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Towards a Collective Memorial: American Poetry After the Attacks on the World Trade Center, NYC

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Abstract

The destruction of the World Trade Center buildings during the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 have been used in poems written in response to the attacks by various poets as a means of coming to terms with the events. The poems discussed in this article may be regarded not only as a way of documenting the events but also as a way of creating commemorative spaces. By means of reproducing the striking visual images of the attacks, especially those broadcasted on television, the poems seem to illustrate multi-voiced responses to the attacks and provide a space for commemoration as alternatives to the physical memorials like Reflecting Absence and One World Trade Center. In other words, the poems share similar characteristics to monuments and create a medium for healing from the trauma. The aim of this article is to study the poetic responses to the collapsing of the World Trade Center buildings and the ways in which the buildings are symbolically rebuilt in the lines of poetry as an act of commemoration.

Keywords: September 11, 2001, American Poetry and September 11 Attacks, Poetic Memorialization, Word-monument, Poetic Monument, Digital Poetry

Kolektif bir Anıt:
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Öz

11 Eylül 2001'de gerçekleşen terör saldırısı sırasında Dünya Ticaret Merkezi binalarının yıkılışı, saldırılara tepki olarak şairlerin yazdıkları şiirlerde olaylarla başa çıkmanın bir yöntemi olarak kullanılmıştır. Bu makalede tartışılan şiirler sadece olayları belgelemenin bir yöntemi değildir, aynı zamanda olayları anma mekanları oluşturdukları söylenebilir. Özellikle saldırıların televizyona yansıyan çarpıcı görüntülerini yeniden üretme yöntemiyle yazılan bu şiirler çok-sesli tepkiler ortaya çıkarır ve Reflecting Absence ve One World Trade Center gibi fiziksel anıtlara alternatif anma mekanları sunarlar. Bir başka deyişle şiirler anıtlarla benzer özellikler taşır ve travmadan iyileşmek için bir ortam yaratırlar. Bu makalenin amacı Dünya Ticaret Merkezi binalarının yıkılmasının şiirdeki yansımalarını inceleyerek şiirlerin dizelerinde bir anma eylemi olarak binaların sembolik olarak çeşitli yollarla nasıl yeniden inşa edildiklerini incelemektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: 11 Eylül 2001, 11 Eylül Saldırıları ve Amerikan Şiiri, Söz-Anıt, Anıt-Şiir, Abide, Dijital Ortamda Şiir

"Poetry is important to people in a crisis,

as love and intelligence are important.

These are survival tools" – Alicia Ostriker (Ostriker)

The collapse of the World Trade Center buildings during the attacks on September 11, 2001 seems to have mutilated the Manhattan skyline forever. While news channels broadcasted the planes crashing

into the buildings and their destruction on loop, other images like the photo of the falling man were censored shortly after their appearance (Redfield 70). The overuse and/or absence of such visual displays have generated responses in other mediums, including poetry. Near the site formerly occupied by the World Trade Center buildings and all over the city, makeshift memorials appeared which contained poems written on pieces of paper as well as other commemorative objects like candles, photographs, artwork, memorabilia, stuffed animals, and political manifestos (Gardner and Henry 40). These temporary but immediate responses suggest that the public needed to respond to the trauma the attacks had caused, even though they might not last for long. As Béatrice Fraenkel points out, the initial poems that appeared at these makeshift memorials were written on pieces of paper and were exposed to the changing weather conditions (Fraenkel 310). She also underscores that while these poems were available to anyone passing near them, they still remained "intimate" due to the pieces of paper used and the motion required to read these poems, which created a collective experience of mourning for the attacks (312-313):

> The ephemeral, collective, "poor" New York writings show the significance of a model that could be called writings by a "we." Such a model is far removed from careful or formal writings and doubtless originated in schoolwork. The model is one of graphic expression based on the norms taught to all during the early years of learning: writing in an exercise book or on a blackboard, writings made individually or collectively. These writings by "us" accompany civil or religious rituals such as the collective signing of visitors' books, burial registers, petitions, and so on (Fraenkel 315).

As Fraenkel's words suggest, the act of reading these poems at the site of the memorials create intimate, individual experiences which accumulate and form a collective experience. In the light of her claims, one may argue that even though these makeshift memorials were temporary sites of commemoration, they embodied the need for a collective site for mourning. In addition to the poems that appeared in the streets, journals, and newspapers received multitudes of submissions including testimonials, creative fiction, and poems which also implied the need for a space for collective mourning. Ann Keniston points out that the political and public events that began with

the attacks of September 11 have influenced American poets to write poems that would allow them to discuss public events in their poems and the significant role poetry might play on the public imagination (Keniston 658). Her claim that the attacks have changed the ways in which poetry was written, illustrates that, in contrast to Adorno's words on the impossibility to produce lyric poetry, there is a need for poetry after the attacks as they assumed the role of memorials that would enable poets and readers alike to come to terms with the events of September 11, 2001. Especially on the relationship between the public and the influence of poetry as an alternative space for mourning, Pavla Veselá argues that while mainstream politics at the time emphasized the slogan "United We Stand," the poets sought to redefine "we" in their poems about the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 as a means of redefining the imagined community they belonged to and enabled "many-voiced and critical reflections" on the events (Veselá 218). Some of the poetry collections she names are were published immediately after the attacks, namely *September 11, 2001: American Writers Respond* (2002), *An Eye for an Eye Makes the Whole World Blind* (2002), and *Poetry after 9/11: An Anthology of New York Poets* (2002) (217). Similarly, Keniston claims that as a reaction and response to the rhetoric created by the White House after the attacks, poets composed poems, some of which were made available online (Keniston 659). For instance, she claims that Sam Hamill's website, *Poets Against the War*, was set up as a protest against Laura Bush's invitation to the poets at the White House to commemorate the attacks (659). Moreover, Alkalay-Gut analyzes poetry websites including Academy of American Poets, Poetry.com, and American Poets Society which also set up pages dedicated to poems about the attacks on September 11, 2001 (Alkalay-Gut 276). The Library of Congress website did not fall short of setting up a page dedicated to poems written about the attacks ("Poetry of September 11"). As the Library of Congress is one of the oldest cultural institutions of the government, its webpage that contains a section dedicated to literary works about the attacks on September 11, 2001 in its online database serves as a mediating commemorative space between the response of the citizens and the response of the government. The poems discussed below are poems printed or submitted to various digital journals and webpages in the immediate aftermath of the attacks, all of which may be found in the Library of Congress website on the page entitled "Poetry of September 11," in which a list of poetry collections and individual poems compiled by the digital reference specialist Peter Armanti are provided ("Poetry

of September 11"). This enables the digital space to become a space for permanent commemoration; in other words, it becomes a permanent monument because it is accessible at all times across the globe.

Poems that refer to the attacks of September 11, 2001 have been grouped by various critics as a different poetry subgenre. For instance, Veselá claims that "September 11 poems" is a term that may be coined for certain poems not because of their references to the events but because of "the historical context out of which they emerged," thus limiting her selection of poems to the immediate ones that emerged after the attacks (Veselá 224). On the other hand, other critics have pointed out that poems about the attacks follow contemporary tendencies of composing poems. In her essay "The Poetry of September 11: The Testimonial Imperative," Alkalay-Gut suggests that poems about September 11 are derived from the recent tendencies in poetry that valued communication over literary complexity (Alkalay-Gut 258). In other words, she argues that these poems may be regarded as trauma or disaster poems from a more general perspective and these poems address a communal experience of trauma. Thus, by writing a poem about a disaster that affected the community or about a personal loss, one was "simultaneously participating in a universal event and contributing to the understanding of a communal trauma" (Alkalay-Gut 259). One may argue that in addition to these poems about September 11 being accessible online, the ones listed in the Library of Congress website have the additional function of mediating between the government's response to the attacks and the response of the citizens. As Alkalay-Gut points out, the digital medium became an extension of the physical space (258). While, on the one hand, makeshift memorials sprung up in the city and webpages and online journals dedicated special issues that commemorated the events, the physical space was also under construction: first the removal of the debris then the construction of the memorials that stand today.

The discussions on how to commemorate the events of September 11, 2001 at the location of the attacks led to two main projects that stand today at Ground Zero: Reflecting Absence and One World Trade Center, or the "Freedom Tower." These projects may be regarded as an extension of the government's response that focused on the unity of the nation and the loss it suffered. The National September 11 Memorial in Ground Zero, namely Reflecting Absence designed by Michael Arad is built on the foundations of the two WTC buildings,

water flows from the edges into a deeper square at the core of both foundations and on the granite borders the names of the victims are carved out into which visitors are able to place commemorative flowers and flags which emphasize loss. The second project One World Trade Center is a 1776-feet high skyscraper designed by David Childs, with an intentional reference to the year of the Declaration of Independence, to symbolize the powerful position of the US and to emphasize the unity of the nation (Cvek 46). David Simpson points out that the design of One World Trade Center should be interpreted together with the Statue of Liberty because it "visually mimics the arm of Lady Liberty just across the water" (Simpson 63). It was not only in architecture or in literature that one may find these commemorative responses to the attacks but also through a combination of the two. Jenny Holzer's "For Seven World Trade" demonstrates how literature and architecture together may be used as a means of healing and of commemoration, transgressing the limits of literature and of landscapes, showing the ways literature may function as a memorial. Shelley Jackson in "9/11 and the Numberless New Yorks" describes Holzer's work displayed at 7 World Trade Centre as follows:

> The words pass at the pace of walking. […] Ghostly, you might say. They glide from right to left, a few feet above eye level, across a wall 65 feet in width. They are made of light: patterns of on and off in hundreds of vertical strings of diodes behind glass panels. […] The building housing Jenny Holzer's piece is a new building, bright with optimism; but to its left, behind fences and scaffolding, is the gaping hole where the World Trade Center once stood. From the street outside, the words, flowing from right to left, seem to be pouring into that hole (Jackson, par. 5, 11).

Holzer's work contains essays, observations, and poems about New York which register literature as part of the healing process commonly associated with the function of memorials (Yau, par. 12). As Kirk Savage points out, the official declaration of categorizing the victims as martyrs overlooks the individual traumas and claims that to resolve this, a "therapeutic monument" would "embrace both the reality of the individual suffering and the collective significance of that suffering" (Savage 114). Literary responses to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 may be regarded as a culmination of individual

responses to the events rather than the official response of the state through the construction of One World Trade Center and Reflecting Absence. Poetry written in response to the attacks on September 11, 2001 are similar to collective and individual memorials in the sense that they address the event through either highlighting its presence in the collective memory or the absence it creates in the eyes of the public and of the individual. Moberley Luger in "Poetry as Monument" argues that poems about the attacks should be regarded as "poetic monuments" because they share common characteristics with monuments (Luger 8). As she argues, both monuments and these poems,

> [...] rely on figuration, representing parts of a whole; monuments invite visitors to interpret the symbolism inherent in their 'reflecting pools' or 'towers of light.' As monuments are poetic, poems are monumental: both are large in scope and are recorded to last through time (Luger 8).

Even though Luger remarks that Jenny Holzer did not regard her work as a memorial, both Shelly Jackson's description of the work and Moberley Luger's emphasis on the similarities between physical monuments and literary works, especially poetry, categorises her work as a memorial (Luger 4; Jackson). In the light of Luger's words, one may argue that the poems listed in the Library of Congress website written in response to the attacks on the WTC buildings are exemplary of how poems become monuments by either portraying the events and its aftermath either by vividly describing the events or by imitating physical characteristics of monuments. Reading the September 11, 2001 archive, Sven Cvek claims that literary works about the attacks aim to construct "a post-traumatic reconstruction of an imagined national wholeness" (Cvek 11) which can also be found as an arching theme in the poems written about the attacks. The poems to be discussed in this article do not nostalgically wish the Manhattan skyline to return to its former state but instead invite the reader to deal with the traumatic events similar to the response one would give upon seeing a monument in a street. While reading the texts evokes a sense of closure, the poems transform into monuments that can be regularly visited, some of which may even be regarded as imitations of physical monuments in terms of their form. Moreover, since all the poems discussed here are accessible through digital archives and poetry webpages, they are permanently inscribed into the narratives of commemoration.

One of the ways in which poems about the attacks on September 11, 2001 transform into monuments is through a description of the events during and after the fall of the WTC buildings. Mathilde Roza argues that the replaying of the attacks on television transformed the event into a "highly symbolic performance" in which Americans could imagine themselves both as potential victims and survivors (105). As a response, she notes, there emerged "the spontaneous production of an unprecedented number of poems" all around New York City and the Internet (Roza 105). For instance, the absence of the WTC buildings is illustrated in Eliot Katz's poem, "When the Skyline Crumbles" in which he describes the moment right after the first airstrike to Tower One and provides the reader with witness accounts while in the background Tower Two is attacked.

Witnesses still in shock were describing a plane flying

directly into the building's side

when a second plane suddenly crashed Twin Tower 2

and orange flames & monstrous dust rolls began replacing

the city's world renowned skyline.

Soon the big city's tallest buildings crumbled, one at a time –

with 50,000 individual heartbeats working in Twin Bodies,

it was clear this horror going to be planetfelt.

(Katz "When the Skyline Crumbles" lines 5-9).

Katz emphasizes that these attacks changed the world forever, including "the city's world renowned skyline." For Katz, the skyline "crumbles," evoking in the mind of the reader that the Manhattan skyline is perishable like the sandcastles that can easily be destroyed (Katz line 8). Katz's poem begins with the persona learning about the events from a TV screen in Astoria. One of the most televised moments during the attacks were arguably the planes crashing into the World Trade Center buildings which news channels played on loop. Neil Leach claims that although the twin towers were a prominent part of the skyline, its featureless exterior made them anonymous compared to other buildings in the skyline such as the Empire State Building:

> The twin towers had been a prominent part of the familiar New York skyline, but they remained somewhat anonymous. This in part was a result of their architecture. Although clearly the tallest buildings in New York, the twin towers were relatively featureless, and, as individual buildings, did not seem to capture the public imagination as did the Empire State Building with its iconic associations with King Kong, or the Chrysler Building with its splendid art deco ornamentation (Leach 75).

Leach remarks that over the years the towers played an important role in the public imagination due to events like Philippe Petit walking on a tightrope between the two towers in 1974 and the political scandals associated with their construction (Leach 76). Yet, Leach claims that they did not have the "physical presence" expected of the "symbolic presence" it had attained over the years and pointed out that the models offered in tourist shops contained relatively fewer models compared to other buildings that made up the Manhattan skyline (Leach 76). He further underscores that the two buildings provided "viewing platforms and vast receptacles of office accommodation" meanwhile collectively contributing to the "dramatic Manhattan skyline," and their destruction during the attacks took away "the anonymity that they may have once possessed" and thus the WTC buildings "became recognizable and identifiable objects, symbols of the dangers of terrorism" after they were absent from the New York skyline (Leach 76). The use of media, in relation to the attacks on September 11, 2001 and its representations in fiction has been addressed by Martin Randall who argues that the repetitive image of the destruction of the two towers on TV emphasized that the spectators were witnessing history:

> [...] it is only a few brief moments before the TV news is replaying the footage of Flight 175, again and again, until finally, predictably, in slow motion the audience is forced to relive the 'special effect' repeatedly as the towers are enveloped by smoke and flames. It is immediately understood that the world – mediated as it is through television – is now watching, as it occurs, History (Randall 4-5).

Likewise, in Eliot Katz's poem the events are narrated in

chronological order and follows the style of a journalist in the sense that it highlights the historical significance of the event. Katz describes a crumbling skyline as the dominant visual image in the poem and repeatedly refers to the information he receives through the television screen. The TV broadcasts in the poem are positioned at the beginning of stanzas as event markers, followed by the actions of the persona which present a dichotomy between the broadcasts and the testimonies of the events. For instance, in the fourth stanza, the persona sits in Union Square meditating with a Tibetan group for peace, meanwhile the TV broadcast is described to "lubricate America's war machine" (Katz lines 21-22). One may argue that the discrepancy between the broadcasts represent the official response to the events by the American government, and the testimony of the speaker registers the civilian response to the events. By juxtaposing these two narratives, the poem not only shows the two different responses to the events but also becomes a medium in which the two disparate responses may reconcile to form a monument that incorporates both public and private forms of commemoration. Similarly, the poems discussed here make use of the visual imagery not only in terms of what is witnessed but also by referring to the TV broadcasts either by repeating the images through the use of words or imitating the repetitions used by news channels. As such, in the poems by Meena Alexander, Eileen Myles, Nancy Mercado, Vicki Hudspith, and Joy Harjo the events, images, emotions one encounters in Ground Zero are described after the attacks through these visual images. These poems make use of "snapshots" of the September 11 attacks and aim to capture their impressions as private acts of commemoration. As such, these poems make use of the first-person speaker's point of view to emphasize the subjectivity and polyphonic nature of acts of commemoration.

In "Late, there was an Island (A Poem Cycle)" Meena Alexander employs a poet-persona who desires to talk about the beauties of the city, but is unable to, because they are now covered in ashes and blood in the first section of the poem entitled "Aftermath":

> I want to write of the linden tree
> That stops at the edge of the river
>
> But its leaves are filled with insects
> With wings the color of dry blood.
> (Alexander "Late There Was"; "Aftermath," lines 3-6)

The poem foregrounds two images, Manhattan before and after the attack; what the persona used to see and what is replaced by that image. The linden trees that make the city appear beautiful are covered with sand-colored ash from the fire, hiding away the charm of the city. The poem underscores the absence of the WTC buildings, and conveys a new image of the city covered in ash and rubble. Not only the city, but also the mutilated, distorted bodies of the victims are portrayed in fragments: "An eye, a lip, a cut hand blooms / Sweet and bitter smoke stains the sky" (Alexander "Late There Was"; "Aftermath," lines 11-12). Instead of flowers, it is "an eye, a lip, a cut hand" that bloom in Ground Zero ("Aftermath," line 11). Alexander's poem re-imagines the pleasant details about the city and replaces them with images of body parts to confront the shock of the events. In the poem cycle the final line of each section is repeated in the following section as the first line with minor alterations. For instance, the second section of Alexander's poem, namely, "Invisible City," ends with "In altered light, I see a bird cry" emphasizing the visual aspect of the events, while the next section entitled "Pitfire" begins with the line "In altered light I hear a bird cry" this time foregrounding the auditory aspect of the events (Alexander "Late There Was"; "Invisible City," line 12; "Pitfire," line 1). The use of such repetitions with alterations gives the effect of a complete description of the events and create a sense of completion and continuation all at once, in the meantime suggesting it to be a commemorative act that tries to capture the events and its aftermath from a journalistic description meanwhile remaining subjective. In other words, Alexander's poem may be regarded as another example of how a poem may contain the public and individual portrayals of the events and by merging them together builds a sensory poetic monument that captures the attacks to form a truthful representation. By depicting these "snapshot" images of Manhattan, Alexander seems to be creating a poetic monument that mourns the loss of the city image and documents the impressions about the aftermath of the attacks.

While some of the poets mentioned here choose to describe the destruction of the WTC buildings by employing urban images or depict the actions of the people around them during and after the attacks, Eileen Myles's poem "Flowers" avoids such descriptions and focuses instead on the flowers placed at the makeshift memorials after the destruction of the WTC buildings by listing the flowers she sees around the city:

Flowers
are out
all over
New York
Every deli
tonight is
lit with
mad daffodils
jonquils
baby's
breath (Myles, lines 1-11).

The use of the words "New York" in the beginning and "[. . .] We / miss you" in the last lines of the poem, one may suggest that the reader is left with the image of numerous flowers surrounding Ground Zero, framed by the mentioned phrases (Myles, lines 4, 61-62). The poem may be regarded as a vivid portrayal of the makeshift memorials appearing in lower Manhattan after the attacks as individual acts of commemoration. In "Heartbreak Written on the Landscape: Public Memorials and Remembering the Attack on the World Trade Center," Gumpert and Drucker describe such spontaneous memorials made up of "perishable items" such as "flowers, letters, photographs, clothing, American flags that would fade, shred or deteriorate over time" that may be regarded as the opposite of the memorials constructed by the government (63). Myles's poem, similarly, makes use of such "perishable items" like the ones mentioned by Gumpert and Drucker, however, unlike the perishable shrines at Ground Zero, in Myles's poem, she is able to preserve them, and is able to reintroduce them into the narratives of individual forms of commemoration. The names of flowers listed in the poem without expressing any particular emotion or opinion about the events and the concise lines gives the poem the effect of a snapshot of the location. Although Myles's poem at first seems to be a listing of various flowers placed at the makeshift memorials, between the types of flowers listed, some words invoke striking images and emotions that are related to the attack. In particular the New York delis are "*lit* with / *mad* daffodils," which depict the store windows "lighted" with flowers (or one may even suggest that the speaker sees the reflection of fire in store windows) and the anger felt by the speaker

upon seeing the flowers (Myles, lines 7-8, emphasis added). As the poem develops, there are "blasts" of roses and "hotter" flowers and the persona is "freaking out" when she notices the absence of pink flowers which suggests that behind the flowers foregrounded in the poem, the actual images of anger and the description of the attacks on the World Trade Center buildings may be traced (Myles, lines 14, 23, 45). At the end of the poem, the speaker notes that "outside […] / the world / continues / its impossible / turning" referring to the global significance of the event (Myles, lines 57-61). The act of such spontaneous shrine-building around the city is also displayed in Nancy Mercado's poem through collecting souvenirs. In her poem "Going to Work" Nancy Mercado illustrates the desire to create a space for commemoration by describing the 'craze' of collecting memorabilia such as postcards and coffee mugs that bear the image of the two towers which signify the attempt to preserve what is now lost forever.

> Frantically I too
>
> Purchase your memory
>
> On post cards & coffee mugs
>
> In New York City souvenir shops
>
> Afraid I'll forget your façade (Mercado, lines 8-12).

In Mercado's lines, the attacks on the WTC buildings, like the buildings themselves, transform into commodities. The destroyed buildings that were once pointed out by Leach as "anonymous" contributors to the NYC skyline seem to be transforming into collectible items waiting to be purchased in souvenir shops in the poem. This commodification of the event and the attachment to the past expressed by the speaker of the poem may be regarded as an attempt to be a part of the commemorative process through the use of objects. Marita Sturken in her article "Memorializing Absence," points out that leaving objects, notes, and flowers, spontaneously building shrines have become part of the national culture in the United States by giving the example of the Vietnam War Memorial (Sturken, par. 10). However, Alkalay-Gut also remarks that poetry as a means to commemorate lost lives in makeshift memorials was seen in the United States for the first time after the attacks on the World Trade Center buildings after September 11 (Alkalay-Gut 258). One may argue that one of the reasons for such meticulous depictions of the surroundings in the poems by poets like Myles and Mercado was to transform these poems into personal shrines

instead of the memorials erected by the government. While One World Trade Center and Reflecting Absence collectively honor the loss of lives and emphasize the unity of the nation, the makeshift memorials built by the citizens seem to underscore loss at a personal level in which mourning becomes a solitary act. The poems about the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 seem to bring together these two forms of commemoration so as to mediate the two responses within the body of the poem.

Another response to these official memorials on Ground Zero can be found in Vicki Hudspith's poem "Nodding Cranes" in which she criticizes the immediate clearing of the debris in Ground Zero after the attack. The fear of forgetting and the fixation to the disaster that has taken place is foregrounded: "My disaster is receding / it encompasses less and less of every block / Fewer streets know it each day" and the cranes and trucks clearing the debris are likened to birds of prey eating away the remains of an animal (Hudspith, lines 10-12; 3-5). The persona of the poem does not want to let go of the disaster and wants to "embrace" it: "I am protective of my disaster, do not want to let it go / Instead, I would like to embrace it / As it once embodied my horror" (Hudspith, lines 16-18). Finally, in the poem the desire to embrace and not let go of the traumatic memory, results in the desire to "rebuild" the disaster through the space of the poem (Hudspith, lines 25-27). By calling it "my disaster," the poem also emphasizes the power of the personal narrative and the personalized act of commemorating the event through poetry. Leach argues that the attack on the World Trade Center buildings was not an attack on "the force of global capitalism," but rather on the "symbols of capitalism" as the buildings themselves symbolized the workforce and capital it provided for the nation and to the world (Leach 90). According to Scott Cleary, Hudspith's poem plays on the double meaning of the word labor to refer to both childbirth and workforce as a remark on the lives of the lost workers and what the WTC represented. According to Cleary, the reason behind forging such a relationship is to link the loss of lives with the loss of the nation (Cleary 79). Cleary rightfully points out that the use of the cranes and the site that once belonged to the World Trade Center buildings under construction in the poem links the signifiers of cultural capital to "grief, tragedy, and death": "It exists as a construction site, a zone of ongoing improvements driven by the logic of capital and the objects of capital: here the trucks and cranes" (Cleary 84).

Joy Harjo's poem "When the World as We Knew It Ended," like Eliot Katz's poem, makes use of images of construction and demolition of the WTC buildings and likens this destruction to the fall of civilization. Harjo's poem may be regarded as a causal analysis that led human civilization to the cataclysmic end of the world described in the poem:

> We were dreaming on an occupied island at the farthest edge
> of a trembling nation when it went down.
>
> Two towers rose up from the east island of commerce and touched
> the sky. Men walked on the moon. Oil was sucked dry
> by two brothers. Then it went down. Swallowed
> by a fire dragon, by oil and fear.
> Eaten whole (Harjo, lines 1-7).

The above lines depict a nation dreaming of development and progress, like the American dream, which is said to be destroyed by greed and exploitation. By repeating the words "it went down," in certain lines like the second and fifth lines, the poem imitates the motion of the videos of the falling towers on loop, each time demolishing another layer of what the two towers once represented, the apex of human progress (lines 2, 5). In other words, her poem builds and destroys in a loop, as if we are watching the collapse of the two buildings over and over again, listing the achievements of the American society, only to destroy them in the following stanza. Cvek argues that the repetitive broadcasting of the fall of the WTC buildings blurred the line between first-hand witnesses, survivors, and TV spectators and transformed the attack into a collective experience of trauma: "Instantly nationally broadcast by the TV networks, the event seemed to take place live, thus apparently narrowing the experiential gap between the first-hand witnesses and the TV audiences" (Cvek 40-41). Similarly, one may argue that the effect of the digital medium as a place for poetry about the attacks on the WTC buildings blur the line between testimony and artistic imagination, and the experience shifts from the response of the individual poet to a collective response to the events. Cvek's claims on the role of media on bridging the gap between the experiences of the TV spectators and the witnesses may be adopted to the discussion of poems about the attacks on September 11, 2001. Reading these poems generate a similar effect

of a shared experience. Thus, the poems contribute to the sense of a collective trauma. Harjo's poem, in addition to the other poems about the attacks, the collective experience is expressed through the use of the first-person plural pronoun "We" rather than the first person singular pronoun "I" which highlights the collective experience of the event. These personae "had been watching" the rise of civilization, they "[. . .] saw it / from the kitchen window over the sink," and they "[. . .] heard [. . .] / The racket in every corner of the world" revealing that the experience is a collective one that transgresses the borders of the nation (lines 9, 11-12, 29-30). Like the WTC buildings repeatedly shown on TV Harjo demolishes and rebuilds the achievements of humankind to underscore the abusive and destructive nature of human greed. Veselá identifies the speakers who refer to themselves as "we" in lines 9-10 as Native Americans, thus demonstrating the differentiation between Native Americans and European settlers (228). She claims that it is after this division in the poem that "financial and industrial emblems of America turn into dragons and monsters" that perish due to "their own ambition and greed" (229). Although Veselá argues that the ending of the poem does not provide the "possibility of peaceful double belonging or hybridization" and rather emphasizes "historical trauma and conflict" one may alternatively argue that the ending of Harjo's poem uses mourning as a generative healing force (Veselá 230). The ending lines that depict the "birthing" of a poem or a song embodies a positive remark that suggests a healing creative product that brings together the fragmented community portrayed in the previous lines of the poem. Like building monuments commemorate the attacks and heal the nation from its trauma, art and poetry in Harjo's poem assumes a similar role:

> But then there were the seeds to plant and the babies
> who needed milk and comforting, and someone
> picked up a guitar or ukulele from the rubble
> and began to sing about the light flutter
> the kick beneath the skin of the earth
> we felt there, beneath us
>
> a warm animal
> a song being born between the legs of her;
> a poem (Harjo, lines 43-51).

In contrast to the destruction articulated in the poem, the ending promises a hopeful future and resists the frequent image of death and loss as seen in other poems. The living bodies, in other words, become the living monuments that will help heal the wounds, instead of contemplating on the dead and constructing memorials for them, Harjo celebrates life.

Harjo's and Hudspith's poems demonstrate the ways in which poetry may heal trauma by assuming the role of monuments. According to Moberley Luger, poetry and monuments share similar characteristics in their role of commemoration as "private spaces of therapy and healing" (Luger 8):

> Living in the world as physical monuments do, poems hold stories of national trauma; like monuments, they are active repositories that carry events of the past into the future. To claim a memorial function for poetry is also to focus on the materiality of a poem as object. Just as a monument is a physical site where mourners can go to grieve, a poem can also occupy physical space (Luger 8).

Therefore, by documenting the attacks on the WTC buildings and reimagining them in poetry paves the way for private manifestations of acts of commemoration, and encourages readers to respond and interact with these poems as they do with memorials. In other words, just like visiting a monument to grieve, these poems on a global, national, and private scale enable the readers to grieve and come to terms with the events through the space the poems take up on the page.

While such poems assume the meanings of a memorial, there are also poems about the attacks on September 11, 2001 which imitate the form of the memorials and monuments. As such, like the memorial Reflecting Absence, Billy Collins's poem "Names" imitates a memorial on which names of the victims are inscribed. Kirk Savage in "Trauma, Healing, and the Therapeutic Monument" argues that using names on memorials as seen in Maya Lin's Vietnam War Memorial became a common practice in building memorials (Savage 103-104). Although Reflecting Absence is not a war memorial, its use of names may be regarded as a tribute to the lives lost as well as an extension of the government's emphasis on the narrative of national loss and the

production of the "war on terror" narrative that justified the war in the Middle East. In this regard, Billy Collins's poem "Names" puts emphasis on the idea of loss once more. Written for the anniversary of the attacks, the poem imitates a memorial because of the names of lost individuals that are listed throughout the poem:

> Yesterday, I lay awake in the palm of the night.
>
> A soft rain stole in, unhelped by any breeze,
>
> And when I saw the silver glaze on the windows,
>
> I started with A, with Ackerman, as it happened,
>
> Then Baxter and Calabro,
>
> Davis and Eberling, names falling into place
>
> As droplets fell through the dark.
>
> Names printed on the ceiling of the night (Collins, lines 1-8).

Collins follows the model of a memorial on which names of lost lives are inscribed in alphabetical order, which, as stated in the poem, can be found everywhere, from "A name under a photograph taped to a mailbox" to "storefront windows," which suggests that the names and shrine-like missing signs and commemorative corners abundant of flowers, photographs, poems and the like found their way into the poem, incorporating what is a transitory, social act of commemoration, into the permanent lines of poetry (Collins, lines 19, 21). One may suggest that to a certain extent, the names of the victims, as well as the makeshift memorials that appeared in Ground Zero are documented within the lines of the poem.

While some of the poems mentioned put special emphasis on depicting the events that occurred on the day of the attacks or their observations on how lower Manhattan looked like after the attacks as their subject material, there are other poems that imitate the physical appearance of the "Twin Towers" through their form. A poetry project initiated by Bob Holman entitled "Towers of Words: The Place of Poetry in Crises," is composed of a selection of lines out of 150 submissions of poetry in which the two towers are constructed as two poems entitled "Tower One" and "Tower Two," physically imitating the two towers with 110 lines each, the same number of floors for each building, voicing more than 50 poets and civilians. Holman describes his motive in this project as a way of searching for meaning:

> As a human, I watched the Towers implode from my office window on Duane Street, six blocks from ground zero. I thought, what to do? My response was to write a poem. And I wasn't alone. Towards the hole in the energy center, towards the sacred burial site of steel, concrete and ash, words began to emerge, looking for meaning, mourning, attempting to understand. […] The impulse to build Twin Towers of Words, to create a poem replicating/remembering what had been blasted by humanity's failings, a response of art, this came later. [The People's Poetry Gathering website] was a perfect site for poets to post their hearts, and they did, often leaving whole poems rather than simply adding a line. So, I wove the lines together, creating a single poem out of the many submissions (Holman et al. "Tower One").

Both of the poems, namely "Tower One" and "Tower Two" begin with the loss of words, the most crucial device for poets: "In a crisis, poets lose words / You can find them here" ("Tower One" lines 1-2). The first two lines of "Tower One" written by Bob Holman and Steve Zeitlin contemplate on the idea that this poem is a consolation, like gathering fragments against the shore, the poets gather the few words that are able to utter and instead of rebuilding a building on Ground Zero, they construct on the space of the page Tower One and Tower Two. Both poems describe the moment of collision, the smoke arising, the collapse of the two towers, and the ash and rubble filling the streets. The collective nature of the poems does not end in their use of various lines taken from numerous submissions in its composition; it also continues with the repetition of personas uttering the first person plural "we" throughout the poem. Thus, by including different submissions and styles of poetry within the body of the poem and using personae in the first-person plural Bob Holman and the contributors are able to create a poem in which a communal feeling of mourning can be felt, much like gathering around a memorial. In the second poem, "Tower Two" which was formed by an invitation to more than 130 poets for their submissions by Holman, the loss of words experienced by the collapsing of the two towers is likened to the loss of words experienced by Ancient Greek poets, and thus the second poem begins with an invocation to the Muses which will guide the poets into articulating the words:

In times of crisis, poets lose words. Find some:

soul, soul I say, to name the smoke-beings like

constellations in the night sky of this cities and cities to come.

Focus the Muses, write while trembling, deliver eternity

sky of this city and cities to come

(Holman et al., "Tower Two" lines 1-4).

The second poem alludes to the first poem with its first lines. The quoted lines of the second poem written by Bob Holman and Eileen Myles (line 1), Martin Espada (line 2), Ed Sanders (line 3) and Anselm Hallo (line 4) respectively, allude to the first poem and portray once again the desire of poets to find words that will be able to voice the loss, building the image of the second tower once again, as seen in "Tower One." These lines taken from "Tower Two" are followed by a description of the attacks and end with the frame narration of the poet-persona. The final three lines written by an anonymous poet, Marie Howe, and Adrienne Rich respectively read:

I wrote this entire poem my line not among the living lines appropriate lines

disappear pure empathy with those who disappeared.

We are on the verge of imagining something else, aren't we? Can you feel the

sentence forming?

"Love should be put into action," screamed the dirty hermit of another poem

("Tower Two" lines 108-110).

Thus, one may argue that when poets reclaim their lost words, poetry will be able to come to terms with the attacks witnessed by New Yorkers – of the collision, of the destruction of the buildings that turn into ash and rubble and the hopeful narratives of people helping each other to find consolation. Although the structure of the two poems force the

lines to be followed one after the other, the diversity of styles between the lines may be regarded as a culmination of voices that simultaneously express shock, anger, mourning, misery, and lamentation. Both poems contain lines written in English as well as in other languages including Arabic and Spanish, and employ personas who belong to more than one ethnic and religious background, which conveys the poems as collective sites for mourning. Mary Marshall Clark, the director of the Oral History Research Project, draws attention to the dominating response of the government was to portray "a nation unified in grief," however, she claims that this response was not a true reflection of the civilian response (Clark 118). She began *The September 11, 2001, Oral History Narrative and Memory Project* for which she interviewed more than four hundred people and analyzed their narratives for common themes and coping mechanisms (Clark 117). Similar to Clark's project, one may argue that Bob Holman's project is also a collection of the public response through poetry as a collective act of commemoration. Through lines of poetry submitted by various poets, the WTC buildings are rebuilt on the page voicing numerous groups of people and uniting them on the page as a site of commemoration. While the absence of the two WTC towers portrayed in the poems evoke a sense of loss, replaying their presence and collapse results in rebuilding them in the imagination as a way to create poetic monuments that would enable a site of collective commemoration. Thus, it is not only the form of the poem but also the content that suggests the idea of a memorial that includes everyone – survivors, victims, witnesses – who were involved in the attacks.

According to Nicole Cooley, the common opinion is that disaster "shuts down language […] because the suffering it causes is so total and complete" however, she claims that it also has the ability to produce "speech, writing, and testimony" and reproduces that disaster (Cooley, par. 1, 3). Some of the poems about September 11 discussed in this article may be categorized as "poetry of disaster" as these poems, like the disaster poems described by Cooley, "rely on fragments, […] refuse chronology and teleology, […] invoke the collective alongside the individual, often in tension with each other" (Cooley, par. 17-20). Moreover, the use of multiple personae who narrate testimonies and experiences that are "not visible in mainstream representations of disaster," in Cooley's words, suggest that the poems about the attacks on the WTC buildings discussed in this article to be

examples of what Moberley Luger defines as "poetic monuments" because they commemorate the events with the language of the "poetry of disaster" (Cooley, par. 21). However, Cooley's definition of the "poetry of disaster" focuses more on recreating the events through lines of poetry, without the aim to rebuild a new memorial as part of the healing process. In the light of her definition, while poems by Eliot Katz and Meena Alexander may seem to fit Cooley's definition, both poems as well as other poems previously discussed use descriptions about what followed after as their subject material, all suggesting that life triumphs over death. Thus, the disaster that all the poems about the attacks address may be regarded as a generative force for a means of closure and the poems thus become poetic monuments.

In conclusion, poems about the attacks on the World Trade Center buildings reuse images related to the attacks as a way of building monuments that would register the collective and individual responses to the attacks. Saphr argues that the questions about the literary representations of the attacks "shifted to questions of trauma and commemoration, a shift in emphasis that displaced concerns with the political work that literature can do." (Saphr 221). According to Saphr, the importance of literature about the attacks should be its ability to rewrite itself to attain an active role in the geopolitical affairs that are in question (221). Although not all of the poems discussed in this article directly address the political concerns raised by Saphr, it is important to acknowledge that by presenting alternative voices to the government's emphasis on unity and loss, these poems display the heterogeneity of responses of a time of turmoil and break away from the highly political narrative declared by the government and instead offer an alternative space for collective and private commemoration. In the context of Claudia Rankine's poem, Kimberley claims that the use of the images replayed on television in her poem is an act of retelling the narrative from a new perspective that removes the narrative of "the American fearful under attack" and instead presents a multiplicity of perspectives (Kimberley 789). In the light of Kimberley's words, one may argue that the recurring use of the images related to the attacks on the WTC buildings in the poems discussed in the present article may have a similar function of enabling individual responses that contribute to the collective imagination by presenting these multiplicity of perspectives instead of the single homogeneous response created by the government.

If after the attacks the city became a "monumental city" that displayed poems in makeshift memorials as Fraenkel argues, then, it may be possible to imagine the webpages to create a similar space for commemoration for the public to experience with the privacy of the individual experience (316). As Alkalay-Gut claims, even searching the web to find "September 11 poetry" has the effect of a "universal response" and most of the links found "do not state the name of the editor, as if to deny the intervention of an artistic censor" (Alkalay-Gut 259). In the tenth anniversary of the attacks Pamela Goodes provided a survey on the exhibitions and events held at the libraries across the nation which demonstrate the continuing need to commemorate the attacks in various ways. Pamela Goodes in her short survey lists exhibits and events held in libraries across the nation that commemorate the attacks of September 11 including a candlelit Freedom Walk organized by the Paramus Public Library and Pieces for Peace quilting activity by L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library (Goodes 26). While such activities seem to illustrate that acts of commemoration have an important role in healing trauma, they remain to be local and temporary, whereas online mediums are available anywhere and anytime, transgressing the temporal and spatial restrictions that limit one to access the space of commemoration.

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