror images, déjà vu, doppelgangers, out of body experiences, etc.)" neither claims to be nor is experienced as a replica or a representation of the self as Freud posits, but rather the "ghost disturbs by producing an uncanny version of the other."[60]

In *Spectres of Marx* (1994), Derrida considers the conflict between presence and absence, inside and outside. He argues that the true logic of uncanniness is a phantom-logic, a necessity of learning to live with ghosts, phantoms, and spirits, because "there is no Dasein without the uncanniness, without the strange familiarity [*Unheimlichkeit*] of some spectre."[61] It is a state of being that is to be always and everywhere haunted by ghosts, phantoms, or spirits: the visibility of the invisible.[62] Spectral logic is the presence related to the otherness

[60] S. Rahimi, "Ghosts, Haunting, and Intergenerational Transmission of Affect: From Cryptonymy to Hauntology." *Psyad* 1 (2015), 3.

[61] Derrida *Spectres of Marx* (1994), 125.

[62] Ibid.

of the self, or the self that is found within the other (whether person, place, or time). In honour of Barthes, he writes: "Ghosts: the concept of the other in the same, the punctum in the studium, the completely other, dead, living in me."[63]

The imagery of "Remembering" is layered with texture in the form of digital pixilation. The boundaries are suffused, and the edges blurred, the planes melt into the towers, which in turn diffuse into the exploding flames. The depiction of the imagery in this way was intentional to activate the memory, the tactile quality links the viewer back in time, to touch, to smell, and physically experience their own version of this past event. The intention behind the video is to reframe the event and bring the past into the present and vice versa. Here, the potential for the viewer to engage with all that is revenant is set in motion. The work does not produce the spectral per se but does allow for what is already spectral to appear or reappear. Here, the spectral is inscribed as a trace, a spectral memory, and creates, as Derrida writes, the potential for "a magnified work of mourning."[64]

The animated hazy quality and the broken pixilation of the footage is intended to engage on a haptic level. Through its surreal and dreamlike quality, I both recreate and encounter moments of the actual and virtual, real and imaginary, subjective and objective and inside and outside. It is an interstitial place of indiscernible momentum; it is a flashback, a link to the past, an experience. There is, in Barad's words, "no overarching sense of temporality, of continuity, in place. Each scene diffracts various temporalities within and across the field of spacetimemattering. Scenes never rest, but are reconfigured within, dispersed across, and threaded through one another."[65]

Since making "Remembering", I have replaced the explosiveness of the event with the animated close-up footage of my film. This is more than a bodily relation to the screen, or a

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63 J. Derrida, *The Work of Mourning,* Trans. P.A. Brault and M. Naas (University of Chicago Press, 2010), 42.

64 Ibid, 23.

65 Barad (2010), 240.

process of entering and feeling the past, it is about taking the imagery, the past, into the body, while simultaneously being absorbed by it. This optical tactile space embraces, nay, consumes the viewer. "Remembering" asks the viewer not only to draw on their own memories but to position themselves back in time, in such close proximity to the event that it feels like it is happening again and again. Through conscious engagement with the haptic visual, the possibility is created for an increase in awareness of one's body, of its physicality, and the interaction with what is on the screen. To paraphrase Laura Marks, this creates for the viewer a sense of being both physically and subjectively connected to the source of the imagery.[66] The artwork brings the virtual and traumatic event into the actual to be freshly perceived. The imagery and the voice provoke introspection, an evocative remembering that weaves through memory circuits towards an "attentive recognition," and a "participatory notion of spectatorship."[67] "Remembering" also manages to reproduce the shock of the trauma and return it animated and softly focused: copy and contact. As such, supporting Susan Buck-Morss' notion that: "Within the enlargement, space is stretched out; within slow motion, movement expands, 'revealing' entirely new structural formations of matter."[68] The past, present and the potential future dispersed and threaded through and within one another. "Remembering" presents a world where: "Time is out of joint, off its hinges, spooked."[69] And it delivers manageable matter through a rendition that is smoothed out.

The black and white footage of faceless moving bodies become Derrida's ghosts, moving between the visible and the invisible, the real and imaginary, spirit and body, both ghostly residue of a departed reality, and material passing into sensation. The digital noise is reminiscent of memories transported over the passage of time, retaining remnants of the original trauma but now repeatedly broken and blurry. It is within these fragments and the

66 L. Marks, *Hanan al-cinema, Affections for the Moving Image* (MIT, 2015), 276.

67 L. Marks, The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses (Duke University Press, 2000), 48.

68 S. Buck-Morss, S. 1989. *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (MA: MIT Press, 1989), 268.

69 Barad (2010), 243.

space in-between that there exists the potential for something. Gilles Deleuze describes the absence of certain images, such as with a black or white screen, or an underexposed or snowy image, as having the *'genetic'* power to restore our belief in the world, and create something new out of the ruins of the image.[70] In "Remembering," the imagery, softened, abstracted, thick with texture and depth in its black and grey rendering, creates a past that is no longer hard and fixed to be used as a political statement of terrorism and trauma. Rather, it becomes a place of mourning, a passage through time towards transition, an opportunity for transformation.

The Derridean notion of hauntology was present in the towers from the very beginning. Their disintegration not only reminded me of the violence that had preceded this event, but the violence that was still to come, how powerless I was to prevent it, how small, how impotent, and how futile my efforts. It was a trauma, as Derrida writes, "whose temporality proceeds neither from the now that is present nor from the present that is past but from an im-presentable to come (venir)."[71] The idea that a worse trauma is yet to come defies mourning and, therefore, resolution. "There is traumatism with no possible work of mourning when the evil comes from the possibility to come of the worst, from the repetition to come—though worse."[72] The rupture, created by the attack on the World Trade Centre, gave rise to a threat of war that was all pervasive; running parallel was an underlying sense of fragility, defended against by the extreme measures put in place after 9/11: from the bureau of Homeland Security to the colour coded terror threat awareness, (green denoting low-level threat, red, high-level).[73]

9/11 violated and shattered the confidence of the United States and challenged domestic and global notions of security. It was a threat that gave rise to the advancement of the "War

70 G. Deleuze, *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*. Trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. (University of Minnesota Press,1989), 200.

71 Derrida (2002), 97.

72 Ibid, 97.

73 CNN (*Cable News Network*), (2011).

against Terror" in which the United States fell back on its conventional projection of power, and the creation of the federal agency for Homeland Security, further demonstrating the Western-centric nature of trauma. Danger was everywhere: "indiscriminate, coming anywhere, as out of nowhere, at any time."[74] Such a scenario created a widespread currency of post-traumatic stress disorder for New Yorkers, and Americans; an outcome which, unfortunately, foreclosed on context, and I believe, focused instead on the dramatic unfolding of events that stood in for the United States' deeper cultural anxieties and past histories. The U.S. retaliated, are still retaliating. In Yeats's words:

> Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
> Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
> The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
> The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
> The best lack all conviction, while the worst
> Are full of passionate intensity.[75]

Finally

Returning to the Tower card, the oft-paraphrased proverb "Pride comes before a fall" feels particularly apt. The original translation from the *King James Bible*—"Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall"—warns that where there is pride, disgrace follows, but with humility comes wisdom.[76] The Tower card teaches us about humility; if we become too certain, too assured of our dominion over the skies and nature, we risk corruption—and in turn, the gods (or God) will strike us down.

The Tower, its phallic form reaching toward the heavens, speaks of capitalism, patriarchy, and colonialism—of humankind's relentless drive to conquer earth and sky. Meanwhile, cultures and communities are erased, species driven to extinction, and air and water poisoned in the name of "progress." Yet the Tower also signifies an external shock that forces reflection and

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74 B. Massumi, *Ontopower: War, Powers, and the State of Perception* (Duke University Press, 2015), 22.

75 Yeats (1919) in *W.B. Yeats, Everyman's Poetry* (1997), 39, lines 3-8.

76 King James Version, Proverbs (1982), 16:18.

re-evaluation. Catastrophe, for all its destruction, can also bring revelation—a breaking down of old constructs to make way for a new way of being in the world.

Haraway suggests that through *SF*—strong figures, science fiction, speculative feminism, speculative fabulation—we can find ways to *stay with the trouble* of living and dying together on a damaged Earth, where "becoming-with, not becoming, is the name of the game."[77] But how might we rethink the past and confront uncomfortable truths? For Haraway, living and dying with *response-ability* requires an ethics of mourning—one in which grief is not separate from the practice of understanding our entangled existence. "Outside the dubious privileges of human exceptionalism, thinking people must learn to grieve-with", for we are all implicated in this undoing.[78] "Without sustained remembrance, we cannot learn to live with ghosts and so cannot think."[79] She argues for a world that resists rigid boundaries, yet one where we must still recognize our place within it—our *situatedness*. "Situation is never self-evident, never simply concrete [but] always critical" and always in the making.[80] Bodies, too, are never separate from the apparatuses that produce them.

Malabou, in her essay "Post-Trauma: Towards a New Definition?", deconstructs Žižek's critique of Freudian and Lacanian ontologies of trauma. Through her concept of *plasticity* as an active embodiment, she bridges neuroscience and psychoanalysis to reframe an understanding of trauma. For Malabou, *becoming* is a radical metamorphosis, the fabrication of a new form, person or a way of being in the world. As she writes: "With plasticity, we are not facing a pre-given difference, but a process of metamorphosis."[81]

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77 Harraway (2016), *Staying with the Trouble*, 12.

78 Ibid, 38.

79 Ibid, 39

80 D. Haraway. "A Game of Cat's Cradle: Science Studies, Feminist Theory, Cultural Studies." (John Hopkins University Press, 1994), 67

81 Malabou (2010), 4.

More recently, in *Fiction as Method,* there is an argument for fiction to create spaces to *let in* the future: the *abstract-outside* where the potential for a new beginning exists, beyond the loop of trauma and the history with which we are so burdened.[82] But it is not to ignore the past, on the contrary, it is to explore new methods to bear the weight, the heaviness of the past staying *with* the trouble rather than *be-coming* the trouble. In 2012, artist Ian Alan Paul set up the "Guantanamo Bay Museum of Art and History", a fictional institute that explores the premise of— '*what if*' and '*as if*'—the latter creating a utopian space where change has already occurred.[83] As the artist declares: "The point isn't to trick people, it's to increase that moment of wonder that hopefully leads to the question of what's possible."[84] Through the work, Paul is also pointing to the place of no sense, where common sense has disappeared. A reapplication of sense is needed to reassert the order of things. A sense-ability (the ability to sense and therefore feel)—is important for an alternative future. It is a different way of being in the world. One that requires an embrace of what is real and what is not, and the ability to navigate the liminal or emerging space between the two. Embedded within this space, Yeats's words echo:

> Surely some revelation is at hand;
> Surely the Second Coming is at hand.[85]

Lightning strikes; the tower is razed to the ground, clearing space for transformation. With the Tower gone, the connection between spirit and matter must now be found within. Destruction of the old is a necessary stage of growth—a release from rigid patriarchal structures and colonial appropriations, making way for new possibilities. As we are witnessing, there is resistance, a desperate reassertion of old power dynamics. But after the Tower comes

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82 J. K Shaw & T. Reeves-Evision. *Fiction as Method* (Sternberg Press, 2017).

83 https://www.ianalanpaul.com/guantanamobaymuseum.html

84 G. Warth, "UCSD exhibit remembers 'closed' Gitmo Bay prison", *The San Diego Union-Tribune* (August 23, 2016).

85 Yeats (1997), 39, line 10.

the Star, bringing new understandings and alchemical processes—an awakening to our vulnerability, the nakedness of truth, ethical alignment, and deeper collaboration with nature.

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