America is an amnesiac, waking up from unconsciousness. Whose lands are these we’re living on, where did all this money in our wallets come from—and why are people trying to kill us? Can we work out our true identity before the end of the movie?

What is the meaning of this image burned into our brains, the twin towers that fall over and over? Oppressed by their ominous absence, we can only conceive of the world in dualities: terrorism or militarism, danger or safety, peace or war. Our own lives, our own questions, whatever those might be, are unimaginable.

Who built those towers, who trained the ones who brought them down? Who stands to gain from our fixation on them? What would it mean to reject the terms they offer us, to refuse our role in the story entirely and make for the horizon?
Forget Terrorism: The Hijacking of Reality

A person who has a sense that her life is meaningful and her destiny is in her hands is in fundamental ways more alive than a person who does not. In that sense, on September 11, terrorists used airplanes to disrupt the lives of everyone who survived. It was not just in the hijacking and crashing of the planes, but in the way the event was used to hijack and crush the meaning of reality, and the zones radiating outward from it were less and less real. The most a man in Iowa could do on September 11,2001, was watch television instead of talking with each other about what one thinks about. The hijacking and crashing of the planes was an act of superlative terrorism carried out against every one of us: not just the hijackers and their targets, but against the global network of meaning itself. In that sense, on September 11, terrorism is in her hands is in fundamental ways more alive than a person who does not. In that sense, on September 11, terrorists used airplanes to kill thousands of people, and politicians and media used the event to kill a little bit of everyone who survived.

1 History is rife with ironic coincidences, not the least of which being that the Berlin wall fell on 11/9.
2 This shows how much we'll have to learn about being able to ignore the news, and about the gradual liberation movement.
3 As Hitler said, if you want to keep soldiers from stopping to think for themselves, keep your enemies marching—that goes for liberal politicians as well as army recruiters.

The trivial little games activists and communities had been playing were rendered—no one would pay attention any longer, let alone join in. This was not necessarily true, of course. But it was news because it was on the news, and because it was new it made it significant paralyzes; without morale and momentum, all the power in the world now froze up as if hypnotized. This was certainly convenient for the dominance on the one hand and autonomy, liberty, and cooperation on the other.

Nowhere across the planet, people were starting to organize themselves, testing their hands at self-directed activities and pushing back when state and corporate interests tried to interfere. At summits of the economic elite were shut down, local collectives assembled, and global networks of resistance linked up; it began to feel like the future was up for grabs. But no one on any side of the barricades had factored in the unintended consequences of U.S. foreign policy had wrought in the third world, and everything changed the day terrorists, directed by a former employee of the C.I.A., brought those chickens home to roost in New York City.

Everyone knows the unforgettable tragedy that occurred that morning, when thousands of human beings lost their lives in an act of cold-blooded violence. But another tragedy, a stranger, subtler one, compounded the first: the tragedy that occurs in this society when a large number of people have the misfortune of losing their lives on international television.

An interesting side effect of the events of September 11 was that television news ratings shot through the roof. Everyone was glued to the television: and all conversations, in every city, state, and nation, were about New York City. Suddenly—because what one thinks about is one's reality—New York City, and more specifically the attack and deaths, were the epicenter of reality, and the zones radiating outward from it were less and less real. The most a man in Iowa could hope for was to have a family member in the towers, so he could be connected by blood to the tragedy that mattered. That, of course, is an insensitive overstatement—but let's not deny that some of us didn't have such a relative a few twinges of sec- ruit, perhaps subconscious jealousy of those who did, who could speak with such anguish and outrage about the one and only subject on anyone's mind.

In the same way that serial killers and serial dramas, disaster movies and real disasters command attention, so did New York City. Everyone outside the city was paralyzed, looking at a distance, wondering what would happen next or if one day in a movie theater. We were all powerless, our sense of agency gone at the most urgent of times. Those of us who held corporate names or otherwise refused to be complicit in our own passivity still stared at the screen with everyone else; those who did not have such an analysis watched and accepted the conclusions of the talking heads as if they were their own. Later, doing as they were told, they raised a flag that was not their own, either.

So-called “activists” were among the ones most paralyzied, comparably speaking. Those who had shared a sense that they could change the world now froze up as if hypnotized. This was certainly convenient for the power that he, who scripted the coverage and spin of the tragedy—but why did this happen?

If you want to disable people, make them feel insignificant. Feeling in significant paralysis; without morale and momentum, all the power in the world—remember, that power is made up of the assembled powers of all in- dividuals, it is not some spectator walled off from above—can only be applied accidentally, according to the dictates of the few whose sense of entitlement is reinforced by their titles and television exposure. Feelings of insignificance render insignificant; desperation to be “where the action is” replaces the ability to decide for oneself about one's life.

The underlying message of the news, the implication hammered deeper home with every replay of the towers collapsing, was that whatever we lit- tle people did, world history, and therefore real life, was out of hands.