Dealing with a nation's trauma

Allegories on 9/11 in contemporary U.S. television drama narratives and the case of 'Homeland'

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The annual memorial celebrations of September 11, 2001, have just recently been performed for the eleventh time. Eleven years ago, it was a regular September Tuesday when four groups of terrorists hijacked four large passenger aircrafts and utilized those planes for suicide attacks on unique symbols of US economic and military power – the World Trade Center's Twin Towers, and the Pentagon, respectively. What for most US citizens began as a regular work day quickly turned into a nightmare of crumbling buildings, falling debris and hundreds of dead citizens. Almost instantaneously, live television reports brought the disaster now known as 9/11 into the living rooms of a global TV audience collective. This total directness made 9/11 the first global media event[1] which did not only affect people on the attacked sites, but also the myriads of TV watchers in and outside the US via its mediations. Since then, many scholars have compared the likeness of those mediated pictures to millennial blockbuster action movies, and questions arose about how cultural forms, from TV and cinema to literature and comics, had premediated the event and the haunting images of it and, vice versa, how subsequent attempts at interpretation and re-telling in various other cultural forms themselves led to remediations of the event that was 9/11.[2]

Almost immediately after the attacks, a national narrative of revenge emerged that wanted to prepare US society for the stratagem that was following; the war on terror.[3] Although some critics voiced opposition to the 'Friend or Enemy'-attitude fostered by the US government and its supporting parties,[4] the general impetus was following this Manichean narrative, a story of Good's righteous fight against all Evil.[5] In addition to providing a larger framework in which to position

1 Jürgen Habermas, 'Fundamentalism and Terror – A Dialogue with Jürgen Habermas' in: Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) 28.

2 A leading exemplary analysis of 9/11 as a pre- and remediated event can be found in Richard Grusin, *Premediation: Affect and Mediality After 9/11* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

3 cf. John Duvall et al. 'Narrating 9/11', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 57.3 (2011) 381.

4 A dissent towards the indoctrinated world view purported by most public institutions is voiced for example in essays by Susan Sontag and Slavoj Žižek. While divergently arguing that the attacks either meant an intrusion of the real into US society's imagined world sphere (Sontag: 'last Tuesday's monstrous dose of reality'), or that the United States' reality had been shattered by the intrusion of the events as the ultimate fantasmatic imaginary (Žižek), both agree on the shocking effects that shattered the pre-9/11 United States' self-perception as an indestructible nation.
Cf. Susan Sontag, 'The Talk of the Town', *The New Yorker*, 24. September 2001.
< http://www.newyorker.com/archive/ 2001/09/24/010924ta_talk_wtc > accessed 15 July 2012.
And: Slavoj Žižek, 'Welcome to the Desert of the Real', *Re:Constructions*, 15 September 2001,
< http://web.mit.edu/cms/reconstructions/interpretations/desertreal.html > accessed 17 July 2012.

5 cf. Justin Lewis et al., '9-11', *Television & New Media*, 3.2 (2002) 125-26.

the individual, this dualistic narrative also helped to amplify the feelings of a US society that, with a largely unanimous association of 9/11 with superlatives such as 'unforeseen', 'unimaginable', and 'unique' - and thus fostering the perception of the attacks as a "holocaustal event"[6] - expressed a self-image of an innocent victim that had been provoked into fighting back. A rhetorical link between 9/11 and the 60 year-old national trauma of Pearl Harbor was quickly utilized by anchormen, journalists and political campaigners to make meaning of the event itself and, again, to strengthen the 'Us against Them'-narrative.[7] Neil Smelser sees the nation-wide reactions to 9/11 as manifestations of a more general self-perception of exceptionalism deeply rooted in US culture that uses the nation's victimization as justification for outward aggression. Smelser argues that this tendency for self-victimization through almost mythical narratives derived from recent US history has often been used to unite the nation under one larger agenda.[8]

While the event's effects on US society are nowadays discussed more openly, this was not the case in the immediate weeks, months and even years after the event. According to Hayden White, the endless recap loops of TV broadcasts produced an effect that led to "wide-spread cognitive disorientation and a despair at ever being able to identify the elements of the events in order to render possible an 'objective' analysis of their causes and consequences."[9] For Thomas Elsaesser, the predominant application of a terror paradigm right after the attacks helped to narrow the spectrum of public discourse, because the inherent 'us against them' polarization tended to repress the formation of critical analysis.[10] It is not to say, though, that academia did cease to produce new insights – during this first decade after 9/11, media scholarship in particular produced a vast amount of critical work. In looking back on ten years of production, David Slocum points out that scholarship was mainly concerned with the images, semantics and narratives of 9/11 representations

6 Hayden White, 'The Modernist Event', in: Vivian Sobchack (ed.) *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television and the Modern Event* (New York: Routledge, 1996) 22.

7 cf. i.e. Brian T. Connor, '9/11 - A New Pearl Harbor?: Analogies, Narratives, and Meanings of 9/11 in Civil Society', *Cultural Sociology*, 6.1 (2012) 3-25.

8 cf. Neil Smelser, 'September 11, 2001, as Cultural Trauma', in: Jeffrey C. Alexander (ed.), *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) 272.

9 Hayden White, 'The Modernist Event', in: Vivian Sobchack (ed.), *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television and the Modern Event*, (New York: Routledge, 1996) 24. Although related to a different traumatic collective experience in US history, the 1986 NASA Challenger explosion, I consider White's analysis of the event's mediation as equally applicable to the modern trauma of 9/11.

10 cf. Thomas Elsaesser, *Terror und Trauma: Zur Gewalt des Vergangenen in der BRD* (Berlin: Kadmos, 2006) 9-10. And: Lewis et al, '9-11' *Television & New Media*, 3.2 (2002) 130.

and the complex issues surrounding it in a media system which, during the last two decades, has itself undergone tremendous changes towards a more diverse and complex system both in media production and reception. Furthermore, Slocum identifies a second scholarly spotlight focusing on the representation of terror and the cultural production around that topic.[11] Summarizing predominant trends in visual media scholarship, Janet McCabe describes the existing academic work on 9/11 as: "focused on blockbuster Hollywood films and the cinema of terrorism, or else how television, and in particular the news media, has handled the topics of war, terror and terrorism."[12] And, with a special focus on the US television industry and TV scholarship, Lynn Spigel finds that academic approaches have put too strong a focus on the news sector, thus largely neglecting almost every other TV genre, including drama among other entertainment genres.[13]

Taking up these described tendencies, this thesis aims to help shift the focus away from news media and the terror paradigm and towards an area that is intrinsically linked to the event of 9/11, but has mostly gone unnoticed and/or been generally omitted by media scholarship - that of the representation of trauma in the medium of television. My premise is that the trauma paradigm had been evoked by reporters only minutes after the images of 9/11 first made their way around the globe, and many commentators, critics, politicians and scholars employed the notion of a traumatic event to describe the impact of 9/11 on US society, but very few scholars actually set out to analyze the deeper implications the trauma paradigm brings with it. My approach is an application of the concept of Trauma Theory[14] to representations of 9/11 in modern fictional television drama. In this context, I understand television drama as providing a cultural forum in which a society's problems, wishes and cultural values are laid open to critical discussion.[15] What I want to investigate is the current state of media scholarship in relation to trauma trends, and links between television representations of 9/11 trauma in serial drama narratives such as

11 cf. David Slocum, '9/11 Film and Media Scholarship', *Cinema Journal*, 51.1 (2011) 181.

12 Janet McCabe, 'In Debate: Remembering 9/11: Terror, Trauma and Television 10 Years On', *Critical Studies in Television*, 7.1 (2012) 80.

13 cf. Lynn Spigel, 'Entertainment Wars: Television Culture after 9/11', *American Quarterly*, 56.2 (2004) 238.

14 This approach will mainly be guided by the approaches of Cathy Caruth and Neil Smelser. Cf. Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995). And: Neil J. Smelser, 'September 11, 2001, as Cultural Trauma', in: Jeffrey C. Alexander (ed.) *Cultural trauma and collective identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) 264–82.

15 cf. Amanda Lotz, 'Using 'network' Theory in the Post-Network Era: Fictional 9/11 US Television Discourse as a 'Cultural Forum"', *Screen*, 45.4 (2004) 423–39.

24 (FOX, 2001-10), *Battlestar Galactica* (Syfy, 2004-9) and *Rubicon* (AMC, 2010). To exemplify such representations of trauma in serial TV narratives, I provide short analyses of three different strands of shows and then analyze the case of *Homeland* (Showtime, 2011-), which in my opinion discusses the traumatic impact of 9/11 and its legacy on the nation and the individual in new and exciting ways and exemplifies the trends dissected earlier. My goal is to show that modern fictional television drama can be used as a cultural forum to present and discuss various perspectives not only of the event of 9/11, but also on the negotiation of national/collective and individual trauma in that context.

Chapter One therefore starts with a brief history of the concept of trauma. It charts the concept's Freudian roots, its reemergence in the 1960s and subsequent convergence into the concept of Trauma Theory during the 1990s, which itself is, then, identified as the root of the millennial turn's notion of cultural trauma and corresponding links to memory, remembrance and mourning. The first chapter then traces the close relationship between trauma and the event of 9/11 and introduces points of critique to the concept suggesting that trauma itself hat been utilized for the purpose of justifying continuing tales of US American exceptionalism and practices of 'Othering'.

Chapter Two investigates the relationship between 9/11, trauma and media. Starting with media scholarship's current state of research, it subsequently identifies a lack of research in the field regarding televisual representations of 9/11. After a brief look at television studies' neighboring disciplines of literature and cinema, this work suggest an adaptation of the concept of 'Trauma Cinema', finding that the ways of trauma representation on the big screen can be easily adapted to the small screen.

Chapter Three then combines aspects of 'Trauma Cinema' with an understanding of television functioning as 'cultural forum' in order to analyze a collection of fictional drama series that are understood as representations of different ways of interpreting and negotiating trauma, terror and 9/11. On the basis of three strands that are identified in this chapter, it proposes to investigates a shift of focus away from the call for retaliation based on a unifying narrative of heroes and perpetrators toward an occupation with the complicated economical, social, political and cultural issues at the basis of 9/11 and the war on terror. These strands are traced through short analyses of fictional drama narratives including shows such as *24*, *Battlestar Galactica*, *Rubicon* and *Person of Interest*, and a subsequent turn to a detailed case-study of the serial drama *Homeland*, which, as

is argued, the search for questions beyond the national trauma narrative is epitomized.

Finally, Chapter Four provides a synthesis of the earlier-identified strands and case studies, displaying substantive insights into the culture and society provided by the cultural forum that is television.

1 A short history of trauma

Following the event of 9/11, public discourse almost instantly declared the beginning of a new age, the so-called 'post-9/11 era'.[16] During the last decade, though, many scholars pointed out that 9/11 did not really manifest a watershed that would divide history in 'before' and 'after' September 11, 2001.[17] Rather, 9/11 is seen to be part of a greater set of cultural changes that begun in the late 1990s, with the digitization of media, larger processes of convergence, and globalization. Also beginning in the mid-1990s, a growing scientific discourse on the concept of 'trauma' can be identified, which was then magnified and re-popularized by the almost-instant wide-spread conceptualization of 9/11 as trauma.

1.1 Trauma's roots in psychoanalysis & PTSD

The postmodernist notion of trauma is mainly rooted in psychoanalysis and thus largely motivated by the early 20th century research of Sigmund Freud, who extensively worked with war veterans showing symptoms of shellshock, or 'war neurosis', as it was named at the time.[18] According to Maureen Turim, a Freudian understanding of trauma considers "all configurations of loss that remind us profoundly of all deep wounds to the psyche (the self or ego)."[19] The concept, which in its modern form was originally used to describe cases of Holocaust survivors haunted by their terrible experiences, was re-established in psychological handbooks from the late 1960s on, when the American Psychiatric Association decided to accept post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD - a form of anxiety disorder) as valid diagnosis for Vietnam veterans.[20] It was used to

16 cf. e.g. Ruby Rich, 'After the Fall: Cinema Studies Post-9/11', *Cinema Journal*, 43.2 (2004), 109–15.

17 cf. e.g. James Der Derian, "9.11: Before, After, and In Between," in: Craig Calhoun et a. (eds.) *Understanding September 11* (New York: New Press, 2002).
Or: Noam Chomsky, *September 11* (Crow's Nest: Alle & Unwin, 2001).

18 cf. i.e. Sigmund Freud, 'Introduction to psycho-analysis and the war neuroses' (1919), in: James Strachey (ed.) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume XVII* (London, Hogarth Press: 1955) 205-211.

19 Maureen Turim, 'The Trauma of History: Flashbacks upon Flashbacks', *Screen*, 42.2 (2001) 206.

20 cf. Wilbur J. Scott, 'PTSD in DSM-III: A Case in the Politics of

diagnose individuals who had been involved in violent assaults on their body or psyche, including "physical attack, robbery, mugging, sexual assault, being kidnapped, being taken hostage, terrorist attack, torture, incarceration as prisoner of war or in a concentration camp, natural or man-made disasters, severe automobile accidents, or being diagnosed with a life-threatening illness."[21] Trauma symptoms were recognizable in recurrent recollections, often in the form of nightmares and daydreams, which uncontrollably intrude into the individual's day-to-day reality, and the affected person's silence resembling even muteness, because of the difficulty to communicate the traumatizing event. Through PTSD, trauma became an established diagnosis, which was suddenly applicable to a considerable percentage of US citizens, including war veterans and sexual abuse victims.[22]

1.2 Trauma Theory

Simultaneously, Freud's research on trauma became revitalized through Lacanian and Derridaean interpretations[23] in the 1980s, and these interpretations, together with the diagnostic tool of PTSD, converged in the works of a first wave of trauma theorists in the mid-1990s, most notably Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub.[24] Since trauma has always been connected to concepts of remembering and mourning, it also became part of the 'collective turn' as part of the larger, postmodern discussion surrounding the field of memory and remembering,[25] and corresponding debates about collective identity formation through unifying narratives that rely on history. In this context, an application of, and identification with trauma narratives that imply victimization has been considered to be applied by social groups to define and strengthen group identities in variety of contexts, e.g. the 'Americanization' of the Holocaust debate in the 1990s, which, allegedly turned the historical atrocity into an "affirmative national parable"[26], and a more recent

Diagnosis and Disease', *Social Problems*, 37.3 (1990) 294.

21 APA, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th edition (1994) 424.

22 cf. Scott, 'PTSD in DSM-III' 295

23 cf. Dominik LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1994) 111-138.

24 cf. Cathy Caruth. 'Unclaimed experience: trauma and the possibility of history' *Yale French Studies*, 79 (1991) 181-192; Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York : Routledge, 1991); Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

25 cf. Allen Meek, *Trauma and media: Theories, histories, and images* (New York: Routledge, 2010) 178-9.

26 Lucy Bond, 'Compromised Critique: A Meta-critical Analysis of American Studies after 9/11', *Journal of American Studies* 45.04 (2011) 733.

debate about the formation of a similarly unifying parable through the implicit victimization of US society through the attribution of 9/11 as a traumatic event.[27]

1.3 Cultural Trauma

These debates both happened along, and simultaneously fueled, the formation of a concept of 'Cultural Trauma', which has been a highly-debated object of analysis in Trauma Theory since the turn of the millennium. Elizabeth Ann Kaplan describes the postmodern trauma trope as inscribing individual experiences into a larger collective narrative, thus crossing the bridge between individual and group experience of history. Kaplan understands the current US society as representative of a 'Trauma Culture', which has been induced by the post-9/11 US "politics of terror and loss, [thus providing new] subjectivities through the shocks, disruptions and confusions that accompany them"[28] and a new form of identity formation.

With his co-authored compilation *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, Jeffrey Alexander also probes the cultural, collective equivalent of individual trauma and describes the concept as providing a 'new master narrative' for this new age.[29] In the same volume, co-author Neil Smelser analyzes the event of 9/11 as the modern archetype of a cultural trauma, listing a variety of common characteristics that he attributes to both the Holocaust as the modern *ur*-trauma, and 9/11. Conclusively, he finds that

> [i]n sum, the September 11 catastrophe unfolded as a fully ambivalent event - simultaneously shocking and fascinating, depressing and exhilarating, grotesque and beautiful, sullying and cleansing-and leaving the country feeling both bad and good about itself. [30]

The approach to cultural trauma employed by Alexander and Smelser shares with other approaches such as that of Susannah Radstone the assumption that events in general are not traumatic *per se*. Rather, traumatic aspects are provided by the context, which defines how an individual or collective interpret and narrate their relation to this event. This is an important refinement of the

27 cf. e.g. Sabine Sielke, 'Why "9/11 is [not] unique,": or: Troping Trauma' *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 55.3 (2010) 388.

28 Elizabeth Ann Kaplan, *Trauma culture: The politics of terror and loss in media and literature* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005) 20.

29 cf. Jeffrey C. Alexander, 'Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma' in: Jeffrey C. Alexander et al. (eds.) *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) 1-31.

30 Neil Smelser, 'September 11, 2001, as Cultural Trauma', in: Jeffrey C. Alexander et al. (eds.) *Cultural trauma and collective identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) 269.

initial Trauma Theory concept, which Radstone criticizes as retreating

> from psychoanalysis's rejection of a black-and-white vision of psychical life to produce a theory which establishes clear, not to say Manichean binaries of 'inside' and 'outside', 'trauma' and 'normality', and 'victims' and 'perpetrators'. [31]

Radstone implicitly accuses earlier trauma theory approaches of providing a scholarly basis for the Manichean narrative so overtly promoted by the US administration right after the attacks, a national story of 'us against them' that reinforce the Bush-Cheney administration's culture of fear on which the war on terror was based.[32] Smelser accordingly states that this narrative silenced the social and cultural noise dominant before 9/11, a noise of

> the politics of identity, primordial group conflicts, and the relativism of post-modernism [that openly displayed a] lack of common values and national and cultural unity. [After 9/11, the unifying narrative of trauma led to] a reassertion of the virtues of nation and community,[33]

through the celebration of American exceptionalism, and a process of Othering of the 'enemy' and those who supported them.

1.4 Transmission of trauma and memory

The importance of narrative as *the* integral part of trauma integration and assimilation is highlighted by Thomas Elsaesser, who, with an actualization of Cathy Caruth's research, argues that "narrative and the ability to tell a (one's) story, where the narrator is fully present to him- or herself in the act of telling"[34] allows the traumatized individual to cross the gap between the traumatized individual's day-to-day reality and the traumatic memories by which he or she is haunted.

Another question arising from the postmodernist understanding of trauma, memory and its narratives is through which channels trauma can be transmitted in these modern times. This question led to the formation of central research topics around the mediation of memory, history and trauma.[35] Elsaesser notes that prior to modern traumatic events such as the Holocaust, which

31 Susannah Radstone, 'Trauma Theory: Contexts, Politics, Ethics', *Paragraph*, 30.1 (2007) 19.

32 cf. Meek, *Trauma and media*, 174

33 Neil Smelser, 'September 11, 2001, as Cultural Trauma', in: Jeffrey C. Alexander et al. (eds.) *Cultural trauma and collective identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) 269-70.

34 Thomas Elsaesser, 'Postmodernism as mourning work' *Screen* 42.2 (2001) 196.

35 cf. e.g. Marita Sturken, *Tangled memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS epidemic, and the politics of remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997);
And: Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic memory: The transformation of American remembrance*

Hayden White labeled 'modernist events',[36] 'trauma' had usually described a catastrophic event that had happened in a more distant past that was followed by a latency period in which interpretations and cultural meanings of that event could be negotiated. In contrast, Elsaesser, with White, points out that, with modern catastrophes such as 9/11, the Madrid (2004) and London (2005) bombings and natural disasters such as hurricane Katrina (2005) and the Japan earthquake/tsunami (2011), this latency period has collapsed into itself, since nowadays universally-present media instantly provide images and corresponding interpretations.[37] With 9/11 as a prime example of how trauma, through its mediations, is able to instantly reach and affect a global audience, Elsewhere, Elsaesser underlines the role of television as prime mediator that carries traumatic pictures directly into "the political space, which nowadays also includes both private and public spaces."[38] Marita Sturken extends Elsaesser's reading, stating that TV is

> about the instant present, in which information is more valuable the more quickly we get it, the more immediate it is. Television allows for an immediate participation in the making of history; it produces 'instant history'.[39]

2 Trauma and media

In an interview in which he contemplated the effects of 9/11, Jürgen Habermas coined the term 'global media event', describing 9/11 as the first event that has been mediated on a global scale.[40] This mediation of 9/11 has mainly taken place in the medium of television. A history of 9/11 scholarship may therefore also chart a variety of other media, and the larger processes of convergence/divergence that took and still take place in the larger US media sphere. But since, as Amanda Lotz notes, television is still the United States' most important mass medium,[41] it seems to be the logical next step to analyze this medium further. What appears to be striking, then, is the

in the age of mass culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

36 cf. White, 'The Modernist Event' 22.

37 cf. Elsaesser, 'Postmodernism as mourning work' 195.

38 Elsaesser, Thomas, *Terror und Trauma: Zur Gewalt des Vergangenen in der BRD* (Berlin: Kadmos, 2006) 8.

39 Sturken, *Tangled Memories,* 6. quoted in: Janet McCabe, 'In Debate: Remembering 9/11: Terror, Trauma and Television 10 Years On'

40 cf. Jürgen Habermas, 'Fundamentalism and Terror – A Dialogue with Jürgen Habermas' in: Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) 28.

41 cf. Amanda Lotz, 'Using 'network' Theory in the Post-network Era: Fictional 9/11 US Television Discourse as a 'Cultural Forum", *Screen*, 45.4 (2004) 423.

medium's absence as object of investigation in the large body of scholarly work surrounding 9/11, as has been repeatedly noted by scholars even a decade later.[42] And the few pieces of existing research into this medium have been mainly concerned with the TV news sector and/or the presentation of terror, violence and war.[43]

2.1 Media scholarship and the omission of TV

What can be identified in the larger body of scholarship are at least three major strands of investigation. First, a strand of interpretations and analyzes of the new, post-9/11 era and the effects of the war on terror on political, social, cultural and economic issues can be identified.[44] Second, a strand of representations of 9/11 and terror and the war on terror in relation to 'popular culture'.[45] And third, a strand of medium-specific representations of violence, terror and terrorism in the context of 9/11.[46] Even in publications that directly reference the medium of TV in their title, such as Dixon's *Film and Television after 9/11*, only a fracture of the essays presented are actually dealing with televisual representations of 9/11. This example may serve to underline the described general trend that TV has largely been omitted in the discussions surrounding 9/11 and its legacies.

42 cf. e.g., Lynn Spigel, 'Entertainment Wars', or: Amy Damico et al., *September 11 and Popular Culture: A Guide* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2010).

43 cf. e.g., Will Brooker, 'In Focus: The Long Shadows of 9/11: Science Fiction, Thrillers, and the War on Terror' *Cinema Journal* 51. (2011). Or: Janet McCabe, 'In Debate: Remembering 9/11'.

44 See e.g. Grusin, *Premediation: Affect and mediality after 9/11* (2010), Melnick, *9/11 culture: America under construction* (2009), Redfield, *The rhetoric of terror: Reflections on 9/11 and the war on terror* (2009), Simpson, *9/11: The culture of commemoration* (2006), Greenberg, *Trauma at home: After 9/11* (2003), Sontag, *Regarding the pain of others* (2003), Sherman et al., *Terror, culture, politics: Rethinking 9/11* (2006).

45 See e.g. Paik, *From Utopia to Apocalypse: Science Fiction and the Politics of Catastrophe* (2010), Quay et al., *September 11 in Popular Culture: A Guide* (2010), Birkenstein, et al, *Reframing 9/11: Film, popular culture and the "war on terror"* (2010), Hart et al., *Media and the Apocalypse* (2009), Melnick, *9/11 culture: America under construction* (2009), Schopp et al., *The War on Terror and American Popular Culture: September 11 and Beyond* (2009), Chermak et al., *Media representations of September 11th* (2003).

46 See e.g.: - **Literature**: Gray, *After the Fall: American literature since 9/11* (2011), Randall, *9/11 and the literature of terror* (2011), Keniston et al., *Literature after 9/11* (2010), Versluys, *Out of the blue: September 11 and the novel* (2009), Bragard et al., *Portraying 9/11: Essays on representations in comics, literature, film and theatre* (2011), Johnson et al., *Poetry after 9/11: An anthology of New York poets* (2011), Keniston et al., *Literature after 9/11* (2008).
- **Film**: Pollard, *Hollywood 9/11: Superheroes, supervillains, and super disasters* (2011), Kellner, *Cinema wars: Hollywood film and politics in the Bush-Cheney era* (2010), Vanhala, *The depiction of terrorists in blockbuster Hollywood films, 1980-2001: An analytical study* (2010), Cettl, *Terrorism in American cinema: An analytical filmography, 1960-2008* (2009), Prince, *Firestorm: American film in the age of terrorism* (2009), Dixon, *Film and television after 9/11* (2004), Nohrstedt et al., *U.S. and the others: Global media images on "The War on Terror"* (2004)
- **Television**: Hoskins et al., *Television and terror: Conflicting times and the crisis of news discourse* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), Takacs, *Terrorism TV: Popular entertainment in post-9/11 America* (2012); also Dixon, and Nohrsted (see 'Film').

The same tendencies can be found in relation to trauma. With the above-mentioned media already favored by the more general research focus on 9/11, scholarly discourse on trauma in the context of 9/11 also primarily took to remediations in the areas of film and literature as the main point of investigation. Both areas have a long-standing tradition of exploring representations of trauma. Over the last decade, literature scholars witnessed a plethora of analyses focusing on the 'Postmodern Big Three', the works of Don DeLillo (*Falling Man*), Jonathan Safran Foer (*Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*), and graphic novelist Art Spiegelman (*In the Shadows of No Towers*).[47] Similarly, Film scholarship became flooded with analyses of *Flight 93* (Paul Greengrass, 2006) or *World Trade Center* (Oliver Stone, 2006). The over-use of recurring examples, particularly in literary fiction, has led critics to the consideration that "certain texts have already become hypercanonical in the discussion of 9/11 fiction, and […] it is time to look at other fiction of 9/11 in the future."[48]

2.2. Trauma Cinema

In the area of film, the topic of trauma has also gained renewed popularity since the turn of the millennium, with analyses focusing on representations of War and Terror in more distant US history (WWII and the Holocaust, Vietnam, the Gulf Wars) and the more recent cases of 9/11 and the war on terror.[49] With the introduction of the 'Trauma Cinema' concept, a form of movies was defined that, through its visual style and fragmentation of narrative, tries to mimic the perception of traumatic memories. Janet Walker describes these as

> a group of films, each of which deals with a world-shattering event or events of the past, whether public, personal, or both. The stylistic and narrative modality of trauma cinema is *nonrealist*. Like traumatic memories that feature vivid bodily and visual sensation over 'verbal narrative and context,' these films are characterized by *non-linearity, fragmentation, nonsynchronous sound, repetition, rapid editing and strange angles And they approach the past through an unusual admixture of emotional affect, metonymic symbolism and cinematic flashbacks*.[50]

47 cf. John N. Duvall et al., 'Narrating 9/11' *Modern Fiction Studies* 57.3 (2011) 394.

48 Duvall et al., 'Narrating 9/11' 394.

49 cf. e.g. Elizabeth Ann Kaplan et al., *Trauma and cinema: Cross-cultural explorations* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008), Janet Walker, *Trauma cinema: Documenting incest and the Holocaust* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005)

50 Walker, Janet, 'Trauma cinema: False memories and true experience' *Screen* 42.2 (2001) 214. My emphasis.

Television, on the other hand, has also been omitted from this discourse. As has been described earlier, the academic focus has primarily been on news and representations of the war on terror, leaving out so much of what television has to offer other than newsreels and war documentaries. This apparent gap in television scholarship may have several reasons. For one, television still holds the (perceived) status of a medium producing an endless flow of ephemeral images that are as quickly forgotten as they were produced, and may thus be deemed not worthy of deeper analysis. Furthermore, as Stacy Takacs has noted, the US television industry has, at least in the early stages, been participating in a form of cross-channel self-censorship, addressing "Americans in a collective fashion, using something approximating the old nationalist address of the high network era."[51] This mode of presentation may have been perceived by some as presenting a medium that would not be able to critically assess or reflect upon what it transports. And, last but not least, the televisual medium has grown into a polyphony of different voices over the last decade in a media landscape that has become drastically fractured and diversified, catering for a variety of niche audience markets and each expressing its own agenda. This multitude of different perspectives became highly visible during the 10th memorial celebrations of 9/11, when almost every US TV channel offered its own special version of memorial shows and features best suited for its own niche audience. Takacs sees a relatively new development in US society, a society which currently seems to be involved in a process of parting with the indoctrinated collective national memory of idealized heroes and sacrifice, craving for narratives of more individual mourning and healing that are more reminiscent of what they, each on their individual basis, had gone through after 9/11 – narratives of what Takacs calls a "democratization of cultural memory".[52]

As I will subsequently show, then, is that television, contrasting the before-mentioned lack of significance, has played a crucial part as important site of negotiation of cultural values, ideas, and changing preferences – a 'cultural forum'. By analysis of how the topic of trauma and corresponding aspects of terror, fear and conspiracy have been approached by a variety of television drama examples, I set out to identify three major strands of shows, which I argue mirror the cultural changes that have been taken place in the United States over the past decade.

51 Stacy Takacs, 'Entertainment Formats and the Memory of 9/11' *Critical Studies in Television* 7.1 (2012) 85.

52 Takacs, 'Entertainment Formats' 86.

3 Trauma TV

Television has reacted in manifold ways to the event of 9/11. As will be shown, many of those ways involved narratives which motivate their audiences to reflect and react on the current moral, social and cultural state of affairs during this first decade after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Thomas Elsaesser, for example, points out that, especially in the context of trauma, TV has played an immensely important role in providing a platform for US society to engage in rituals of confession, mourning, and witnessing, through the format of the talk-show, which he sees as manifestations of earlier rituals stemming from religion and the welfare system.[53] In that aspect, TV has taken over important social functions that other institutions and, on a more general level, US society's disintegrating communal bonds have ceased to fulfill.

This work's focus, though, aims at analyzing another form of television continuously involved in commenting on and implicitly criticizing the social and moral dilemmas created by US politics after 9/11: that of serial fiction drama. As Amanda Lotz has aptly noted, the singular cultural impact television as a whole has been eroded by the diversification of TV content available on a multitude of platforms, and corresponding variety of niche audiences. The cultural forum approach I want to employ here understands a single television installment, in this context each individual series, as of diminished significance and calls for a focus on trends that can be perceived across multiple series, networks and periods of time.[54] In the context of the trauma of 9/11, I understand television as being able to transfer witnessed aspects of the event, and the witnessed event as a whole, into narrativized, and more structured and explained, form. I argue that since the early 2000s, complex drama TV has provided a highly-nuanced and diverse spectrum of shows dealing with a variety of social, cultural, economic and moral issues that evolved with and out of 9/11 and its legacies. What Lotz calls "the negotiation of ideas, fears and values"[55] that take place in these examples of different strands of shows will be discussed in the following, with an identification of trends within the cultural forum that is television. The common denominator I see in all of those shows comprises elements of what I call 'Trauma TV': a collection of elements adapted from the more established form of 'Trauma Cinema' (cf. Chapter 2.2.) featuring the earlier-mentioned

53 cf. Elsaesser, 'Postmodernism' 196.

54 cf. Lotz, 'Using 'Network' Theory in the Post-Network Era' 429-32.

55 Lotz, 'Using 'Network' Theory in the Post-Network Era' 431.

narrative and visual style that support a particular form of mise en scène that mimics traumatic experiences and thus helps to narrate such trauma in the form of fictional drama.

3.1 Fictional Perpetrator Hunt

In the wealth of TV series topically surrounding 9/11, at least three major strands of shows can be identified in the context of 9/11 and trauma. Right after the 9/11 attacks, what could be witnessed was the rise of a collection of 'Hunting terrorists/bad guys'-shows that put the Bush administration's 'Us against Them'-narrative in fictionalized form. Most notable examples here would be shows such as *24* (FOX, 2001-10), *The Agency* (CBS, 2001-3), *NCIS* (CBS, 2003-), *Prison Break* (FOX, 2005-9) and *The Unit* (CBS, 2006-9), and police procedurals such as the long-running *Law & Order* (NBC, 1990-2010), *NYPD Blue* (ABC, 1993-2005), the *CSI* franchise (CBS, 2000-) and *The Shield* (FOX, 2002-2008), most of which predated 9/11, but reacted to and incorporated the event into their narratives in one or the other way. *24*, a show that had been produced prior to the attacks, was then scheduled to air its premiere later than its intended date due to the 9/11 attacks.[56] It has been reconfigured in many ways and tells the story of fictional CSI Counter Terrorist Unit agent Jack Bauer (Kiefer Sutherland), who is permanently on the hunt of international terrorists, from Serbian war criminals and Colombian drug cartels to an Islamic sleeper cell financed by evil US-Americans in a 'hands-on, take-no-prisoners' fashion. Critical reception of the show widely read it as the conservative wing's dream of a lone gunman/agent taking justice into his own hands and hunting 'the bad guys' wherever they dare show their faces.[57] *24*, which has also set new standards in creating suspense through a groundbreaking form of visual representation,[58] has also been one of the first shows explicitly employing the application of torture as a means to acquire 'important' information into its narrative. The display of a multitude of cases of waterboarding, application of electroshocks, sleep deprivation, etc. thus has "been claimed to tap into a consensus of fear, and a shared desire for decisive action, encouraging a popular acceptance of torture"[59] which was further promoted by the Bush/Cheney administration at that time.

56 cf. Derek Johnson, 'Neoliberal Politics, Convergence, and the Do-It-Yourself Security of *24*' *Cinema Journal*, 51.1 (2011) 149.

57 cf. Rubio, Steven, 'Can a Leftist love *24*', in: Richard Miniter et al. (eds.), *Jack Bauer for President: Terrorism and Politics in 24* (Dallas: BenBella Books, 2008), pp. 19–28

58 cf. Michael Allen, 'Divided Interests: Split-Screen Aesthetics in *24*', in: Stephen Peacock (ed.) *Reading 24: TV Against the Clock* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007) 35-48.

59 Johnson, 'Neoliberal Politics' 149.

This first strand of shows can therefore be seen as mirroring the reality of the immediate post-9/11 world as perceived by conservative US citizens. These shows replaced an occupation with the problems at hand – for example an occupation with the trauma induced by the attacks and their images, and corresponding problems arising from the attacks' effects – with an induced fear of future terrorist attacks planned by the world's evil-doers and the subsequent acting upon the prevention of that threat, a behavior that was prominent in US society right after the attacks. The display of resolute action, power, and the proclaimed will to hunt the perpetrators was one of the main reasons why both the Bush/Cheney administration's approval rates[60] and approval of the US army sky-rocketed in the immediate period following the attacks. This surge in activism as reaction to 9/11 can be seen reflected in this first strand of shows. *24*'s 'Jack Bauer School of Therapy' for example, has been read as providing a form of exposure therapy that may help its audience work through their trauma by engaging in narratives of hero cops/agents who actively fight America's aggressors and in the end make sure the United States will be safe for at least one more episode.[61] The politics behind this first strand of shows can be seen as being motivated by the conservative wing's understanding[62] of a new great American narrative based on what has been retrospectively labeled "an extraordinarily myopic, self-righteous, even puerile view of the nature of our world."[63] Almost all of those shows have been produced by Fox Network and CBS, two broadcasters known for their ideological tendency toward conservative beliefs.[64] And especially the case of *24* and its production company's ties with and support from right-wing institutions, conservative public figures and the US military have often been noted by media scholars.[65]

60 cf. Gallup Poll, 'Presidential Approval Ratings: George W. Bush' <http://www.gallup.com/poll/116500/Presidential-Approval-Ratings-George-Bush.aspx> accessed 11 September 2012.

61 cf. Jeanne Cavelos, 'Living with Terror: Jack Bauer as a Coping Mechanism in Post-Traumatic Stress Disordered America' in: Richard Miniter et al. (eds.), *Jack Bauer for President: Terrorism and Politics in 24* (Dallas: BenBella Books, 2008) 6.

62 cf. Republican statements such as Congressman Tancredo's during the Republican Presidential Candidate Debate, May 15, 2007: "You say that nuclear devices have gone off in the United States, more are planned, and we're wondering about whether waterboarding would be a bad thing to do? I'm looking for Jack Bauer at that time!" quoted in: Eric Greene, 'Jack Bauer Syndrome' in: Richard Miniter et al. (eds.), *Jack Bauer for President: Terrorism and Politics in 24* (Dallas: BenBella Books, 2008) 171.

63 Duvall et al. 'Narrating 9/11' 394.

64 cf. e.g. Jonathan S. Morris, 'Slanted Objectivity? Perceived Media Bias, Cable News Exposure, and Political Attitudes' *Social Science Quarterly* 88.3 (2007) 707–28. or: Eric Alterman, *What liberal media?: The truth about bias and the news* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).

65 cf. e.g. Johnson, 'Neoliberal Politics' 149-50. or: Greene, 'Jack Bauer Syndrome', 172-3.

3.2 Allegories on 9/11

A second strand of drama television that this work wants to introduce are shows that present allegories or alternate world scenarios resembling the real-world event of the 9/11 attacks that, through allegorical parallels, comment on the sociopolitical changes resulting from this event. Among those series are shows such as *Firefly* (FOX, 2002-3), *Deadwood* (HBO, 2004-6), *The 4400* (CBS, 2004-7), *Battlestar Galactica* (Syfy, 2004-9), *Lost* (ABC, 2004-10), *Jericho* (CBS, 2006-8), *Heroes* (NBC, 2006-10), *Fringe* (Warner/FOX, 2008-), *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* (FOX, 2008-9) and *FlashForward* (HBO/ABC, 2009-10). The majority of those shows is part of the Science Fiction/Supernatural/Mystery genre, with only *Deadwood* (Western) and *Jericho* (Action/Conspiracy) as exceptions to that corpus, although it must be noted that, with modern narratives, clear-cut genre definitions are often not applicable any more.

3.2.1 Deadwood

HBO's *Deadwood* is an interesting example because it uses the Western genre, a genre so intrinsically tied to much of US culture, to critically comment on and create an antithesis to the then-dominant ideology of US-American exceptionalism.[66] In her work on *Saving Jessica Lynch* (NBC, 2003) and *Deadwood*, Stacy Takacs compares NBC's made-for-TV movie to the HBO series and finds diametrically different ways in which the Western genre is employed. As a basis to her analysis, she discusses the televisual medium's ability to provide a cultural forum in which social issues are presented to open debate. Subsequently, she dissects the NBC production and investigates how the Western genre has been employed by supporters of the Bush administration to strengthen the national Manichean narrative that has been governing public US discourse since 9/11. As a counter-example, she then provides a reading of the HBO series *Deadwood* as a 'realist' Western that strips the genre of its mythology, thus confronting its viewers with broken and ambiguous characters who try to make a living on the brink of civilization. Implicitly, the show asks questions about the validity of the US administration's image of a US society that Takacs sees mirrored in the allegory of this Western town as a "naked form of primitive accumulation organized through the violent suppression of completing claims and claimants."[67]

66 cf. Enrica Picarelli, 'Reframing 9/11: Film, Popular Culture and the "War on Terror"', *darkmatter*, 7 (2011).

67 Stacy Takacs, 'The Contemporary Politics of the Western Form: Bush, 'saving Jessica Lynch', and 'Deadwood", in *Reframing 9/11: Film, popular culture and the "war on terror"*, ed. by Jeff Birkenstein et al. (New York: Continuum, 2010) 158.

Janet McCabe, in her analysis of *Deadwood*'s historical/fictional character of Calamity Jane, sees both the character's plot and the narrative of *Deadwood* as depictions of "multiple and contested memories that relate to a complex and often traumatic experience in the narrative reshaping of modern frontier historiographies", for the post-modern, traumatized viewer fulfilling a "narrative function for catharsis and healing in the post-9/11 era – a time of perceived national crisis related to global terrorism, political and religious schism, and a controversial war involving the latest gold rush – oil."[68] In other words, in laying bare the struggles and submerged memories that have been covered by popular Western mythology, *Deadwood* enables the post-modern audience to relate their own suffering and memories suppressed by the national narrative of 9/11 heroes and sacrifice, to historical precedents.

3.2.2 Battlestar Galactica

A completely different form of narrative, although similarly critical of the socio-political developments in the US of the early 2000s, is presented in the Science Fiction plot of *Battlestar Galactica* (*BSG*). *BSG*, a re-imagining of the successful 1970s television show, is set in a distant future and has as its premise the almost total annihilation of the human race by the Cylons, a human-made robot race that evolved to a form of collective consciousness, and that subsequently is following its own search for enlightenment and God, who - as is the Cylons' belief - can only be found by removing their intermediate creator, mankind. The series narrates the lives of some fifty thousand human survivors on board the *Galactica* and other spaceships, who, after surviving the initial annihilation attempt, have been on the run from their enemy and begun a life as space nomads, and are now searching for a mythical promised land, their former home planet Earth. The story gets further complicated when the human survivors learn that the Cylons have gained the ability to adapt their appearance to the human image, becoming almost indistinguishable from 'true' humans. On that basis, the show problematizes cultural, social, religious and moral problems well-known to US society, because the issues depicted in this SciFi setting resemble a variety of issues posed by the war on terror and, in particular, the military missions in Afghanistan and Iraq. The show's mise en scène imitates a realist style through a deliberate choice of presenting a dirty, run-down setting with over-exposed lighting, shaky, documentary-like hand-held cameras

68 Janet McCabe, 'Myth Maketh the Woman: Calamity Jane, Frontier Mythology and creating American (Media) Historical Imaginings' in: David Lavery (ed.) *Reading Deadwood: A Western to Swear By* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006) 76.

and almost no application of extradiegetic sound that would mask or emphasize one way of interpretation, thus underlining the ambiguities presented in the narrative. Starting with the basic premise of the Cylons as the 'Other', which can be read as an allegory on the United States' armament of the Middle East and the subsequent revolt against US domination, the show covers issues of war, terror and trauma. In her article on torture in *BSG*, Karen Randell provides a detailed list of the issues covered in the show:

> sexual violence against enemies ("Pegasus," season 2, episode 10 [hereafter abbreviated as, e.g., 2.10]; "Resurrection Ship," parts 1 and 2, 2.11–2.12), the embedded press ("Final Cut," 2.8), suicide bombing and terrorism ("Litmus," 1.6), abortion and reproductive rights ("The Farm," 2.5; "The Captain's Hand," 2.17), genocide ("A Measure of Salvation," 3.7), incompetent government administration ("Fragged," 2.3; "Resistance," 2.4), rigged elections ("Lay Down Your Burdens," part 2, 2.20), and […] torture, in the aptly named episode "Flesh and Bone" (1.8). [69]

Those issues, which are often controversially discussed and ambiguities laid bare within the narrative, were also governing or at least present in public discourse during the years after 9/11 and the US declaration to fight 'evil' with all means necessary. For example, when the surviving humans in *BSG* capture one of the new, human-like Cylons, the possibility of torturing him in order to gain important information on the whereabouts of the enemy's fleet is discussed at length, with different points of view presented within the narrative. In stark contrast to the Jack Bauer ideology employed in *24*, the characters' struggle to find a way through these moral dilemmas are depicted in detail, leaving the audience, who may relate the allegory to their own experiences, contemplating the ambiguities such moral dilemmas inherently present. Simultaneously, the viewer is much more drawn to those characters who are depicted as neither good nor bad, but ambivalent and human. In the course of the series, one finds oneself even sympathizing with the 'bad guys', the Cylons, who also display human characteristics. Or, as Randell puts it: "The problems and the pleasures for the BSG audience rest in this constant narrative dilemma: the series offers philosophical debates rather than easy answers played out to resolve our contemporary problems."[70] I want to argue that *BSG* provides a fitting example of a show in the 'cultural forum' sense for which television is a platform to comment on predominant ideologies and present differing points of views, and to

69 Karen Randell, "'Now the Gloves Come Off': The Problematic of "Enhanced Interrogation Techniques" in *Battlestar Galactica*', *Cinema Journal* 51.1 (2011) 169.

70 Randell, "'Now the Gloves Come Off'" 173.

negotiate values, ideas and fears.[71] By presenting a narrative of groups in constant conflict about ideologies and world-views, *BSG* weaves an allegory that motivates the viewer to scrutinize their personal views on current issues surrounding the event of 9/11.

3.2.3 Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles

As a third example indicating this second strand of Allegories on 9/11, this work wants to highlight the series *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* (*TSCC*). On the level of production, this show in some way contradicts the other two examples presented here – those have been produced by companies of rather leftist/Democratic ideologies (*Deadwood*/HBO , *BSG*/Syfy), while *TSCC* was produced by FOX, for some the epitomization of a right-wing media outlet.[72] The plot of *TSCC* is based on the *Terminator* movie franchise (1984-2009) and tells the story of the teenage John Connor and his mother Sarah, who are fighting to prevent the evil Skynet network to take over the world and annihilate/enslave humankind in the process. Agreeing with Anna Froula, I read *TSCC* as an allegory on the post-9/11 anxieties about the enemies the United States have created in the process. Skynet, which initially was designed to guarantee safety for the future United States, turns against its creators in the same way that former Cold War allies such as Al-Qaeda have become enemies of the United States.[73] This analogy grows more complicated, though, because Sarah and her son John, who are constantly on the run from the Terminator machines. have to use terrorist techniques in order to stay alive in the underground, leading to a character classification as 'terrorist' that has also been actively highlighted by the show's Media and Law representatives.[74] With the Connors constantly on the run, hunted by a variety of Terminators and protected by a special, 'rogue' Terminator, the whole series is very action-driven. Froula's analysis indicates a narrative based on a traumatic framework that is realized through complicated and fragmented temporal shifts and jumps.[75] Indeed, at times the viewer is not sure whether one is currently witnessing a past or future memory realized through flashbacks and flashforwards. Those complications stem from the fracturing of temporal relations, as John and

71 cf. Lotz, 'Using 'Network' Theory in the Post-Network Era' 431.

72 cf. e.g. Scott Collins, *Crazy like a FOX: The inside story of how Fox News beat CNN* (New York: Portfolio, 2004). Or: Jonathan Morris, 'The Fox News Factor', *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 10.3 (2005) 56–79.

73 cf. Anna Froula, "'9/11 - What's That?": Trauma, Temporality, and *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*', *Cinema Journal* 51.1 (2011) 174.

74 cf. Froula, "'9/11 - What's That?'" 174.

75 cf. Froula, "'9/11 - What's That?'" 175.

Sarah, who themselves perform a time jump from 1999 to the year 2007 in the pilot episode, are visited by a group of future rebel soldiers later in Season 1, among them the future version of John's father Kyle Reese, who, in the narrated present, is haunted by memories of the future that come back to him in dreams. Froula states that such temporal confusions are one key element of trauma. Real-world examples of such trauma can be found both in US army veterans coming home from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and those traumatized by the event of 9/11 itself, who live in constant fear of new attacks on the United States. In *TSCC*, though, the trauma itself becomes even more complicated, because the characters are not able to settle into a post-traumatic setting that would allow them to try to cope with their past experiences. Rather, they have to continue their war and fight against what has already hurt them in the future world of the Terminator universe, and are thus trapped inside their trauma. These traumata, according to Froula, "mirror a United States that is haunted by memories of 9/11 in the anxious present of the war on terror and its government-stoked fear of another attack."[76] The show therefore can be seen as a narrativization/visual representation of the complex relations existing between time, trauma and terror, relations that Thomas Elsaesser describes as the trauma-terror dilemma, a disaggregation of the apparent causal relation between terror and trauma which has become further complicated by 'modern terror'. Based on the Derridaean understanding of the post-modern extension of trauma's temporal unidirectionality to a bidirectional understanding of trauma relating to both past and future events, the goal of 'modern terror' seems to be not to physically kill people, but to produce traumatized survivors.[77]

What unites this second strand of shows is the narrational realization of a negotiation of US-American fears and positions in the allegorical context of fictional drama. This strand of shows presents narratives that, through depiction of alternate world scenarios featuring plots and characters who are suffering from and dealing with issues similar to that of the real world, aim at criticizing modern moral dilemmas resulting from the deeply-rooted understanding of US exceptionalism,[78] which was re-actualized on a collective level through the black-and-white narrative promoted by the US government. The degree to which ideas, values and fears are

76 Froula, "'9/11 - What's That?'" 177.

77 cf. Elsaesser, *Terror und Trauma*,11, 15. German original: "[D]er Zweck des modernen Terrors [besteht] nicht darin [...], Leben oder Eigentum zu zerstören, sondern durch einen Akt der (Selbst-) Zerstörung Zeugen und Überlebende zu erschaffen, die durch den Akt traumatisiert/ terrorisiert sind."

78 cf. Neil J. Smelser, 'September 11, 2001, as Cultural Trauma' 264–82.

discussed within each of the narratives may vary, as is shown in the exemplary serial narratives. For instance, *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*, produced by FOX, foregrounds action and the well-known plot of the Terminator franchise, and arguably only contains subtle hints that allow for a more critical reading of the show. The Syfy-produced *Battlestar Galactica* on the other hand, similarly to *TSCC*, also employs the allegorical cover of Science Fiction, but, in that context, does much more overtly problematize a variety of economical, ethical and social issues such as the (non-)necessity of war, motivating the public to reconsider and deliberate upon basic US positions and beliefs.

3.3 Traumatized individuals & a dissection of the homeland

The third and final strand this work wants to introduce is also the newest of the three, resulting in a rather short list of shows representing this strand. In my opinion, those shows epitomize a turn away from allegorical approaches that had been so prominent in the years before, and towards a reconsideration of the causes, costs, and consequences of the United States' military engagement for its population, including a recognition of those left scarred by this engagement. I see the trend represented by this strand of shows as currently taking place, starting in 2010 and including *Rubicon* (AMC, 2010), *Person of Interest* (CBS, 2011-), and *Homeland* (Showtime, 2011-).

3.3.1 Rubicon

AMCs *Rubicon* is a show featuring a 9/11 conspiracy 'slow-burn narrative'[79] in the style of spy classics such as the John Le Carré novel-based British miniseries *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* (1979), telling the story of Will Travers (James Badge Dale), an analyst working at an fictional intelligence agency, the American Policy Institute (API), who finds himself entangled in a conspiracy that had his supervisor and mentor David Hadas (Peter Gerety) killed. Travers, with help from his team of code-crackers, is determined to unravel what he finds is a nation-wide conspiracy that has been plotting major global disasters in order to profit from insider trades betting on the consequences of those disasters. What makes this show special is its story development that evolves at a snail's pace – a key element that is arguably found in most current AMC shows such as *The Killing* (AMC, 2011-), *Breaking Bad* (2008-) or *Mad Men* (2007-).[80] And, since the actual narrative is moving

79 cf. Anthony N. Smith, 'Putting the Premium into Basic: Slow-Burn Narratives and the Loss-Leader Function of AMC's Original Drama Series', *Television & New Media* (2011, published online before print) DOI 10.1177/1527476411418537

80 cf. Smith, 'Putting the Premium into Basic'

forward so slowly, with a much longer duration of each scene and a corresponding lower cut rate, the time at hand is employed to ensure a more detailed character depiction, often deliberately letting them traverse spaces, or simply showing them doing nothing but thinking. Each of those characters is depicted as both genial and wounded personae in one or the other way, collaborating on the puzzles presented to them; Travers' co-workers are either addicted, on the verge of being paranoid or simply awkward and not socially compatible. And Travers in particular, whose wife died in the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001, is stigmatized by the loss and has turned to an introverted existence brooding over his past. His profession seems to further amplify his personal problems, with both him and his colleagues being almost exclusively existing in their offices, or on their way to or from work. The series' style of presentation in a way imitates a passive-aggressive narrative style that provides the characters and the viewer with clues to mysteries in the one scene, and withdraws or relativizes those hints in the next one, always keeping the viewer on the main character's level of information. The narrative tactics of keeping the viewer always one step short of deciphering what it all means makes sure that one never loses the motivation to stay with the show, creating a gravitational force that has the viewer always wanting to know more.

The choice of James Badge Dale as main actor seems to be remarkable on two levels. He creates a believable character driven by his pattern-recognition skills and a tragic past that keeps haunting him. Moreover, the fact that Dale was playing the partner joining Jack Bauer (Kiefer Sutherland) in Day/Season 3 of the action-packed terrorist hunt of *24* in a sense makes Dale the perfect impersonation of the changes US television drama has undergone: from his 2003 hands-on character as CTU agent Chase Edmunds to traumatized intelligence analyst Will Travers who, within the enmeshment of a global conspiracy, struggles to keep his life together, his characters mirror the questions asked by the first and the third strand of fictional TV drama presented here. While *24* is the reenactment of US society's want for retribution, *Rubicon* can be seen as the metaphor of a society in the state of recognizing the damages its own traumatized state of mind has caused.

3.3.2 Person of Interest

Person of Interest, produced by CBS, presents a different angle on the 9/11 conspiracy plot. Its premise is the US intelligence sector having joined forces after the 9/11 attacks and mandated the construction of a 'machine', a sort of supercomputer that is able to filter all surveillance data

collected in the city of New York and to automatically recognize threats to the city's society through live pattern analysis. The narrative then follows the creator of that machine, wealthy Harold Finch (Michael Emerson), and his soon-to-become partner John Reese (Jim Caviezel), who is a former Green Beret and ex CIA field agent assumed dead by the authorities. As the machine, besides analyzing the city's patterns, happens to also produce a list of social security numbers of persons who, according to the analysis, will soon be part in an imminent crime (as victim or perpetrator can not be known in advance), Reese has the task to interfere in each of those incidents. The show's characterization of Reese, who is depicted as a broken, introverted being who keeps to himself and, when communicating with other people, talks with a very low voice is an apt representation of the veteran soldier without a means in life that reminds one of the character of Jason Bourne (Matt Damon), the protagonist of the successful Bourne trilogy movie franchise.[81] Furthermore, the audience learns that Reese has recurring traumatic flashbacks of his missions, and in particular, of the death of his wife. Those seemingly uncoordinated flashbacks, as well as the over-arching plot, are narrated in fractured segments that, similar to traumatic memories, in the beginning are deeply confusing for the viewer. The magic link that the audience is presented with is the CGI representation of temporal relations on an animated time bar indicating each episode's time frame that is spanning from the late 1990s up to the year 2010, including Reese's pre-9/11 involvement with the CIA and the fictional here and now.

Similar to shows like *Burn Notice* (USA, 2007-12), the series features installments of one case per episode that are combined with over-arching plot structures slowly developing the two main characters' back story as well as evolving supporting threads featuring two police detectives helping Reese and Finch, a CIA branch wanting to cut loose ends, and tales of corruption and conspiracies which the duo finds itself in the middle of. Compared to *Rubicon*, the visual style is completely different: considerably higher cut rates enabling a faster development of the narrative, a focus on action sequences, and the recurring application of surveillance camera aesthetics combining made-for-the-show CCTV video, CGI elements and actual surveillance tape material provides the show's paranoid, surveillance framework. Similar to *Rubicon*, then, is the choice of topics and issues at its basis: the consequences of 9/11, and the depiction of a traumatized main character who tries to settle into the new homeland environment, which has considerably changed since he

81 cf. Vincent Gaine, 'Remember Everything, Absolve Nothing: Working through Trauma in the Bourne Trilogy', *Cinema Journal*, 51.1 (2011) 159–63.

had been left and presumed dead by his government.

3.3.3 Homeland

The third example will be analyzed in more detail because I consider it as epitomizing the key elements of this third strand of fictional TV drama. The Showtime program *Homeland* is based on an Israeli series by the name of *Hatufim* (Keshet/Channel 2, 2009-12). The series revolves around the characters of Carrie Mathison (Claire Danes) and Nicholas/Nick Brody (Damian Lewis), who both have been involved in the post-9/11 war in Iraq.

Introduction: Carrie Mathison

Mathison is introduced in the first minutes of the pilot episode as a CSI operations agent who had been to Iraq on an unauthorized mission to gather information about a prisoner of war (POW) who allegedly has been 'turned' by the terrorists, implying that this POW would act as a double-agent for Al-Qaeda. Brody, who had been fighting as a US Marine in Iraq in 2003 and, together with a second soldier, has then been declared missing in action, is recovered by a Delta Force unit eight years later during an invasion of a terrorist stronghold belonging to a terrorist by the name of Abu Nazir (Navid Negahban). As the audience quickly learns during the show's pilot, Mathison has a reputation of a rogue agent who, due to her mood swings often has difficulties following orders and accepting hierarchies. During summary debrief of Brody's extraction from the terrorist stronghold, she is the only one assuming that Brody is the turned POW, while the rest of the CIA and other officials involved are more than happy to declare Brody a hero. After a short discussion about an authorization to wiretap the Brody family's house with her former mentor and supervisor Saul Berenson (Mandy Patinkin), who acts as Mathison's consciousness and guardian angel, Mathison decides for herself to illegally observe the returned war hero. At this point the audience learns about the CIA agent's manic-depressive way of dealing with her life. Her bipolar disorder, a disease which is narrated as running in her family and apparently triggered by the 9/11 attacks, also enables her to see patterns like a savant, making her a valuable asset for the CIA. On the other hand, Mathison is depicted as torn apart by her manic-depressive behavior at times, recurring at multiple points in the narrative, and showing symptoms such as traumatic fits that keep haunting her, that can be seen as similar or related to PTSD. To keep those nightmares at bay, she has turned to drugs that the CIA must not know about, since it would mean her definite discharge. Mathison's sister Maggie (Amy Hargreaves), a physician, writes her prescriptions for

those psychotropics, thus helping her to keep both under the CIA's radar and in control over her disease.

Control in a more general sense appears to be one of Mathison's obsession. She has made the abstract, collective guilt of not having been able to prevent the 9/11 attacks her personal responsibility. The audience is repeatedly reminded of this felt responsibility during the introduction of every episode, a visual traumatic statement in itself comprising of seemingly random cuts to depictions of 9/11 news clippings, pictures of Mathison, pictures of Brody, images of both standing apart from each other, trapped in a labyrinth, and all layered with fractured sounds of a news anchor, presidential statements, and the voice of Mathison stating that she's missed a terrorist plot once (9/11) and that she can not let that happen again. These megalomaniac allusions make her appear even more driven, haunted by the past, and broken. Except her fighting the specter of a new terrorist attack, she has lost all purpose in life. And with her identification of the antagonist in the person of Nick Brody, she becomes obsessed with him.

Introduction: Nick Brody

Brody, on the other hand, is presented as a worthy antagonist. He embodies the direct opposite to Mathison on various levels. He is a very controlled, introverted person who rather keeps to himself and does not talk much. His imprisonment has left his body and psyche marked, but he works hard to eventually assume and fulfill his role as a home-coming hero of the nation, father of two children and loving husband. As a viewer, one always wonders if Brody really is only trying to make his re-socialization and re-integration into the life he left behind eight years ago work, or if he is the cunning sleeper agent that Mathison thinks he is, "playing the Hero card", as Mathison's mentor suggests ('Grace', 1:2), meaning that Brody puts on a masterful show that has everybody fooled. This game gets even further complicated when the audience learns that Brody, wandering off into the hidden confinements of his garage to pray in the direction of Mecca, has apparently adopted the Muslim faith. One finds oneself jumping to conclusions, but, when thinking twice about it, the question arises if this single fact alone does make Brody a terrorist (there is no other evidence provided that would substantiate this suspicion during the first episodes), or if he should rather not be judged solely on the practice of a newly-found belief? It is those questions and the narrative equilibrium created by the tension stemming from Mathison's allegations and her determination to prove them on the one hand, and Brody's stoic way of settling back into his

old life on the other hand, slowly winning back his family's and friends' faith in him. Especially Brody's initial struggle to adapt to US Society is depicted in a realistic and believable way. When he, still on the transit from Iraq to the US via Ramstein, Germany ('Pilot', 1:1), first contacts his wife Jessica (Morena Baccarin), the audience gains a rare informational advantage when learning that Jessica has an affair with another man, with Brody's call interrupting an actual amorous tête-à-tête of theirs, but him not actually knowing of it. From Jessica's perspective, Brody's coming home therefore constitutes one additional break-up of her life as a soldier's widow, with her and their children believing that their husband and father has died.

The Brody family

The show depicts the difficulties the Brody family has to face in the process of growing back together in detail. Nick, acting awkward at first, but equipped with a stern self-perception as *pater familias* and not suspecting his wife having an affair during the first episodes, overreacts when he learns about the affair Jessica was having with his best friend and army colleague, Michael/Mike Faber (Diego Klattenhoff), ending in a fistfight with Mike during a BBQ in the Brody's garden ('The Good Soldier', 1:6). His wife Jessica is torn between minimizing the damage done by her affair, which, after her husband assumed dead for eight years, for her felt to be the right thing, and welcoming her once-loved husband back into the family, working to rekindle that lost love between them. And Brody's children, thirteen year-old Chris (Jackson Pace) and sixteen year-old Dana (Morgan Saylor) have their own way of coping with the situation: right from the beginning Chris is the eager-to-please child, quickly accepting his father back in the family, while Dana is more pubescent, experimenting with marijuana ('Pilot', 1:1) and generally being moody. Dana in particular initially distrusts both her mother and her father, but later warms to Brody's presence.

Brody's traumatized self

Another layer of the show is the story of Brody's imprisonment and the corresponding dual, undercover life he begins to lead back in the United States. He is very secretive and provides only very few details when actually talking about his eight years in the care of terrorist Abu Nazir (Navid Negahban), but the audience gets to learn a lot of his back story through flashback memories of the traumatized self that is Brody. The viewer witnesses fragments of the story of a soldier who has survived a variety of torture methods, has then been welcomed into the house of his torturer, who, as we learn later in the show ('Crossfire', 1:9), entrusts him with the education of his son.

The web of submission and trust that is spun by Abu Nazir ultimately has Brody ensnared, having him reconsider his most basic beliefs and ideologies. The fragmentation, aesthetics and temporal dislocation of the memory sequences suggest that Brody has been deeply traumatized. To clearly distinct these traumatic passages of Brody's memory representations, the show here adapts a style of what Janet Walker, in the context of movie production, labeled 'Trauma Cinema', and what I also see at work in the context of Trauma TV: "non-linearity, fragmentation, nonsynchronous sound, repetition, rapid editing and strange angles [produce] an unusual admixture of emotional affect, metonymic symbolism and cinematic flashbacks."[82]

Mathison's compulsive obsession: Surveillance & pattern recognition

After the discussion with her superior, Saul Berenson, about the legality of wiretapping Brody, Carrie Mathison's earlier-mentioned obsession with Brody, fueled by her bipolar disorder, has her taking matters into her own hand. Assisted by a former CIA colleague, Virgil (David Marciano), who is now working as a freelance surveillance specialist, Mathison decides to have the Brody's house under illegal 24-hour surveillance from the moment Nick's family is leaving home to pick him up from the airport.

Subsequently, the viewer watches Mathison watching Nick Brody and his family on a multi-monitor set, determined to register every move of Brody. An exceptionally awkward situation in this observational constellation develops when Brody, for the first time alone with his wife, has serious problems reconnecting emotionally and physically with Jessica ('Pilot', 1:1). The situation's climax is an awkward lovemaking-scene (shot in surveillance tape aesthetics to make clear that the audience sees what Mathison is seeing), in which Jessica, after having found Brody's body scarred from the interrogations, seems to participate rather for pitying or even fearing her husband than for actual feelings between them. Other scenes display Brody sometimes just standing or sitting around forlornly, suddenly struck by recurring daydreams of the nightmares he has lived through – a classic symptom of PTSD – and Mathison, through her surveillance cameras, strangely seems to be able to understand what he is going through. After four weeks of surveillance, which had in the meantime retroactively been sanctioned by Mathison's mentor Berenson with a Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) Warrant received from a judge who Berenson had to blackmail into signing, Carrie Mathison is forced to end her observational project, and with it, the

82 Janet Walker, 'Reports and debates. Trauma cinema: False memories and true experience' *Screen* 42.2 (2001) 214.

narrative takes up speed. Mathison still feels that Brody must be observed and embarks on a new level of personal surveillance. Initially confused about what to do when she sees Brody meeting fellow veterans at a War Veteran's therapeutic group, she 'accidentally' bumps into him, pretending to not be sure whether participating in such a talk group would be her thing. Still angry about his wife's affair with his friend Mike, Brody is interested in her as a fellow Baghdad veteran who understands his situation is sparked. Out of that interest develops an affair in which Brody appears to have found somebody with whom he is able to connect both physically and spiritually ('Semper I', 1:4). Three episodes later, Brody learns that Mathison has been spying on him, and when suspicions, lies and explanations are placed on the table, Mathison finally seems to see the bigger picture. Brody confesses to having killed the second soldier captured by Abu Nazir, Tom Walker (Chris Chalk), during their captivity, and admits to now being of Muslim faith. A few minutes later, Mathison is informed by Saul Berenson that Tom Walker has been identified on US soil, having her draw the conclusion that she has been observing the wrong POW, and that Tom Walker would be her suspect. As the audience learns in the following episodes, she never could have been more right, and wrong at the same time, because, in her determined fixation to find the one POW her source told her of, she never even considered that there might be more than one sleeper agent. Brody, apparently deeply hurt by Mathison's allegations and the wrong that has been done to him, ends the relationship and leaves their romantic hideout, returning to his family ('The Weekend', 1:7).

Healing of trauma & its negation

It is this part following the break-up with Mathison that has Brody, apparently, finally coming to terms with his past and being freed of his surveillance, which serves as mid-season quasi-*dénouement*. On a first impression, Brody has, after his conversations with Mathison, been able to talk about what has deeply haunted him, suggesting that, through a form of psychotherapeutic, Freudian, talking cure, he was able to move on towards a state of healing for Brody's traumatized self.[83] And indeed, after his breakup with Mathison, Brody seems to be more confident, to reach out to his family, and to become more socially active. This implied understanding of the talking cure,

83 cf. Thomas Elsaesser, 'Subject positions, speaking positions: From Holocaust, Our Hitler and Heimat to Shoah and Schindler's List', in: Sobchack (ed.) *The persistence of history* (New York: Routledge, 1996) 146.
And: Jaques Lacan et al., *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981) 235.

though, is soon to be turned *ad absurdum*, when the audience eventually learns in the remaining five episodes of the first season that there did exist more than only one turned POW, and that Brody was just only beginning to play his game. At this point, the show reminds the viewer of the complexities inherent in such matters as international relations, globalization, and terrorism, and the contestable US foreign policy. Mathison's fixation in *Homeland* to find the one sleeper terrorist may be seen as an allegory to the Bush-Cheney administration's painting a picture of one evil mastermind who simply needs to be removed in order to restore the *status quo* of a pre-9/11 world.

Media and Politics

Brody's relation to the media and politics is another remarkable element of the show. Right from the pilot episode, a host of media representatives, from cameramen, television and print reporters to anchormen and analysts, is encamped in front of the Brody's house. During the first weeks, these media representatives are following every step of Nick Brody and his family, therefore presenting a different form of surveillance, which maybe more benign, but is still intrusive. The media representatives are more than happy to participate in the creation of a 'Homecoming Hero' story, a story which the military and political administration is eager to stage. Right from the beginning, we learn that *Homeland*'s CIA Counterterrorism Center Director David Estes (David Harewood) makes clear that the military administration needs "Brody in the public eye, reminding America that this [the war on terror] is far from over" ('Grace', 1:2). Brody, initially unwilling to participate in the media circus, agrees at the end of the same episode to give interviews and to become the public figure the media want and need him to be. Mathison, watching his preparations for the interview, is convinced that he is now "playing the Hero Card", but to what ends will remain open till the end of the first season. The big question governing the whole season is: Does he just want to be in control of what is reported of him, or does he subtly manipulate the media in the way Hollywood has often portrayed sleeper agents in popular cultural artefacts such as *The Manchurian Candidate* (1959/1962/2004)? Similar to the *Candidate*'s narrative, the influence Brody gains from his status as a war hero slowly increases within the narrative. The Pilot's final scene, for example, has Brody, haunted by memories that depict him being talked into beating the other captive marine, which the viewer later learns to be Tom Walker, to death. Brody is frantically jogging through Washington at dawn and finally taking a break from his exhausting tour. Coincidentally, his run brought him near the government district – and when he stops to

catch his breath, the audience sees a suspected sleeper terrorist enjoying the view of the White House.

Later in the narrative, his war hero status presents him with new political opportunities; he is introduced to the presidential circle of influential people, eventually wins the US President's secretary's trust and is even presented with the possibility of filling a political position ('Achilles Heel',1:8). Here I argue that Brody's easy rise in the political system can be seen as an implicit critique of the then-current debates surrounding political achievers and the presidential elections – in particular the debate about John McCain's qualification for the post of Republican presidential candidate in 2000 and 2008 – in which war veterans seem to naturally inherit a status of believability and perceived competence that only US Americans can really understand. And, as Katherine and Gary Edgerton aptly note, Brody's counterpart Mathison, with her "bipolar disorder emerges as an apt synecdoche for the current state of the post-9/11 American psyche, oscillating between aggressive offensive actions abroad and fear-filled defensive manoeuvres at home."[84]

Homeland*'s cultural relevance*

As has been shown, *Homeland* is a television drama that vibrates with cultural relevance, mirroring the United States' extreme collective responses to 9/11. The overwhelmingly positive response of US critics to the show – metacritic.com lists 28 positive reviews, with no mixed or negative commentary [85] – indicates the collective nerve the show's creators Alex Gansa, Howard Gordon and Gideon Raff appear to have struck with the pastiche of conspiracy thriller, action series and trauma narrative that is *Homeland*. Gansa and Gordon in particular, who have also been working on the post-9/11 era's television ur-text *24*, may be seen as chroniclers of these ongoing changes in the American television landscape. While *24* features the Manichean narrative of Jack Bauer vs. The Axis of Evil, their current production's premise is to make visible the complexities inherent in questions of terror and trauma. Embodied in the character of Mathison, the spotlight is on the United States' fixation on foreign enemies, "until Brody widens the series' perspective to include all 'enemies foreign and domestic' in *Homeland*'s season-ending finale, [with the show confirming that] the country's damaged post-9/11 psyche is the real sleeper agent, wreaking havoc at home and abroad more profoundly than any unforeseen terrorist cell."[86]

84 Edgerton, 'Pathologizing Post-9/11 America in *Homeland*' 91.

85 cf. Metacritic, '*Homeland – Season 1*' <http://www.metacritic.com/tv/homeland> visited 22 Sept 2012.

86 Edgerton, 'Pathologizing Post-9/11 America in *Homeland*' 92.

What also comes to mind in the context of *Homeland* is Thomas Elsaesser's notion of the inseparability of trauma and terror, which is displayed on multiple levels in the fictional case of Nick Brody, but also applicable to the narratives of *Rubicon* and *Person of Interest*.[87] Brody, who is assumed to embody the terrorist, has himself suffered trauma in multiple ways – beginning with his witnessing the 9/11 attacks, his motivation to embark on the mission 'Iraqi Freedom' as a sniper, the cruelties he must have experienced (and performed) when in combat, his subsequent capture, incarceration, torture and suffering, including the illusion to have been forced to kill his sniper partner Walker, the affect Brody has been induced to feel for the death of Abu Nazir's son, etc. In some ways similar to Mathison, but different in others, the character of Brody metonymically mirrors modern US history and the somewhat schizophrenic relation US society has to itself and the Other. Nevertheless, I want to stress, that the case of *Homeland* does *not* make a case for easy self-victimization, an element Stacy Takacs sees present in a plethora of cultural artefacts that aided the celebration of a national trauma that led to "9/11 [becoming] a monument to national innocence,"[88] but rather a clear statement of the, sometimes ambiguous, complexities at the base of national and international relations that effectively turn an appropriation of clearly-defined roles of victim and perpetrator impossible.

4 Outlook: Trauma TV, and now what?

Eleven years after 9/11, America appears to have reached a state of ambiguous uncertainty, in which it its populace demands explanations for the multi-layered complexities surrounding the nation, its self-perception, and its relation towards the Other. On economic and political levels, the US administration had, if reluctantly, to accept that American exceptionalism alone does not pay the bills in an age of globalization, and that the Bush-Cheney administration's contested politics of 'An eye for an eye' would, metaphorically speaking, leave many, if not all, people blind. Regarding cultural production, and, in particular, that of the television sector, the early application of a framework of trauma has, as Stacy Takacs argues, constructed a national narrative that acted as a veil covering 9/11 attacks' historical context, distorting or eliminating the complex aspects at the core of this disastrous event, and forging a simple, Manichean story of victims and perpetrators

87 cf. Elsaesser, *Terror und Trauma*, 7,11.

88 cf. e.g. Stacy Takacs, *Terrorism TV: Popular entertainment in post-9/11 America* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012) 239.

that enabled the inherently-logical next step of retribution, in order to "fight the terrorists there so we wouldn't have to fight them here."[89]

This work's goal, then, has been to promote an actualized understanding of trauma that is freed from these boundaries. The introduction of Trauma TV, and a combination with the the 'cultural forum' model has been employed in order to make visible tendencies in the representation of trauma that have been present, if not governing, public television discourse for the last eleven years. As I have argued, these tendencies are represented in three distinct strands of fictional drama and can be seen as indicators within the cultural forum provided by television, indicators of larger tendencies predominant in US culture at their respective periods of time.

The first strand of counter-terrorist thriller shows can thus be seen as the embodiment of a call to arms for all US Americans, that, through the construction of omnipresent threats and the corresponding culture of fear, proposed a way to act out, rather than work through, the trauma experienced on 9/11 in revenge plots that proposed violence against the Other as an easy healing mechanism.

The second strand identified presented a collection of shows that, through political allegorical narratives that presented the ambivalence inherent in such concepts as counter-terrorism, criticized the culture of fear, corresponding securitization and the administration's neglect to acknowledge individual traumata for the sake of a prescribed national trauma tapped into the emerging public feeling of ambivalence and dissent. In the context of these shows and the critique they implicitly voice, an argument voiced by Thomas Elsaesser comes to mind, stating that America's social and cultural occupation with itself and its memory of 9/11 shows parallels to Lyotard's concept of the *Immemorial*. Elsaesser's adaptation of Lyotard to the context of trauma describes the *Immemorial* as something that can neither be remembered nor forgotten, but will always return as something to haunt an individual or a society, in a way not referring to simple repeats of the event or story that haunts the subject, but rather a *mise en abyme*, a endless self-reflective mirror image looped into infinity.[90] In the case of the United States, it is the national trauma inscribed with 9/11 that will always return to haunt the nation, if the vicious circle is not broken by other forms of dealing with a nation's trauma. As has been shown, series like *Battlestar Galactica* contest such a mode of *mise en abyme*, question the official explanation, and open cultural discourse to negotiate new ways

89 George W. Bush, quoted in Takacs, *Terrorism TV*, 239.

90 cf. Elsaesser, *Terror und Trauma*, 36.

of coping with the trauma caused by 9/11.

The third and most recent strand of fictional drama narratives presented reflect the uncertainty currently governing US cultural discourse. As a consequence of the former US government's contestable decisions on national and international scale, the United States finds itself looking towards a bleak future, governed by the global economic crises, a public administration that has considerably lost reputation and that is haunted by the specters it had provoked, who it finds personified in the thousands and thousands of dead bodies sent home from the war zones, and the home-coming and traumatized war veterans. It is the voice of all those marked by the loss of their loved ones due to 9/11, and those haunted by the experiences they themselves had to endure, that are mirrored in this third strand of television drama. All three examples representative of this third strand strongly feature the assumption of a conspiracy in their respective narrative, all evoking the imagery of corrupt governments at the base of the 9/11 problem, and motivated primarily by economic voracity (*Rubicon*), total control over the population (*Person of Interest*), or the perceived need to keep the war on terror going and cover up the United States' mistakes (*Homeland*). Conspiracy narratives may be seen as outlets of public dissent that have a long history in US culture. What makes this work's major case-study *Homeland* so special, then, is the entanglement of a conspiracy plot with the realistically-depicted story of a home-coming war veteran who may or may not be a sleeper terrorist. The exemplary story follows a family that has 'tied a yellow ribbon around the front yard tree' for eight years, just to find out that the assumed dead is alive, but not the person they had left behind. Since its premiere, the show has been attributed with cultural significance from a variety of critics,[91] and the producers as well as both of the main actors have been awarded with the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences' Emmy Award,[92] the most important television accolade available in the United States.

As has been shown, the United States' storytelling machine that is television has provided a plethora of different voices during the last eleven years, each commenting in its own way on the changing social and cultural circumstances. Through the cultural forum approach, I tried to identify certain tendencies and trends and to make sense of recurring themes persistent in the chaotic landscape that is the universe of television drama – most notably those of trauma, terror

91 cf. metacritic.com. 'Homeland – Season 1'.

92 64th Primetime Emmy Award Winners, <http://www.emmys.com/sites/emmys.com/files/64thPrimetimeEmmyWinners.pdf> accessed 24 September 2012.

and loss. What I found was the televisual form of Trauma TV, which in general is based on a traumatically-themed narrative, and a corresponding presentation of that trauma narrative by an application of features borrowed from 'Trauma Cinema', namely a focus on fragmented temporal frame, and a mise en scène mimicking traumatic memories, by rapid cuts, a non-linearity and fragmentation of storytelling, and an application of often non-synchronous sound, which itself can be fragmented.

Ultimately, the reasons for Trauma TV's current popularity can only be speculated: it may well be due to the fact that, after having been silenced for so long by the collective narrative that has been based on the assumption of a cultural trauma in order to create a national monument, many people finally want to see their individual traumata and suffering acknowledged, and work towards a healing of those traumatic wounds. And cultural artifacts such as television shows, and in this particular context Trauma TV, with narratives that address exactly those problems, might well help their respective audiences to do exactly that, and in the future hopefully also include those victims situated outside the US. As an optimistic outlook, *Homeland* as adaptation of Israeli origin may be seen as one of the United States' first steps towards an inclusion of external perspectives into its cultural forum that may open the cultural discourse for other, yet unheard voices. On the other hand, the producers' choice of an Israeli format to describe the United States' current state of affairs may itself be questioned, because Israel may, at least by some,[93] and similar to the United States, be currently perceived as a nation on the brink of paranoia, but this is a question that can not be answered within the frame of this work.

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93 cf. e.g. Am Johal, 'Interview with Haaretz journalist Gideon Levy' *Worldpress.org*, 19 September 2010. <http://www.worldpress.org/Mideast/3624.cfm> accessed 24 September 2012.

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