

The devastation that hit those towers that morning hit me. Buildings are metaphorically people. We see features—eyes, nose, and mouth—in their windows. I now realize that the image of the plane going into South Tower was for me an image of a bullet going through someone's head, the flames pouring from the other side like blood spurting out. It was an assassination. The tower falling was a body falling. The bodies falling were me, relatives, friends. Strangers who had smiled as they had passed me on the street screamed as they fell past me. The image afterward was hell: ashes, smoke and steam rising, the building skeleton, darkness, suffering, death.

The people who attacked the towers got into my brain, even three thousand miles away. All those symbols were connected to more of my identity than I could have realized. To make sense of this, my very brain had to change. And change it did, painfully. Day and night. By day the consequences flooded my mind; by night the images had me breathing heavily, nightmares keeping me awake. Those symbols lived in the emotional centers of my brain. As their meanings changed, I felt emotional pain.

It was not just me. It was everyone in this country, and many in other countries. The assassins managed not only to kill thousands of people but also to reach in and change the brains of people all over America.

It is remarkable to know that two hundred million of my countrymen feel as wrenched as I do.

The Power of the Images

As a metaphor analyst, I want to begin with the power of the images and where that power comes from.

There are a number of metaphors for buildings. A common visual metaphor is that buildings are heads, with windows as eyes. The metaphor is dormant, there in our brains, waiting to be awakened. The image of the plane going into South Tower of the World Trade Center activated it. The tower became a head, with windows as eyes, the edge of the tower the temple. The plane going through it became a bullet going through someone's head, the flames pouring from the other side the blood spurting out.