

EMPTY SKY: CSI AND THE INCOMPLETE MOURNING FOR THE 9/11 DEAD

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## THE EVENT

Tuesday, September 11, 2001 dawned a perfect late summer day in Manhattan. The sky was cloudless. The air was dry. The temperature would reach 80 degrees by mid-afternoon.

At 8:46.45 a.m. American Air Lines Flight 11, flying out of Logan Airport in Boston, bound for LA, slammed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center at a speed in excess of 400 miles per hour, striking between the 93rd and the 99<sup>th</sup> floors.

Within minutes WNYW, a local TV station, and CNN were broadcasting images of the burning building. Millions of TV viewers saw a second plane, United Air Lines Flight 175, also out of Logan and bound for LAX, fly behind the burning tower and angle into the South Tower, creating a huge fireball as it disappeared into the structure between the 77<sup>th</sup> and the 85<sup>th</sup> floors.

At 9:59 a.m., 56 minutes after it had been struck, the South Tower collapsed in on itself. The building was gone in ten seconds.

At 10:28, 29 minutes later and 102 minutes after the initial impact, the North Tower also collapsed.

## THE AFTERMATH

Rescue and recovery operations at the site began later that night and officially ended the following July. By that time 2,753 death certificates had been issued by the New York Medical Examiners Office. The dead included 343 New York City firefighters 23 New York City policemen, 37 Port Authority police and 10 independent EMTs.

Only a dozen of the dead could be visually identified. 293 relatively intact corpses were recovered. Almost 20,000 human fragments were recovered, and the dead were identified using dental records, identification papers and DNA samples. In the last analysis, about 1600 of the total of 2753 known dead were forensically identified. 1,151 people who were known to have been in the Towers had disappeared completely.

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## THE PROBLEM

9/11 created three problems, in addition to the incalculable personal pain it caused the families of those who died, and the tens of billions in lost revenue, recovery and rebuilding costs.

First, 9/11 caused the obliteration, beyond recovery, of more than 1150 human beings, as well as the effective disappearance of 1,500 more. Here is the problem: if so many have died, and disappeared, and they were our fellow citizens who died and disappeared *because* they were citizens, how do we honor them? How do we craft a reasonable

funeral for those dead whose remains, remain, under our feet when we visit Ground Zero? It is axiomatic, when one studies funeral rituals across cultures, that the dead must be found and properly buried, or they will come back to haunt us.

There is a second problem associated with the first. The question of who these dead are has never been resolved. We know who died. We have a definitive list. But to what category do the dead belong? And what kind of mourning is appropriate for them? What kind of funeral?

Are they war casualties? Are they murder victims? People who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time? Are they heroes? Are they martyrs? Who have we lost, and what memorial should we create for them?

This anxiety created by both problems is clear at the official 9/11 memorial, *Reflections of Absence*, which opened on September 11, 2011 and which I visited in January of this year. The memorial is powerful and touching, but it is marked by an unresolvable tension. It incorporates two distinct motifs, which work together on an aesthetic level but reveal an ideological conflict.

As you will see in the film clip, the memorial consists of two square depressions built over the footprints of the original towers. These 'holes' have sheer black sides. Into each depression waterfalls endlessly from all four sides of the square, the streams made more sibilant by crenelated stone faces over which each sheet of waterfalls. In the center of each depression there is a second smaller square hole, disappearing into darkness, into which the water also falls.

These ceaseless waterfalls represent the ever disappearing, absent dead, the dead who are lost deep in the earth of Ground Zero, never to be recovered. Like the evanescent water,

the 9/11 dead keep eluding us, escaping as it were through our outstretched fingers and yet they are forever with us, always whispering their presence/absence even as that presence dissolves and disappears. They keep disappearing and they keep coming back. This is a haunted site.

At the same time the absent dead are also monumentally, changelessly present. The sides of the two deep pools are lined with bronze plaques into which the names of every victim are incised. These plates have the solidity and permanence, the presence that belongs properly to memorials for war dead. They remind one of the names inscribed on the Viet Nam War memorial in Washington, D.C. They represent casualties properly recovered and interred.

These coexisting memorial strategies paradoxically represent the dead as disappearing victims and as solid heroes, water and bronze, in a single memorial space in which no effort is made to integrate the diametrically opposed symbols.

#### WHY SHOULD WE CARE?

Grieving is most often reserved for the immediate family and friends of the deceased. The circle of concern is generally small. But some deaths are different. The deaths of celebrities such as Princess Diana or Michael Jackson can unleash extravagant levels of public grieving involving millions of people who never knew the deceased directly.

Political deaths, too, especially assassinations, provoke variants of the same mass reactions.

These deaths matter because they involve people on a very fundamental level – as fans, as citizens, categories that include millions of people. It is a cultural cliché that everyone

who is old enough remembers exactly where he or she was when he or she got the news that John F Kennedy had been shot in Dallas.

The 9/11 deaths were similar in many ways to the deaths of celebrities and even more to the assassination of political figures. The difference was that on 9/11 we lost, not a celebrity or a political leader, but people like ourselves, fellow citizens. We learned that nearly 3,000 people had died for a single reason -- they were citizens or they were in the United States associating with American citizens.

And on 9/11, despite ample warning, reams of incriminating information, and the presence of agencies that could have prevented it, the United States was subjected to the worst attack on its soil in more than 135 years. Interagency rivalries and lack of communication between various intelligence operations made 9/11 much easier to pull off than it should have been.

On that day we learned two very important and disturbing things: first that we could just as easily have been the people in the Twin Towers or the Pentagon, and second, that our government had not done a good job doing what it was fundamentally called on to do -- protect us from foreign enemies and insure domestic tranquility. We might be the next victims -- all it took was American citizenship -- and we did not trust our government to protect us from that fate.

And so all of us -- the vast majority -- had to be anxious, and we mourned the dead as our fellows, and hoped we would not join them through official ineptitude or indifference. Whatever mourning we did must honor the dead, not as family members, but as fellow citizens, and that mourning must somehow reference the government that had failed us.

ENTER CSI

However brilliant the 9/11 Memorial, it reenacts our cultural anxiety and uncertainty about the disappearance as well as the meaning of the 9/11 dead. It provides a memorial but not a safe and stable resting place, for either the living or the dead. And the many other 9/11 memorials suffer from similar ambiguities.

The metaphysical and moral problems that 9/11 created needed a special memorial that more traditional forms of memorialization could not offer. First –this is the third problem that 9/11 posed -- for most people 9/11 happened on television, which Marshall McLuhan famously identified as a “cool” medium which puts one at a certain psychological and I would say, ontological, distance from the events it shows.

I think that 9/11 pushed the boundaries of McLuhan’s categorization to and past its limit. Anyone who has gone to YouTube and watched unedited footage of the towers taken with minicams and early cellphone cameras knows how ravaging the screams, curses, fireballs and terrible sounds of the planes hitting the towers are, and how they can rip away the fifth wall and involve one immediately in the sights, if not the smells and heat, of that event. Even worse are the silent images of what at first appear to be pieces of debris falling from high on the towers. These all too quickly resolve themselves into blurry, momentary images of falling human bodies

We all saw 9/11. We saw the second plane hit; we saw the pouring smoke; we heard snatches of the desperate cell phone calls to 911; we all saw first the South, then the North, Towers collapse in on themselves.

And these sights created a third problem related to the first one: we all saw the complete disappearance of the 9/11 victims. We saw their absence. We were eyewitnesses to the exit of the dead from Being. The wound of 9/11 is not only the loss of the dead; it is also and indissociably the fact that we lost them in plain sight, while we were all watching, transfixed. We have probably never watched a television event so closely, and we have probably never missed as much.

How to heal these metaphysical and moral wounds? How to remember our dead and lost fellow citizens? How to remember them properly? How to remember them in ways that reconnect us with the government that failed us on that day? Most important – how do we recover the irretrievably lost dead so that we can remember them in the way that matters most – by burying them?

The first thing that is obvious is that this memorial cannot exist in ordinary space and time, because the lost, obliterated dead cannot ever be found in this world. And in the real world of political conflict we may never come to a shared judgment on who they died as – victim, casualty, hero. So, to remember the dead properly to offer them a good burial, and to heal our own wounds, we must either create or be offered a fictional world in which the losses of 9/11 can be made good. And the perfect locale for this fictional world is the very place where the damage originally took place for most us – on television.

## THE SHOWS



My thesis is that the *CSI* shows offer a way to remember, and bury, the 9/11 dead that resolves the three problems I cited above – the loss of the bodies, the ambiguity about who the dead are, and the paradox that we saw them disappear in plain sight.

*CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, broadcast its first episode on Friday, October 6, 2000, almost a year before 9/11, so we cannot suggest that 9/11 caused *CSI*, as it clearly caused *Rescue Me*, *24*, and *Without A Trace*. But this does not mean that *CSI* did not provide a metaphoric home for the political mourning associated with 9/11. Anthony Zuiker, the creator and executive producer of all three *CSI* series, said in a 2007 interview:

"We started in 2000 and it was a success, but our ratings really shot up after the September 11 attacks. People were rushing to us for their comfort food. There was a sense of justice in *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* – it helped to know that there were people like our characters out there helping to solve crimes. And, of course, 9/11 was the world's largest crime scene."

My task now is to show you in detail exactly what Zuiker meant.

## THE ANCHORS

But, to add another and necessary layer of complexity to this already complex picture, I need some way to determine whether the memorial and burial strategies the shows deploys fit a template for how memorials and burials should ideally work. My friend Bill Hoy provided that template. He asked me to read the manuscript for his now just-published book, *Do Funerals Matter?* Hoy posited what he calls five anchors for a good funeral, that buries the dead properly and offers comfort to the living. What better way to

test my hypothesis about CSI? Do these shows provide all the elements for a good funeral? I have found this template invaluable and will use it today.

Hoy's anchors for a good funeral are, very briefly:

1. Connecting the event to the deceased person's historical background.
2. Using meaningful rituals in the ceremony.
3. Using meaningful symbols.
4. Enlisting a relevant community.
5. Showing respect for the corpse in transition.

### The CSI Structure

We begin by citing a fact on which everything else depends: *CSI* is about dead bodies. There are dead bodies in every episode, and we spend a good deal of script time looking at dead bodies recumbent on autopsy tables or splayed out at crime scenes. Not only that, we also spend time, thanks to the miracles of CGI technology, speeding into and through the bodies, penetrating layers of tissue, coursing down veins and arteries, entering vital organs, watching what bullets and knives and blunt instruments do to human flesh. *CSI* can become a plausible site for memorializing the 9/11 dead first and last because its subject matter is dead bodies. More than that, it is about dead bodies that have been found and recovered, and that can be examined because they are intact.

But to get at this thematic of dead bodies, we need a framework for understanding *CSI*. I have divided the show into three elements: (1) the crime scene, in which the body is discovered and recovered; (2) the *CSI* World proper – labs, morgue, autopsy theatre,

offices in which the body is; (3) the CSI characters, the people who work on the bodies. Each of these elements all taken together create the fictional memorial and burial that I will now detail.

## THE CRIME SCENE

Using Hoy's anchors, we see that CSI stands in a long history of genre fiction. CSI is a police procedural a crime show whose driving narrative engine is the fact that its principal actors are sworn police officers or civilians working with them. The police procedural is about civil servants working in a large state bureaucracy, and details how this apparatus deals with serious breaches of the law and brings wrongdoers to justice.

Dramatic emphasis is on following what professional police officers do: cordon off and examine crime scenes, collect evidence, interview suspects and witnesses, chase and capture offenders, execute search warrants, work undercover, and so forth. Police procedurals typically produce a result: the crimes presented in the stories get solved because of the hard work of a group of police professionals.

Police procedurals are also inherently conservative. They assume respect for the law and end with the apprehension of guilty parties, always done by the book. There are more worldly versions of the genre in which the people arrested are not always the people who are really guilty, and in which powerful people routinely evade prosecution in a variety of ways.

*CSI* is a very conservative if innovative instance of the form. It is conservative in the sense that there is complete reliance on the law, on the equipment used to find and process evidence, and on the power of facts and logical inferences to reveal the true perpetrators

and bring them to justice. In *CSI* postmodern irony has no place. There is no relativism about right and wrong although there is a wide tolerance for human difference. Cross-dressers, dominatrices, role players, costume fetishists, all find a home in *CSI* plots. As long as what they are doing is legal they are fully accepted and respected. When the dead enter the *CSI* fictional universe they are entering a world with stable values and one that believes in and respects the principle of justice for all.

But there is a second history into which the dead body enters when it appears in the *CSI* world. Not only is it an item in a police procedural, it is also an object of scientific interest and analysis. The classic police procedural use forensic evidence such as fingerprints, blood types and DNA sampling, ballistics tests and gunpowder residue. But the body as an object of scientific analysis is at the very center of the *CSI* world.

This focus on the body as an object of scientific analysis incorporates it into a long history of Western science. We all learned something about the Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution in school. These trends in Western intellectual history and practice operated on the assumption that disinterested human reason, using objectively tested and proven techniques, could make reliable predictions about how nature will act, and can, using the right equipment, exert a surprising degree of control over nature.

This is exactly the history we join at the *CSI* crime scene, which is deeply encoded with the symbols and rituals of both state power and scientific knowhow.

But *CSI* provides the corpse with more than a history. Every *CSI* episode begins with the moments just before one of the crimes that will constitute a plot focus. We do not see the

crime itself but the period just before the crime. Then we see the crime scene populated with CSI operatives. The crime scene is filled with both symbols and ritual. First it is always cordoned off to keep out the civilian population. The police bureaucracy has control, and runs bright yellow crime scene tape, a vivid symbol of the state's legitimate authority, and of its power, over the scene to create a kind of sacred space for the criminal investigation and the revelation of truth.

Inside this charmed circle are the police, straight out of procedural Central Casting, and those they are protecting, the forensic technicians who will apply the knowledge accumulated by Western science to assist the state in applying its laws.

The tape, the side arms, the uniforms are all symbols of police power. Evidence bags, body bags, cameras, fingerprint kits, tweezers, mag lights, bullet casing markers and the like are the now familiar symbols of scientific competence in service to the state. Here police work and science both provide a wealth of symbols.

And to supplement the symbols we are also enmeshed in a series of rituals.

Our government, the one we no longer trust to keep us safe – is on the scene immediately, with adequate force, cordoning off the crime area, and bringing in a full complement of scientific experts with exactly the right kinds and amount of equipment. There is no hint here of government shortages, of poor planning, of lack of readiness. Here, in CSI world, the state always has both the resources and the competence to control the scene of tragedy and enact the rituals of recovery and retribution.

The CSIs always examine the body for trace evidence at the scene. They always conduct a meticulous search of the scene looking for hairs, fibers, blood spatters, shell casings, weapons, footprints, drag marks and so forth. We are all familiar with watching them

pore over the scene, picking up tiny, apparently inconsequential objects with tweezers, their hands encased in the symbolic disposable surgical gloves. We all know that the medical examiner, a standard and important part of the team, will arrive sooner or later – they never get there with the CSIs, and will conduct his or her preliminary examination of the body before ordering it “bagged and tagged”. We also all know where that body is headed: into what I call ‘CSI World’.

Before we leave the crime scene we have to fill in two more of Hoy’s anchors. In CSI the dead enter a community, the community of police and forensic experts, whose world will be their temporary home. Family and friends play a peripheral role in most CSI episodes, except as suspects and witnesses. The bureaucratic/scientific community becomes the corpse’s new ‘family’.

Finally, all the testing and probing and measuring and transporting done with and to the CSI corpse are in aid of making their transitions respectful. However objective the treatment that the dead receive, it is always as gentle as possible. Every ritual and symbol has one purpose: to reintegrate the lost dead into the fabric of the state, into the network of reasons and causes, into the house of justice. There is something coldly loving about the care that the CSI dead always receive.

#### CSI WORLD: GROUND ZERO REDEEMED

Now that we see that the CSI dead receive a history, rituals, symbols, a community and respect at the crime scene we can move into the heart of CSI world where all five elements are only intensified. Aside from the CGI voyages into the interior of the bodies

of murder victims the most distinctive thing about CSI is its interior sets and lighting, every element of which has significance.

At the conclusion of this segment of the analysis I will show a short clip of a virtual tour of the several CSI: NY labs and autopsy theater, as an illustration of the claims I am about to make.

The first two things that struck one about the interior spaces of CSI world are the indirect lighting and the fact that it is hermetically sealed. In this world there are no windows. We are completely sealed into a world in which we do not see doors leading to the outside. The hermetic sealing symbolizes that here we are safe from attacks. No alien presence can enter. The only people we see are forensic technicians and detectives, people who are on our side, and on the side of the corpse. The dead are within the protective community of scientific experts and state power.

This hermetically sealed world is also lit softly with a diffuse indirect glow that is unlike the harsh fluorescent lighting in real autopsy theaters, and in almost all labs, where ultra-clear light is needed to carry out investigative procedures. Many people who know how forensic investigations go have commented on this anomaly, but I think the light serves a powerful symbolic purpose. It resembles that in a high-end funeral home or day spa. This is a world in which the dead will be exposed, in a world where the light soothes rather than startles. This soft lighting is allied with distinctive feature of CSI world, its unexpected transparency. As you will see in the film clip, the typical lab or office seems to have windows for walls. We see through every CSI workspace into other workspaces and into corridors along which purposeful young people in lab coats, people who are never identified, move briskly carrying files and clipboards. CSI world might be

indirectly lit, but it is suffused with the light of truth. Everything here is open, everything is, as Descartes recommended for true ideas, clear and distinct. There is no opacity, nothing hidden or mysterious or unclear, and nothing occluded by thick smoke or debris clouds or subterranean darkness. The philosopher Ian Hacking has written a piece called “To The Sunlit Uplands of Truth”, and in the CSI labs this is exactly where we are.

Why does this matter? First it matters because in CSI world government employees work in the open. We see everything they see, know everything they know. And they know everything about what they should know about – the victimized dead. The light of scientific truth shines on the dead, revealing the sources of their suffering and offering recompense for their loss. The government which failed to know the truth on 9/11, and which some people even believe was complicit in the attacks, is here represented as open to all relevant truth, and offers that truth as a symbol of consolation to the dead to us was mourners.

Second, these beautifully lit, open areas sealed off from the world are also a reworking of the chaos and darkness of Ground Zero, and a healing of the fact that Ground Zero was always a politically and morally contested space, the zone in which the interests of the fire fighters and other first responders clashed with those of the demolition and construction teams. CSI world is integral, open, safe and conflict free, a redeemed version of Ground Zero.

There is more. As we look even more closely at the labs and offices and autopsy rooms we see that they seem to disappear into an unclear middle distance. They are indeterminately vast, as if the government has dedicated virtually endless space to the dead, because they matter so much.



The space is not only vast, it is also, in sync with the theme of transparency, open and uncluttered; every lab has plenty of room to get all the work done that needs doing. And not only do we have ample space, we also see banks and tablesful of what appears to be the latest and best scientific apparatuses, from autoclaves and electron microscopes to high speed computers running facial recognition programs to ranks of high definition TV monitors deploying streams of information.

There seem to be no limits to the amount of money the state is willing to spend in the interests of justice for the dead. Anyone who has real life experience with law enforcement agencies knows how restricted their budgets and equipment are. We have all heard about rape kit evidence taking more than a year to process and about autopsy results that take at least six weeks to appear. But in CSI world every job having to do with justice for the dead gets done almost before it is proposed. No one ever has to wait for equipment or a lab, nothing ever breaks, no one complains about poorly designed software programs, and no evidence goes unprocessed.

As you will see in a minute, the CSI: NY labs have separate spaces for trace evidence, ballistics, AV, DNA, and so forth – lab after lab, each fully equipped and each capacious and each open to scrutiny. The dead are taken from the scene of their murder into a world that is as near perfect for its purposes as any world could be. One might even speculate that CSI world represents a kind of bureaucratic/scientific afterlife, a this-worldly secular Heaven. It definitely represents a caring community equipped with the right equipment to carry out all the proper rituals to find justice for the dead.

When we apply Hoy's template to this world we get spectacular results. The dead are taken up into the dual histories of the police procedural and of Enlightenment science. As

they enter this reassuring history in which reason and power cooperate to find the truth, they are enlisted into elaborate secular rituals – the autopsy, in which the body is displayed for the viewer to see, and which we participate in by entering the body in *CSI*'s iconic inner journeys; the fingerprint and DNA and facial recognition analyses; the examination of surveillance videos; the ballistics tests in which suspect guns are fired; the reenactment and blood spatter labs, where the crime is replayed on dummies. All of these procedures are ritualized and repetitive. Every week the audience knows what will be done, even if, as in the best of religious ritual traditions, they do not always understand all the terminology or all the machines.

The machines, the labs, the morgues, the lab coats, are all potent symbols of the power of science, driven and funded by the state, to find the truth about and for the dead.

All this activity exudes profound respect for the dead, and marks the body's transition from its original lostness and disarray, its undignified, sad end, and its rehabilitation into a clean, ordered space that yields vital truths to the investigating authorities. The body is transformed, by the care given it by the CSIs, from something left carelessly alone and uncared for into a powerful witness to truth, 'cooperating', even in death, with the authorities who have recovered and remade it.

And there is an added benefit that derives from the fact that *CSI* is a television series made in Hollywood. Not only are the dead recovered and cared for, they are beautified in the process. *CSI* corpses tend to be disproportionately female, younger, almost never obese, and most often much fitter than the average person watching the show. Whatever deeper purposes the *CSI* dead might be serving, they are serving these purposes in the

context of show business, and so the dead get an additional ‘advantage’: they become beautiful.

Finally, in CSI world the dead are sustained by two communities – the several millions of people in the television audience and the dedicated team of forensic technicians who together serve as guides for the dead from this world to the next. Who exactly are these people who enact rituals, deploy symbols and join the dead to history as they help them pass from one state to another?

The first thing we note is that the first ‘generation’ of CSIs resemble nothing so much as a secular priesthood. They wear lab coats rather than shoulder holsters, pocket protectors rather than Kevlar vests. They rarely engage in anything resembling police activities and only leave their labs to gather evidence at the crime scene.

These forensic technicians are, typically damaged and isolated souls, with a shared dedication to science and justice and a shared lack of compelling interests outside the job. The iconic CSI, Dr. Gil Grissom, has few friends. He does not have a damaged past but he is an emotionally disconnected intellectual fascinated by insects, which were the subject of his doctoral dissertation.

I want to suggest that Gil Grissom and by extension many of his team are 21<sup>st</sup> century Kantian moralists.

What do I mean? Immanuel Kant was a philosopher writing in the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He helped define the Enlightenment and its trust in scientific reason. At the core of Kant’s vision was an ethical system based on the single ethical demand that reason can make: Will the Good. In Kant’s view this is the only reasonable thing for a logical being to do.

This means that rational beings are required to will to do the right thing, no matter what the consequences and with no consideration for whether doing the right thing will benefit oneself. If something is good, and we know that it is good, we are constrained, as rational beings, to will it, even if by so doing we undercut our own interests.

This is a radical ethical position and one that Kant understands it is all but impossible to enact successfully in this world.

We must honor our perfectly legitimate bodily and emotional needs as far as that is possible. That is reasonable. But in this flawed world we cannot always arrange events in such a way that we can take care of ourselves and also take care of the ethical demands that reason imposes.

This is exactly where we find Dr. Gil Grissom and his colleagues. His world is full of dead bodies and mysteries to be unraveled. And since every dead body represents an unjust act, done by someone who was willing the opposite of the good, it is only reasonable that Grissom dedicate his skills and education to making these unjust situations, just. This is simply what a reasonable person, following the demand made by reason to will the good, would do.

But there are so many bodies, so much evidence to analyze, so many tests to be run, and only a finite amount of time to do all this. Even under ideal circumstances we understand that Grissom and company can do their job properly –do the right thing without qualification – or have normal lives. Grissom, for example, does have hobbies, such as racing his pet cockroaches, but it is not until the sixth season that he begins to develop a close relationship with his coworker Sarah Sidle, who almost immediately leaves the show.

He is the perfect Kantian moral subject. His life is dedicated to being reasonable, both scientifically and morally. Grissom is utterly fair, utterly reasonable, utterly dedicated – to and for the dead. And utterly alone, because of this moral commitment to those who have been wronged.

He is the perfect counter to the public's suspicions about government workers. Grissom never watches the clock, is never indifferent to the plight of his 'clients', works, to an almost absurd extent, beyond the call of duty. He is motivated by nothing but concern for justice.

Who better to take care of the dead, and to comfort the skeptical living, than an individual who literally lives for his fellow citizens, and who never seems to sleep, or eat or do anything but work for the good?

. Grissom's team are not as dedicated as he is, but they all look to him as a model and, like him, do not seem to have eventful lives outside the CSI lab. They are all, or almost all, also oddballs and/or geeks, socially awkward and very intelligent, enacting cultural expectations for such scientific types. But these geeks are different. They work with the dead and their business is to help the dead 'speak' so that justice can be done.

When we connect CSI with Kant we see that in both cases the moral universe is one in which rational human beings decide, often against their own best interests, to dedicate themselves to the good. In the CSI case the team dedicates itself, not to saving the living, but to 'saving' the dead. This is a shift from a stance that characterizes pre and post 9/11 salvation narratives.

But the essential moral impulse in both cases remains unchanged. Gil Grissom and company embody this self-effacing ethical absolutism, with one difference. In their world, of the police procedural and of Enlightenment era science allied with state power, there have to be outcomes. Their narratives are about closing cases and putting the dead to rest, so final results count as much as the purity of motives.

These moral purists constitute the ideal community which deploys all its rationality, both scientific and moral, under the aegis of government power, to recover and reclaim the dead.

We have come full circle. We have seen the contours of the CSI world, how carefully and purely, it is constructed, and how, when we examine its elements, it does provide all five of Hoy's anchors for a good funeral: a history, rituals, symbols, respect for the corpse and a community. In the *CSI* world all of these elements are, as we have seen, perfected and idealized.

But two questions remain. First, how does this respond to the three problems about death and memorialization that 9/11 posed and that its memorials leave largely unresolved? Second, what relation exists between these forensic 'funerals' and more spiritual burials?

To respond to the first question, *CSI* offers the most profound response imaginable to my three questions because it creates a fictional space, in which all things are possible, all questions answerable. *CSI* finds the lost dead and recovers them. It restores them to the world of law and reason, and to our political community, penetrating deep into their bodies, studying every artery and organ. What was irretrievably lost that lovely Tuesday

morning in September is here, found and reintegrated into the space of reasons and the space of justice.

Second, this refinding and reintegration happens right in front of our eyes. *CSI* brings the dead clearly and distinctly to the home screen, the exact symbolic real estate where we witnessed and suffered the loss of our brothers and sisters. We lost the dead as we watched, and saw and could not see. In *CSI* world the smoke and debris are gone and we are placed in a safe, spacious orderly world of scientific procedures and glittering machines where the dead could not be more clearly visible.

Finally, *CSI* settles the identity of the 9/11 dead. First it identifies them unambiguously as murder victims, repressing the political dimension entirely, and allowing the dead to enter the civilian legal system. But, and this is a subtle point, *CSI* also inserts the dead into a moral universe, represented by the characters moral radicalism, in which the origin of the dead's sufferings becomes irrelevant. Whether they were killed by jealous lovers or by terrorists, the same justice must be served. The moral focus and purity of the *CSI* characters serves to depoliticize the deaths without rejecting the political dimension.

In conclusion, then, *CSI* provides responses to the three questions about the dead that 9/11 raised. It also gives the dead a good funeral and, in the process, reassures an anxious citizenry that its government is deploying every resource of money and intelligence at its disposal to take care of its dead, from finding them to avenging them. In a world where we have lost so much, such idealized reassurance is worth more than one might easily imagine.

In discussing these points I left something out. The CSI world has virtually no religious references, and there is almost no mention of the afterlife, almost no footage of funerals, very little attention paid to relatives mourning and grieving. Families and religion seem almost marginal to the way the CSIs deal with the dead. Grissom, for example, admits that he was raised Catholic and believes in God, but there is no way to tell what effect this has on his commitment to the dead. And in one episode, a row of newly deceased people, four or five, all of who died at roughly the same time but in different places, sit up from their morgue slabs and discuss what it is like to be dead. They do not seem distraught at their condition, and although they are clearly 'alive' after death, nothing further is made of this. When living people approach they lie back down and stop talking.

In CSI the dead simply disappear once they have done their work in providing evidence to the technicians. As lovingly as they are cared for during their brief sojourn in the morgue and labs, they are never mentioned again, and we never see them being reclaimed by their families. We almost never attend a funeral.

This lack of interest in religion and the afterlife, the absence of funerals, all point in a single direction. CSI is about government officials pledged to uphold a secular Constitution in which no religion is established. The forensic technicians and police can provide a judicial 'funeral', a symbolic interment for the dead when the evidence they provide leads to the apprehension of their killers. But the state can do nothing more. It is not in the business of burying people who are not war casualties or indigents. So, once the dead have surrendered their secrets, the state moves away from them. If CSI provides



a site for indirectly mourning the 9/11 dead, it provides a purely political and judicial level of comfort, without a hint of religious consolation. A secular tragedy is healed by a purely secular work of mourning, and we are left to add our own prayers.