

September 11: A Special Issue

Matthew Gumpert

It is more than two years now since the destruction of the World Trade Center: an event that has come to be known, most commonly, as *September 11* (or sometimes *9/11*). In the American discourse of *catastrophe* (from *katastrophe*, a sudden turning or overturning), the event sometimes loses all specificity or materiality, and becomes simply a date: Black Tuesday, December 7 (A Day That Will Live In Infamy), etc. It is as if in *catastrophe* the calendar itself has turned against us.

Which would explain our own efforts to tie such events to the anecdotal and the everyday, to coordinate and cross-reference catastrophe with our own personal itineraries, narratives plotted as on a map, as in the oft-heard refrain from my parents' generation: "Where were you when JFK was shot?"

Where were you on September 11? This issue of JAST will explore the way September 11 continues to resonate: it will focus, that is, on the *aftermath* (from an Old English word for the second crop of grass after the first has been harvested) of the event; on the way that event has been remembered or forgotten, diminished or inflated, fetishized or trivialized. It is hard to imagine, in any event, what it would mean to focus on the *event itself*. The destruction of the Twin Towers? The rise of terrorist organizations, such as Al Qaeda, that plotted the destruction of the Twin Towers? The political and economic and cultural circumstances that led to the rise of terrorist organizations that plotted the destruction of the Twin Towers (etc., etc.)? The event is elusive. Any attempt to grasp it already suggests a chain of causality suspended or severed by the act of interpretation. Thus, in general, what the contributors to this issue attempt to illuminate is not so much September 11 itself, but the way September 11 has been apprehended or articulated after the event: indeed, many are interested in the particular sense of *before* and *after* that the event itself seems to have inaugurated.

The idea for this issue of JAST emerged out of a workshop I chaired on "Rhetoric and/as Terrorism: Before and After September 11" at the Poetics and Linguistics Association Conference in June 2003 in Istanbul, sponsored by Boğaziçi University. Five of the pieces included here (Çalışlar, Eradam, Gumpert, Lowenthal and Mutman) are based on papers offered at that workshop. I want to thank the organizers of the PALA conference, Işıl Baş, Didar Akar and Özlem Öğüt, for their help in making that workshop an "event" in itself. Thanks above all to JAST's editorial board, and especially its editor, Ayşe Lahur Kırtunç, for giving me the opportunity to edit this issue.