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UNITED WE STAY . . . HOME:
READING THE RACIALIZED *BILDUNG*
OF UNITED STATES' CHILDREN
IN POST-11 SEPTEMBER 2001 COMFORT
BOOKS

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Now let's turn to children's book publishing. Here we find great growth, but much of it in series and packaged books. And we writers are subtly and not so subtly encouraged to write down to make our writing accessible to the widest range of reading skills and the most common sensibilities.

Compare TV news with the new breed of children's nonfiction book. We are now advised that all such books should be brief and profusely illustrated. These are the same restrictions that force TV news to be shallow. The fact is, some of the most important things we can tell children are hard or impossible to illustrate. We seem to be deciding that these things will not be said through nonfiction.

– Aaron Shepard (2001)

1. Introduction: On *Bildung*

Bildung, which can mean creation, transformation, schooling, and education, in the title of this essay, is a German word with divinized connotations cherished by the late eighteenth and nineteenth century Romantic writers of the nationalistic *Bildungsroman*— a novelistic genre that arose during the German Enlightenment—such as Johann Wolfgang Goethe and Friedrich Schiller. Authors of this genre presented the psychological, moral, and social shaping of the personality of the (generally young) protagonist. *Bildung* has been characterized as the modern bourgeois "formation (of citizens of the state) in the sense of informing submission to a discipline or curriculum" (Miller, 2000, p. 63). My thesis is that the politicized aesthetic ideal of *Bildung*, far from being dead, is now simply digitalized, more aggressively commodified, sociopolitically racialized, and imported into America—changed in form but not in spirit.

Look at the images, for instance, appearing in the "factual, tactful information" (Marsh, 2001) on 11 September 2001, which glamorizes, however crudely, the mind-numbing simplicity of "high tech" security. Such images instantly appeal to many of us, especially children who habitually use video games, and especially those accustomed to and seduced by vivid digitalized images devoid of content—precisely this "robotic" kind.

2. On Building by *Bildung*

In "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" Immanuel Kant (1784) quipped, "it is so comfortable to be infantile." Interestingly, "infantilized" is the key word Susan Sontag used when she summarized, two weeks after the tragedy, the psychic impact of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the American public:

> The disconnect between last Tuesday's monstrous dose of reality and the self-righteous drivel and outright deceptions being peddled by public figures and TV commentators is startling, depressing. The voices licensed to follow the event seem to have joined together in a campaign to infantilize the public.

> Our leaders are bent on convincing us that everything is O.K. America is not afraid. Our spirit is unbroken, although this was a day that will live in infamy and America is now at war. But everything is not O.K. And this was not Pearl Harbor. We have a robotic President who assures us that America still stands tall. A wide spectrum of public figures, in and out of office, who are strongly opposed to the policies being pursued abroad by this Administration apparently feel free to say nothing more than that they stand united behind President [George W.] Bush. (2001, p.24)

One telling sign of the infantile regression of the post-11 September 2001 United States is the recurrent disconnect between the devastating reality of that day and the reality-concealing rhetoric of the United States. The mainstream media reinforces such rhetoric, which forms the concerted guardians of Kantian minorities in the nation. The nation, given that all remarks and attention have been limited to "self-congratulatory bromides" (ibid.) and self-indulgent mourning, has been "reverting to [its] childhood. Thus, we are in the same weird mood preferring fantasies and stories to reality . . . thinking 'POOR US—WE ARE ALL ALONE? POOR US—WHY DO THEY HATE US?'" (Hanson, 2004). "If the very idea of America is to have any meaning" (Mitchell, 2002, p. 571) in the post-11 September 2001 United States, we would need to be able to see, at a distance, "the robotized, infantile delusions of September 10" (Hanson, 2004). Such delusions would be revealed as composed, in essential part, of "childish

persistence in self-contradiction" (ibid.), including the "unquestioning acceptance of the judgment of leadership" (Mitchell, 2002, p. 571).

In a small corner of the United States book market, we see "infantilization of the public" happening. We are seeing a glut of comfort books for children produced to help them cope with the national tragedy and trauma. With such topical urgency, I have been reading popular post-11 September 2001 books for children; that is, children's books that directly address the event itself or issues of ruptured family and community in the aftermath of the event. Some notable titles, which I will discuss shortly, are: *September 11, 2001: A Simple Account for Children* (Poffenberger and Gottesman, 2001), *September 11, 2001*: *The Day that Changed America* (Wheeler, 2002), and *Terrorism: The Only Way is Through a Child's Story* (Schnurr, 2002).

Mostly banal, these texts appear to provide an allegorical window into and a contemporary index of the socio-political and commercialized immaturity of the post-11 September 2001 United States. An analytic look at such therapeutic materials for traumatized "children" may elucidate factors in the national psyche that assert with robotic consistency "United We Stand." We can ask why such an automatic introversion and mechanical insistence characterizes this literature. The question that motivates my inquiry is why and how, in the wake of "9/11," that now-familiar slogan functions as a rhetorical foil for a "United We Stay . . . Home." What sort of homemaking, extension, and consolidation is happening now in the land of "Bob the Builder"—the American cartoon figure whose crew of talking machines sings, "Can we fix it? Yes, we can!"

The building at stake is founded upon racialized binarization. A closer look at the inclusive-exclusive gestures of "we who share" the national and globalized tragedy reveals that the very authorial efforts to diversify the projected members and future adult subjects of this reconstituted entity called "the United States of America" depict narrative centers and perspectives that remain visibly Anglo-white—scared Anglo-white.

White reflexivity normalizes a collective knee-jerk racism or racist discourse in the post-11 September 2001 United States. Because "white reflexivity" stems from the technical term for the ethereal effect of filmic layering seen in laminated paper, its use in the present context emphasizes the operative and layered invisibility of white-racialized, defensive emotions such as fear and hypocrisy.

White reflexivity manifests itself rapidly and collectively in the form of racialized and racially justified fear, hypocrisy, and schizophrenia towards the enemy other who is in colorful disguise. Consequently, the "enemy other" necessitates invasive and exhaustive profiling and containment. The objects of fear and suspicion are "would-be" terrorists as well as the contextually generalized enemies who would blow apart "our" wafer-thin identity, our positive and stable national identity as the global superpower—a good cop. The faith in "our" freedom becomes a thinly disguised fear of "their" free will, their own freedom.

On a deeper level, the nationalist confidence that spurred the archetypal formation of brave American children in the nineteenth century is being swiftly undermined by nationalist conservatism. Through digitalized media and imaging technology that conservatism infantilizes the potential voting public and invalidates the rest. The Constitution of the United States, historically sustained by a series of what Cornel West describes as radical "experiments with democracy," is being insidiously replaced by the racially based, codified constrictions, and constructions of "us"—the newly identified brothers and sisters of "our country under an unprecedented attack."

The "United" States of post-11 September 2001 America is a prime and recent example of how reactionary rhetoric can create a terrifyingly concrete reality. It is reconstructed rhetorically through concerted, regressive translations of mythical motherlands into the literalized homeland that suddenly must be protected from within *by* the informal and communal institution of visibly white parents, guardians, and teachers. These "bedrock" institutions that would ultimately form the moral and national "values" promise to nurture all the children, including racial and social minorities, *as long as* they show sufficient evidence of sharing the same logos, mythos, and ethos of puritan, suburban, white-fenced Anglo-America.

Under the veneer of democratic civility and bureaucratic formality, we seek to contain and detain each other in boxes of racially ready-made images, creating an allergic distance. The politics of affect and trauma played out in the current world of children's literature contributes not simply to the post-11 September 2001 construction of patriotic discourse, but more deeply to an ever more blatant subtextualization of the intra-American Other who suddenly surfaces through the bifurcated rhetoric of inclusion-exclusion. The collective reflexivity and blindness of such racialized, authorial introversion of white American values runs counter to the fundamentally American, foundational ideals, practices and promises of self-reliance, independence and freedom for each and every human being.

It is against such a background, both political and historical, that I offer here an analysis of the visual narrative and narrative sterility of post-11 September 2001 patriotic discourse that runs through even the most minor of minor literature—the massively standardized literary network television for scared little ones. I set out to analyze the visual as well as verbal rhetoric of "home building" in several post-11 September 2001 United States Children's and Young Adult books, with a critical focus on the white hetero-familial normativity that subtextually regulates and reinforces the ideological formation of super-patriotism.

3. A Scene: A White Child Reading a Book for Comfort

Imagine you are entirely new to this concept, "terrorism" or "terrorist." You might wonder: what do adults mean by terrorists, when they say we were attacked by them? Here is an answer from *Terrorism: The Only Way Is through a*

Child's Story, a book on terrorism produced and presented under the assumption that "the only way to understand it is through a child's story" (Schnurr and Strachan, 2002):

> "Dad," I said, "What's a terrorist?" The car jerked and I thought we were going off the road. Dad didn't say anything for a few minutes. He just squeezed his hands tightly on the steering wheel. Then he did a big swallow, the kind where you can see that bump in his throat going up and down. He said that a terrorist was a *very bad* person who did *very bad* things. I didn't ask any more questions because I was worried that we might go off the road or that the steering wheel would come off in his hands. (Ibid., p. 25; emphases added)

Later Dad repeats the point:

> Dad and I went out into the backyard and I kicked at things. "We're all angry," my dad said. "The only way to understand this is to know that people who are called "terrorists" do things that good people all over the world do not accept. When bad people purposefully kill other people it is called "an act of terror" or "terrorism." Do you understand?" I nodded my head. (Ibid., p. 28)

I am reminded of the definition of terrorist offered by Marsh: "a person who does bad things, usually with no warning and often against innocent people" (2001, p. 6). Interestingly, this idea of terrorism—as a mortal and *moral* threat posed by untimely contamination—often accompanies an image of differences that must at once be recognized and overcome. Consider the following five captions, from two books, each accompanied by a matching illustration:

> (1) "(You are scared of) people who look different." (Carlson, 2002, p. 12)
> (2) "All this scary stuff can make you want to hide under your covers and never come out." (Ibid., p. 13)
> (3) "There's a Big, Beautiful World Out There" (Ibid.)
> (4) "On Television we heard our President tell us everything would be all right." (H. Byron Masterson Elementary School, 2002, p. 23)
> (5) "Our thought for the day became 'America United.'" (Ibid., p.10)

The first three captions portray a post-11 September 2001 home. The remaining two depict a post-11 September 2001 school. The point of all five captions, as captured by the book titles (*There's a Big, Beautiful World Out There!* and *September 12th: We Knew Everything Would Be All Right*), is that a big, beautiful world exists, and on 12 September, we knew everything would be all right. Note further how differences change from being *presumably* bad to being actually

non-existent—white-washed, literally (ibid., p. 19). As the story goes, we over-come evil and become "good" by containing differences (or, our fear of them).

The book, *There's a Big, Beautiful World Out There!* allegedly "hit just the right note. . . . [because] preschoolers are sure to find the protagonist's worried but not terrified face a comforting focus on the 'scary' pages" (Sutherland, 2002). However, we might ask, what sort of face is this? In both books, the pro-tagonists are "white"— literally in their faces and more symbolically in their representation of "America United." The "other" sorts of faces being present in the pictorial spaces is not a sufficient defense, for at issue is not the absence of multi-ethnic social awareness but the assumed, inscribed racial identity and cen-trality of the narrator(s).

Our focus is on "the flaming signifier," the "color of color's own subtrac-tion and absence" (Sedgwick, 1993, p. 255) that is attempting to withdraw from and redraw the social body at once. Our issue is with the meta-color that wishes to color but not be colored. The "white lie" of multi-racial inclusivity becomes more audible, and the white reflexivity of "seeing without seeing" more appar-ent, when the united colors of America show the absent presence of a face—a particular set of identity markers. Visibly absent from all the pages above is one who *looks* "Arabic."

Given the seemingly exhaustive visual catalog of "scary faces" democrati-cally united by the dated and extrapolated shock, given the caricatured racial and social markers equally distributed, it seems not accidental that the catalog does *not* include *the* face of the enemy other contextually advertised as such. Such seems a crude manifestation of the Hobbesian "racialization" (Foucault, 2003, pp. 61, 81, 87–114) of the enemy that would "permanently, ceaselessly infiltrate the social body" (ibid., p. 61), which functions as a modern political premise of justi-fied warfare; "the specific political distinction to which political actions and mo-tives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy" (Schmitt, 1976, p. 26).

Terrifying to the Schmittian sovereign subjects that operate on the logic of "with us or against us," pure and simple, is the possible invisibility of the enemies. One way to tackle that fear is to make sovereign subjects hyper-visible by excluding them: to recruit more friends and reaffirm the absence of the enemy within the group. The facial or sartorial signifiers of "Muslim" or "Middle Eastern" have become the absent master-signifiers that silently and invisibly frame the reference of all the other signifiers appearing in the picto-rial space of representation.

Here is another example that illustrates the systematic post-11 September 2001 exclusion of the emerging other: again, the picture diary book by the first-grade students of H. Byron Masterson Elementary, Missouri, *September 12th: We Knew Everything Would be All Right*, which received the Kids Are Authors Award in 2002. Given the geo-historical and demographical background of the state of Missouri, it is unsurprising that the pupils photographically represented at the beginning in the "Meet the Authors" section are black or white (with one

Hispanic boy added to one corner of the pictorial list). What remains troubling is the symbolic clue this prized model provides: the Muslim other is the new black, for blacks have been politically united with (recruited supplementarily into) whites in this time of crisis.

This point is also exemplified by Darwyn al-Sayeed (played by Michael Ealy) in the Showtime Network television drama series, *Sleeper Cell* (2005). Al-Sayeed is an undercover FBI agent, and an African-American Muslim hero, who infiltrates an Arab terrorist network that is plotting to bomb Los Angeles. Suddenly, Americans of Middle Eastern and South Asian origin/face/name find themselves terrified orphans, totally inside and outside the laws of protection.

This negatively demarcated (subtractive) national self-identity of post-11 September 2001 America is the flip side of the compulsive affirmation of extremely united "states" of America. Overnight, the people of Arab/Middle Eastern/Muslim origin or descent, exclusively and confusedly singled out, became non-people. They were transcoded into a herd of beings with evil intentions and terrorist potentials—a militarized target later piled into small pyramids of animals. "Undoubtedly a race but not human . . . in the sense of not being an image of God, the Eternal," (Fest, 1974, p. 212, quoting from Hitler's hate speech against Jewish people in May 1923, at the Krone Circus in Munich, Germany). Something akin to such an "image of the Devil" is still floating around in the subliminal consciousness of terrified America.

Immediately relevant is the fact that *There's a Big, Beautiful Out There!* was written on 12 September 2001, the author notes, which is when, while dealing with the raw emotions of shock, horror, grief and confusion, the United States affirmed that *We Knew Everything Would Be All Right*. Why and how? Because "we saw lots of flags"; "our parents still tucked us in our warm, safe beds"; "our parents said they loved us"; "the stars and moon came out and America went to sleep"; "and the next morning the sun came up again" (H. Byron Masterson Elementary School, 2002, p. 20, 24, 26–28).

How does the "we" arise so suddenly, so quickly? Here, Theodor Adorno's insight into the behavioral psychology of totalitarianism helps one understand in part the material basis of such totalized banality, the work of mortal fear:

> Totalitarian regimes . . ., seeking to protect the *status quo* from even the last traces of insubordination . . ., can conclusively convict culture and its introspection of servility. They suppress the mind, in itself already grown intolerable, and so feel themselves to be purifiers and revolutionaries. . . .The struggle against deceit works to the advantage of naked terror. "When I hear the word 'culture,' I reach for my gun," said the spokesman of Hitler's Imperial Chamber of Culture. (Adorno, 1981, p. 26)

In the reactionary immediacy with which "naked fear" converts to internalized faith in group protection, one senses the unbridled totality of freedom of a rouge

state that uses a culture against culture. "Cultivated" in this case is the mob psychology of hatred that elevates mere intimidation to moral indignation. In other words, the imperial culture of conformity deprives its citizens of rational and individual "*freedom* . . ., the child that he or she has been" (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, pp. 72–74), by rewarding them with the infantile pleasures of creating and destroying enemies who they at least are not, which is a negative sign of their small privilege. Little ones who, upon reflection, knew everything would be all right, would later ensure that everything would be all right by grafting themselves onto a network of gun clubs, local and global.

To wit, post-11 September 2001 "America becomes united" by racializing morality and nationalizing the "good race"; we are a civilized, human(e) race. An interstitially abusive mobilization of logical and hypothetical connectives further reinforces the rhetorical strength of patriotism that *looks* morally fair or superior:

> We may look at a person and not know their religion. However, we often see Muslims dressed in long dresses (women) or wearing turbans and long beards (men). This is one way they express their religion. They may look different, but that is not what makes them bad or good. (Marsh, 2001, p. 17)

This passage beautifully summarizes the key points we have been building so far in this section. First, "looking different": why should it immediately invite a moral evaluation on the part of one who does the looking? Second, "bad or good" rather than the usual "good or bad": do we find this incidental reordering of moral priority accidental? Third, do "we" include readers who could be bad or good? If not, how do we recognize those who pretend but cannot be part of us? "One way they express their religion" is one way we can spot them. Consequently, "if you see something, say something" (Metropolitan Transportation Authority, 2007).

On 12 September 2001, the street rhetoric of race-based American nationalism (for example, the evasive aggression of "I am not a racist, but . . .") had been re-codified and recharged with new subtextual and transhistorical significations and resonances. The disjunctive string of binarized flashes of thoughts on the archetypical battleground of good versus evil personified into goodies versus baddies paraded as "factual, tactful information that helps us all" (Wheeler, 2002, front cover). It simultaneously confused one who *can* read the world with one who can judge without being judgmental. This analytic kid, perhaps at least one among the neatly seated sixteen kids of Booker Elementary, would be or become a "weirdo," "who sits along at the turn of the staircase, reading" (Skyes, 1996, p. 101), but who might end up becoming something weirder like a philosophy teacher.

As a matter of course, analytic demand has its share of aggressive insensitivity. But we should *feel* free to ask a question as simple as *why* "my very special" Grandma—who "lives 'on the coast'" "and is supposed to come to stay

with us for a while"—is taking a bus instead of flying (Schnurr and Strachan, 2002, p. 34). Curiously, in the book, it is the child who instantly limits the possible range of questions. She imagines that the question might cause "something to happen." She doesn't ask because she has "a feeling that it had something to do with terrorists" (ibid.).

The element of magic realism to which the child naturally subscribes is sensible. To that extent, the scene of halted thought is poignantly humane and instantly relatable. What is worrisome is that the story, "the only available" story as claimed, ends right there. It shows no signs of cognitive development or epistemological adventure, negative or positive. The author does not attempt to present the world more clearly or to reconstruct the world more truthfully. Instead, the story precludes such efforts or even possibilities.

4. A Family of Color Blindness: On a "White Mom"

Even Firefighters Hug Their Moms (MacLean and Reed, 2002) is a playful allegory of masculine vulnerability. It features Big Frank, a firefighter wannabe who "every morning gets up and looks at the newspaper" (upside down) "to find out where the fires are" (ibid., p.1). An imaginative preschooler, in reality, who pretends to be busy otherwise, Big Frank eventually takes time off to hug his mom who is busy managing what appears to be a typical middle-class, white, American, heterosexual family with two children: one boy and one girl.

This story contains two messages: (1) it is perfectly fine to be and act afraid, whoever you are, even if you are the last person anyone would expect to be fearful, since (2) "we" are all hurt, bruised, confused, honest children in need of immediate comfort and consolation. This we even includes real firefighters such as *New York's Bravest*, Mose Humphreys, legendary firefighter from the 1840s, employee No. 40 (Osborne, 2002). Humphreys' story is multiplied in the narrative by post-11 September 2001 legends, "all eight feet tall and able to swim the Hudson River in two strokes" (ibid., front flap).

Lest you feel left out of the world of heroes and celebrities, a fable for ordinary folks has also been written. Such is the story that *Bravemole* (Jonell, 2002) tells. Mole's story involves his life-and-death struggle with, and eventual triumph over, a "wicked dragon with terrible teeth and terrible claws and fire inside" that "lives far away" (ibid., pp. 1–2). Originally, the dragon was a mythical creature that only the great-grandmole allegedly saw, but it suddenly became real during Mole's lifetime. Back home, "delivered from dragons" by Starmoles and Overmoles:

> Mole rocked his baby mole soft and slow, rumbling a lullaby a little off-key. His good wife came in quietly, giving his shoulders just one more squeeze, and sat beside him. It would not be easy, Mole thought, patting his wife's furry paw with his own sore one. But Overmole helping, they

would get the hard job done. Because ordinary moles were strong. And brave. And steady. There was a city of them. A country of them. A whole *world* of them. Bravemoles. (Ibid., 28–29)

Why this evocation of the localized motherland and maternal care? What kind of message is instilled in this historicized allegory of self-forgetting bravery? The question of manhood or fatherhood aside, here we would like to ask: who has access to that *über* mom that is both literal (one whom even firefighters hug and who gets to squeeze the bravemole) and metaphorical (one from whom all of New York's bravest and ordinary moles come)? Or, if there are multiple moms, as there are multiple races in the United States, which one are we to use as the shoulder, the pillow, and the womb?

In a poem entitled "Trouble, Fly," is depicted a quilt of houses where everyone is sleeping, including cats and dogs (Swanson, 2002, pp. 18–19). These are symbols of domesticated living beings. The focal point of one picture is the united nations of a nursery room (ibid., p. 19): a white mother is asleep with her arms around brown, yellow, and white children, all bundled in one bed. The sleeper series begins with the blonde mother and ends with a blond child who also had to stretch an arm vertically as if to draw a straight line, as if to bring closure to that dreamy space.

If New York City is sorted by the father, as is evidenced by the story of Mose Humphreys in *New York's Bravest*, homes are managed by the mother who will breed, feed, and multiply the next Mose Humphreys. Who else has access to that immediately and ultimately huggable *über* mom, that really tall lady from New York City, who always stands firm and holds that torch twenty four hours a day/seven days a week? None. Again, as random as the illustration accompanying this scene may appear, the visible pictorial and narrative exclusion of children of specifically Muslim, Middle Eastern or Arabic origin from the familial space, remains alarmingly intriguing.

One colorful and rather delightful, poetic exception I could locate, is *We Are All the Same Inside* (Bellavia, 2000). In this book, an extraterrestrial sage, reminiscent of Dr. Seussian characters, "comes to us, a person like *you* and *me*, but with only the *inside* we can see," with "a *goal*, . . . a *soul*, . . . with no outside *skin* (because the sage came from the "planet where we are all *kin*")" (Bellavia, 2000, pp. 6–9), and:

Sage was all alone and needed a home.
Without any fear, Sage looked far and Sage looked near. (Ibid., p. 13)

Will they think I'm Dwight when my outside is all white?
Will there be a scar due to Dasha's black and violet hair?
What about Safia's veil . . . I wonder if it will fail? (Ibid., pp. 17–19)

> The insider heard some *chatter*. So you know Sage went to see what was the *matter*. (Ibid., p. 21)

An academic could specify "the matter" as follows: the implicitly sanctioned, psychosocial practices of ethno-social zoning, distancing, and outcasting, which is a function of race panic and provincial familialism as discussed earlier. *We Are All the Same Inside* is actually asking this question, again through an allegory and yet, this time, an allegory of the extraterrestrial alien. Given the color-coded boundaries of inclusion-exclusion that constitute the socio-historical ontology of America, we can ask, what kind of social justice and hope can be multilaterally envisioned, beyond and above the historicized horizon? How can we think across the social color line while acting against it? Can we even show a book of "We are all the same inside" to our "Mom and Dad, to whom the book is dedicated" (ibid., p. 38)—the Mom and Dad who do not think the alien Sage is or should be in and among us? Yes, we can, the book is trying to say and show.

5. An Open Reflection: Tomorrow, Us, and the United States

Above, I have offered a twofold—phenomenological and rhetorical—analysis of the post-11 September 2001 infantilization of American minds that racialize "the enemy." The enemy is cast as an imaginary group of hostile strangers, exactly the kind that children who read the bedtime propaganda often learn to repeat. Specifically, I have sought to draw our attention to some of the subtle and not-so-subtle ways in which the figures of the threatening other are systematically juxtaposed with those of the home or homeland and become racialized—or colorized—as one would see from the United States terror alert codification system. With this move is the reactionary formation of the discourse of nationalistic unity.

In short, I called into question the normative, sedimented whiteness of patriotic and parental discourse in post-11 September 2001 America. To this end, I have shown how, right there in the knotted, prefabricated discourses of justified infantilism and uncritical nationalism, good old white racism and raced sociality resurface and function as subtextual points of connection. The images of the housed child—innocent, vulnerable, and future adult citizens of the United States in need of parental protection and guidance—are exploited in the name of democratizing traumatic and traumatized sentiment. White *racializing* super-patriotism and, in turn, pan-*nationalizing* ("We, proud Americans") becomes a quasi-racial phantom category that remains schizophrenically incoherent and deceptively universal. On the most specific level, I focused on a shifty mechanism of the infantilization, or the infantile bipolarization of the public, by which the aesthetic hegemony of Caucasian America politicizes future subjects such as children of the nation or the nation *as* a born-again child who now returns "home."

This is an essentially white home; that is, an all-inclusive all American white mother with a reconstituted "homeland" that becomes flagged as "Amer-

ica" anew. On the most crudely fundamentalized binary scheme of "in versus out," "good versus bad," "white versus colored," is overlaid a relatively new, metonymic set of binary oppositions. Such oppositions include: accommodated versus drifty, and American race versus non- or anti-American race. I have concluded that analysis by introducing what I have come to see as an alternative, a future-oriented example: the open-ended and yet allegorically resonant narrative of *We Are All the Same Inside*.

Perhaps it would be unfair to say that "typical" white houses in the United States of America, as often one-dimensionally portrayed in books for 11 September 2001-trauamtized children, are joining forces with the nation's administration. Perhaps it would be unfair to say that the "white Republican middle-class soccer moms," who still form a racial and political majority of the producers and consumers of children's book, gently militarize the home by systematically hypnotizing their children with such books. Perhaps it is an exaggeration to say that most of the mainstream post-11 September 2001 books for children and adolescents "target" and further reproduce the child in bed/pajamas, in need of immediate comfort and compensatory consolation. And yet, I also find myself asking this question: is it too strange that we now rarely have the child explorers and inventors, whose patently American innocence lies in the extraordinary ability to question and discover, often outwitting the condescending adults and unveiling the ideological pretensions of the naked emperor?

So now, even an ultimately big, beautiful world out there (Cf. Carlson, 2002) has to be seen from the point of a cute little brown-haired child installed inside the window of a cute little suburban house. Who is still left out in the cold, in the city of lost children? More importantly, who will critically reconsider such an offer of accommodation? Who would start interrogating the assumed homogeneity of fears and hopes? Slowly but steadily, I have been and will continue to be nagging adults with such unpleasant questions—adults who once were children learning to see and speak the language of the world in the homes and schools.

Today, American schoolteachers, not knowing how to explain "the event," still agree on one thing. They believe that they must "emphasize the positive" (Monique Field, "Attack Anniversary Is Living History Lesson," *St. Petersburg Times* (5 September 2002). Their plan to emphasize, "how the country bonded rather than what was torn apart" (ibid.) is not simply a measure to give the nation's children a sense of vitally needed security. It is not as simple as administering psychological first aid, "a form of psychological support that teaches individuals how to care for themselves and to provide basic psychological support for family, friends and neighbors" (Jacobs, 2006, p. 69). Nor is it simply an optimistic response to or a pragmatic solution for the administrative task of "leaving no child behind." The problem arises when social cushioning furtively extends to social cocooning—a sort of self-containment.

Psychological first aid could "be developed as preparedness for disasters and terrorist attacks" (ibid., p. 68). However, such "preparedness" often manifests itself in the form of security paranoia or generalized xenophobia. The innocuous-sounding directive of "emphasizing the positive," when mindlessly repeated, brings out and blindly reactivates the political unconscious of America and will leave out many children. What is to be tightly articulated, and what I have been trying to articulate with a counterbalancing urgency, is a deeper socio-psychical impulse behind such a collective, introverted move.

Such is an ambiguous move towards an exclusive inclusion of "we Americans" engineered through a manipulation of the nation's bad faith in good terms such as cross-sectional solidarity and civic communality. At the heart of American triumphantalism, read as a case of bad faith in the Sartrean sense, is an infantile negation of (as opposed to dialectical engagement with) the politicized other. The undeniable fact is that the American ideal of freedom and patriotic solidarity historically suppressed the racial and ethnic materiality of the American body in favor of abstract autonomy, mechanical equality, and nominal independence. The post-11 September 2001 discourse of nation united by faith and hope mobilizes precisely that undercurrent through the imaginary reconstruction of the national body thus "torn apart."

This way, a collective reflex has replaced reasoned, public reflections. Now, the fear of others' freedom is overwriting faith in our freedom. Why do they hate us? This tragedy is relatively easy to understand. The more scathing riddle for us is and should be the moral ambiguity of brave new America consumed by racialized primary narcissism and capitalist individualism. The ambivalence remains structural, and its symptoms, are as old as the American history of colored crises. Forever free, America wishes to "spread freedom" all over. Forever fearful, America wishes to go home and watch television, or play video games, until sleepy with Wee Willie Winkie, hopefully dreaming of a, perhaps, kaleidoscopic society entirely composed of newborn babies:

> Racial identity will only cease to be salient when one can say of a newborn baby that his/her racial identity will have no significant impact on the kind of life he or she is likely to lead. But the conditions that would make it possible to say that cannot be brought about without a radical transformation of society of a kind that most Whites would not even contemplate. (Bernasconi, 2001, p. 284)