



**A BACHELOR THESIS ON
COME FROM AWAY IN
REGARDS TO BAUDRILLARD'S
POST 9/11 NOTION OF THE
STATIC IMAGE**

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WELCOME TO THE ROCK

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Table of contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Introduction | 2 |
| <i>Come From Away</i> : a musical | 2 |
| Research field | 3 |
| Theoretical framework | 4 |
| Methodology | 5 |
| Chapter 1: Actor / Audience | 6 |
| 1.1 A new way of making meaning | 6 |
| 1.2 Structure | 6 |
| 1.3 Chronological timeline | 6 |
| 1.4 Narrative style | 7 |
| 1.5 Actor or narrator | 8 |
| 1.6 To conclude | 8 |
| Chapter 2: Text / Reader | 9 |
| 2.1 ‘Fill in the blanks’ | 9 |
| 2.2 Hannah’s phone calls | 9 |
| 2.3 Scenery | 10 |
| 2.4 Television screen | 10 |
| 2.5 Language barrier | 11 |
| 2.6 To conclude | 12 |
| Chapter 3: Terrorist / Victim | 13 |
| 3.1 Bringing back nuance | 13 |
| 3.2 Leitmotiv | 13 |
| 3.3 Suspicion | 14 |
| 3.3.1 On the bus | 14 |
| 3.3.2 ‘I am an American citizen’ | 15 |
| 3.3.3 ‘Be anxious for nothing’ | 16 |
| 3.3.4 ‘I am an international chef’ | 16 |
| 3.4 To conclude | 17 |
| Chapter 4: Reality / Fiction | 18 |
| 4.1 Reinventing boundaries | 18 |
| 4.2 Based on a true day | 18 |
| 4.3 Based on existing characters | 19 |
| 4.4 Communication and interpretation | 19 |
| 4.5 To conclude | 19 |
| Conclusion | 20 |
| References | 23 |
| Appendix A: Character scheme | 25 |
| Appendix B: Images of the scenery | 26 |

Introduction

“Tonight, we honour what was lost, but we also commemorate what we found”¹

8:46 AM, September 11th, 2001. A hijacked Boeing 767 plane en route to Los Angeles crashes into the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York. It is the first of a series of four coordinated terrorist attacks against the United States of America and marks the start of a day that permanently changed the world. The attacks are considered the biggest act of terrorism in history, having taken almost three thousand lives from ninety different countries. More than can be read in a lifetime has been written about that day in efforts to grasp what actually happened and to understand the extent of the attacks. Additionally, countless works of art have touched upon the terrorist attacks. After having witnessed the worst acts of humankind, people have tried finding a proper way with words and art to cope with the terrible acts. The pivotal artwork in this bachelor thesis, and this bachelor thesis in itself, are no different.

Come From Away: a musical

On March 12th 2017, *Come From Away* premiered on Broadway. The musical tells the story of 7.000 passengers from 38 planes that were diverted to Gander, Newfoundland after the terrorist attacks in New York on September 11th, 2001. Irene Sankoff and David Hein, the writers of the musical, visited Gander for the 10th anniversary of 9/11 and spent a month interviewing the plane passengers and town residents while they returned for a reunion. Being so impressed with the stories that were told, they decided to turn to writing. Director Christopher Ashley, music supervisor Ian Eisendrath, choreographer Kelly Devine and stage designer Beowulf Boritt soon joined the team and so it begun: they would turn the stories of the Gander residents and the plane passengers from the days following 9/11 into a musical.

The no-interval 100 minute show features twelve actors that portray multiple characters throughout their stay in Gander during the days following 9/11. Gander is a very small town, but still has an airport that used to be a refuelling stop for transatlantic flights. Now that planes no longer need to refuel, there is no real use for the airport anymore. Only in times of disaster, the airport is used to divert planes. When news spreads that New York is under attack, the mayor of Gander quickly receives the message that some planes will have to divert to his town. At that point, it's uncertain how many planes and how many people it will be. The mayor relies on his residents for help to quickly prepare as much as possible. When the planes land, the passengers and crew learn what has actually happened while the residents do their best by offering the passengers shelter, food and anything they might need. In the days that follow, the characters get to know each other and the audience learns about their personal stories. Some passengers have missing family members, others find support on unsuspected ground, and some characters face suspicion and racism regarding their background, religion, or sexual orientation. The planes stay on Gander ground until the airway is cleared a few days later and the passengers and crew head off to their initial designated destination. The show ends with a flash-forward to the ten-year anniversary of 9/11, when the crew and

¹ S.n. (2017) *Come From Away Digital Lyric Booklet*. <https://themusicalcompany.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/CFA-digital-lyric-booklet-4-5.pdf> (2 April 2019): 42.

passengers reunite with Gander and its residents. They exchange stories of the generosity, kindness and homey feeling they experienced in Gander, even though it were the worst days of their lives.

Research field

*“We try retrospectively to impose some kind of meaning on it, to find some kind of interpretation. But there is none. And it is the radicality of the spectacle, the brutality of the spectacle, which alone is original and irreducible.”*²

After the attacks of September 11th, 2001, the world was shaken to its core in such a way that the proper language to describe what happened seemed to not have been invented yet. Terror to this extent had always seemed impossible. In order to grasp what actually happened – in order to understand the extent of it all – our collective reality needed to be redefined, Baudrillard claims.³ As Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelik write in their *Stof en As: De neerslag van 11 september in kunst en populaire cultuur*, it took quite some time for people until they turned to words to fathom what happened. The media attention was overflowing, but they kept repeating the same images. People turned to art, but needed time to sort their emotions out before they could properly process what had happened.⁴ After a few years, books started to be published. For instance, Dana Heller wrote *The Selling of 9/11* in 2005, in 2008 Ann Keniston & Jeanne Follansbee Quinn followed by reflecting on literature that had been published on 9/11 to that day in *Literature after 9/11* and a few years after that, Richard Gray updated their research by publishing *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11*. Nowadays, almost twenty years later, we’re still drawn back to that day immediately when we hear the term 9/11. According to Baudrillard, events like 9/11 have lost their meaning because of the elaborate media attention. Images have hollowed the event, he claims. This makes that – according to him – the attacks can be viewed as an overanalysed day that’s minimized to the few remembered images instead of the day nearly three thousand lives were lost. This claim is supported by Slavoj Žižek, philosopher and sociologist: “The image entered and shattered our reality”, he says.⁵ Žižek even takes it a step further: instead of claiming the image ‘only’ hollowed the event like Baudrillard wrote, Žižek elaborates on his belief that the media has actively shaped our memory of the event by the way the event was portrayed. After all, when thinking of the attacks, people are likely to think of the same infamous images – the planes crashing into the buildings, the falling man, maybe President Bush’s speech – and in doing so, we reduce the attacks to these images instead of remembering the nuance that simultaneously came with it.⁶ In this way, our collective memory has been shaped in a manner that is not completely representative of the actual event. It is, however, not too late to add nuance to the event. Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelik write that cultural memory is not static but ever-evolving. It is therefore very possible that our cultural memory, dynamic as it is, will change after a new influential thinker or artwork is introduced. The memory that we have now is different from the memory that we had five years ago and will thus also differ from our future perspectives.⁷

² Baudrillard (2002): 30.

³ Idem.

⁴ Plate & Smelik (2006): 14-15.

⁵ Žižek (2002): 16.

⁶ *Falling Man* is the one of the best-known photograph of 9/11 and was taken by Richard Drew.

⁷ Plate & Smelik (2006): 15.

Another research field that this thesis will frequently touch upon and forms the other half of this research, is musical theatre. John Brown's *Oxford Illustrated History of the Theatre* is an academic source that has well made its way into the canon of theatre studies and will therefore definitely be elaborated on in this thesis, but to make this research as specific as possible, the – much smaller – research field of musicals will be touched upon more regularly to properly analyse the case. Julian Woolford's *How musicals work*, Taylor Millie's *Studying Musical Theatre*, Elizabeth Wollmann's *A Critical Companion to the American Stage Musical*, Richard Schechner's *Performance Studies: An Introduction* and Raymond Knapp's *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical* will be combined as a proper groundwork to build this research on. As Plate and Smelik write and as is described earlier, much has been written on the attacks on September 11th, 2001. Research has been done on the attacks, their aftermath and even of the art that followed the attacks. However, the combination of theatre – musicals in particular – and 9/11 has not been studied properly. This thesis will therefore draw further on the research fields of (musical) theatre and 9/11, but most importantly combine the two and in doing so expand both fields, simultaneously encouraging others to do the same.

Theoretical framework

In 9/11 aftermath, many theoreticians have tried to capture and make meaning of the attacks, but for a long time the general conclusion seemed to be that the language needed to do so had not yet been invented. The terror exceeded all existing boundaries and the words needed to fathom and comprehend what happened, simply appeared to be non-existent. One of the most well-known exceptions to this is Jean Baudrillard's *The Spirit of Terrorism*, published in 2002, in which Baudrillard argues that 9/11 has become a visual spectacle in which the terrorist attacks are nothing more than a static 'image'.⁸ Because of the excessive media coverage of the attacks, images have taken over and neutralized the actual event, he claims: "The role of images is highly ambiguous. For, at the same time as they exalt the event, they also take it hostage. They serve to multiply it to infinity and, at the same time, they are a diversion and a neutralization. The image consumes the event, in the sense that it absorbs it and offers it for consumption"⁹ According to Baudrillard there seems to be no serious trial to defy this image, therefore it is claimed to be static.

In November of 2015, Elise Silva published an article called "*Terror as Theater*": *Unraveling Spectacle in Post 9/11 Literatures* in which she draws further on Baudrillard's notion of the static image. According to Silva, recent post 9/11 works have distanced themselves from the image that Baudrillard introduced. She illustrates this by elaborating on Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), claiming that these works address the 9/11 spectacle and reject a polarized, closed and – to use Baudrillard's term – static image of the attacks of September 11th, 2001, and in that endeavour, they subsequently open up to different interpretations and interactions. It is this interaction that is essential in post 9/11 works, since it advocates for communicative connections which then create solidarity, Silva says, opposed to the extreme political division that occurred as the initial reaction to 9/11 and has been prevalent since. Instead of relying exclusively on the world of symbol and static spectacle – which still interaction as they leave no space for communication and opinion – post 9/11 texts can attempt to

⁸ Baudrillard (2002): 30.

⁹ Baudrillard (2002): 27.

reinstate nuances and complexities that demand readers to become part of the story, history and even the future of 9/11 studies through reading and interpretation.¹⁰ Silva proceeds to present four levels of interaction that she noticed in every of the earlier mentioned works during her research: interaction between actor and audience, text and reader, terrorist and victim and lastly reality and fiction. The more a post 9/11 work relies on these levels of interaction, the more it distances itself from Baudrillard's notion of the static image. The central question in this thesis will be: to what extent can Silva's levels of communication in post 9/11 works be found in *Come From Away*? By answering this question, I will be able to conclude in what manner the musical relates to Baudrillard's notion of the static image.

For the sake of clearance and the text's readability, I have decided to include a scheme of the characters and their most important characteristics and plot lines in the appendix. Furthermore, images of the musical's scenery have been added. These will be referenced to on multiple occasions. The appendix can be found from page 23 onwards.

Methodology

Even though Silva's essay is immensely inspiring and I am very glad to base my research on it, she unfortunately is not very clear about her exact research method: her essay is more of a presentation of her findings than it is a walkthrough of her research. I do, however, believe these four levels are suitable to work with and of great value for my thesis as they seem to offer a clear overview of the communication that might be found in post 9/11 works. I will thus shape my research in the following manner: this thesis will consist of four analytical chapters, each dedicated to one of the levels that Silva introduces. Every chapter will discuss a level and to what extent it can be found in *Come From Away*. As Silva describes her levels elaborately, I believe that by close reading the libretto of the musical, analysing the music and scenery and by using footage of the musical (a Broadway video recording of the original cast and the West End performance that I saw on March 12th, 2019), I will be able to elaborate on the interaction that is suggested and in doing so, form a clear view of the extent in which the levels are present in the music, scenery and libretto. As Silva structures her essay according to the levels, I have chosen to do the same and in the meantime analyse the musical as a whole. Silva's research is mainly text based, so I will additionally pay attention to the different aspects of musical – music, scenery or libretto – to figure out in what ways communication can be included in this different medium. Per chapter, I will explain which of the different aspects of the musical are of importance for that level. After four chapters of analysis, I will be able to conclude to what extent Silva's levels are present in *Come From Away*, subsequently concluding whether the musical follows or distances itself from Baudrillard's notion of the static image.

¹⁰ Silva (2015): 4.

Chapter 1: Actor / Audience

1.1 A new way of making meaning

The first level of interaction that Silva introduces is between actor and audience, in which she aims for audiences to become part of a performance through communication and interaction. 9/11 was an act of terror that shattered every existing boundary, so post 9/11 texts explore and question the – maybe renewed – roles of audiences, actors, and identities. In doing so, Silva says, the texts try to open up to new dynamic communication methods in which neither the audience nor the actor is the sole meaning maker.¹¹ This communication can be shaped in many forms, whether it is by creating shock like DeLillo's *Falling Man* does or by recreating the feelings that were felt during the attacks. In addition, going through the terror again – this time in a much more subtle and planned manner – gives the audience a chance to rethink their initial response to the horror.¹² This chapter will elaborate on ways in which *Come From Away* invites the audience to become part of the performance. These are mainly to be found in the libretto and the way *Come From Away* structures its plot on stage.

1.2 Structure

Firstly, *Come From Away* is inspired by – and relies on – the lives of the people that experienced the plot and the events that occurred during the terrorist attacks of September 11th. Therefore, it needs to be told truthfully (taking some dramatization into account). In essence, the story is told by the characters that speak directly to the audience and guide them through what happened in Gander during 9/11 and the following days.¹³ They do so by literally and chronologically explaining what happened. Every actor adds to the general story and together they sketch a timeline of the events and everything that came with it. The book, music and lyrics of the musicals have been created to tell a linear story all-together, one of the most clear characteristics of a book musical.¹⁴ This linear story, however, does not just exist of narrations and songs: the characters also frequently jump into a scene that is then played out or continued where the narration left off. In doing so, it is as if the characters invite the audience to join the events instead of just listening to them talk.

1.3 Chronological timeline

To be sure that the audience doesn't feel lost and is able to connect the story to personal memories, the actors frequently announce a time or date, mostly at the beginning of a scene. This firstly happens in the third song called Blankets and Bedding:

Janice: "11:53 A.M."

All: "Tuesday."

¹¹ Silva (2015): 6.

¹² Silva (2015): 7.

¹³ S.n. (2017) *Come From Away Digital Lyric Booklet*. <https://themusicalcompany.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/CFA-digital-lyric-booklet-4-5.pdf> (2 April 2019): 6.

¹⁴ Woolford (2012): 22.

Janice: “September 11th, 2001. Any available community buildings will be converted into shelters. With thousands of passengers arriving at any minute, the town is asking for help with – well, anything you can do...”¹⁵

Janice starts by telling the audience what time and date it is. When she starts the sentence ‘Any available community buildings...’, all lights dim except one single spotlight aimed at her. She raises a microphone with the logo of a TV station to her mouth and speaks about the soon-to-be arriving passengers. It creates the illusion of a television broadcast in which Janice reports the news. Her report is no longer directly aimed at the audience, but at the people that supposedly watch Janice’s report on a television broadcast from September 11th. Instead of telling the audience what happened, the cast is now playing the scene to show the audience.

1.4 Narrative style

During the song Costume Party, we see the plane passengers after spending their first night in Gander. The local community has donated clothes for them to wear which they put on as soon as they wake up. Hannah, Diane, Kevin T. and Kevin J. sing, but when Nick enters the stage, the lyrics pause to emphasize Nick’s presence and give him space to speak.

Nick (to the audience): “I wake up in a crowded room full of people sleeping on the floor and I see Diane and ask, ‘Are we leaving?’”¹⁶

As soon as he says “I see Diane and ask”, he jumps into the scene that continues after his sentence to the audience. In doing so, his question “Are we leaving?” is directed at Diane, not the audience.

Diane: “Any time now”

Nick: “Is your hair different? I mean... you look good. I like it.”

Diane: “Hm! Thank you! No shampoo for three days.”¹⁷

We don’t get to see more of their rendezvous, as Kevin T. turns to the audience and tells them his part of the story of that morning.

Kevin T: “They start handing out clothes to anyone who needs them”

Kevin J: “I haven’t changed my clothes in 39 hours”

Bob: “I wanted to burn my socks”

Kevin J: “Kevin puts on this plaid thing. He says he’s ‘incognito’ and that he’s going to ‘blend in with the natives’, but he just looks like a gay lumberjack”¹⁸

¹⁵ S.n. (2017) *Come From Away Digital Lyric Booklet*. <https://themusicalcompany.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/CFA-digital-lyric-booklet-4-5.pdf> (2 April 2019): 15.

¹⁶ S.n. (2017) *Come From Away Digital Lyric Booklet*. <https://themusicalcompany.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/CFA-digital-lyric-booklet-4-5.pdf> (2 April 2019): 25.

¹⁷ Idem.

¹⁸ Idem.

1.5 Actor or narrator

This manner of shifting between acting out scenes and speaking about them to the audience is the narrative style of the entire musical. It invites the audience to stay alert, because it feels as if the actors speak to them directly. Moreover, by breaking the fourth wall the actors acknowledge the existence of the audience, therefore validating their presence, backgrounds and stories. By having each actor narrate at some point in the story, it feels as if a conversation is opened.

According to historian Lawrence Stone, described in *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, narrative requires a few key elements: chronological organization (not excluding temporal shifts), dominant presence of a particular story (though this can be folded into a primary one), human agents and particularities rather than generalities. What we need in a narrative differs per story, though, as some background information may already exist in our discourse.¹⁹ In the case of *Come From Away* it is superfluous to elaborately describe the context in which it is set, as 9/11 has its set position in our cultural memory. *Come From Away* seems to meet the requirements of chronological organization, human agents and particularities rather than generalities. This last element ties in with an element that is less fulfilled: dominant presence of a particular story. *Come From Away* tells twelve individual stories – that fold into a primary story of which no context needs to be given – but there is not one character that takes the lead. In doing so, every human agent has an equal part in the story. The audience is therefore also served with many particularities instead of generalities. Every personal story ties in with the general story and all the personal particularities create a chronological timeline together, however this narrative form does not correspond to Stone's requirements of the perfect narrative.

It also does not correspond with the role of the narrator that Millie Taylor and Dominic Symonds introduce in their book *Studying Musical Theatre: Theory and Practice*, in which only one character introduces characters, scenes or situations and in doing so exists close to the world of the audience instead of the theatrical space that's distant and fictional.²⁰ Instead of one specific narrator that lives outside of the story, *Come From Away* has twelve part-time narrators that at all times jump in and out of the theatrical space to start, stop or continue a scene that relates to what they have just told the audience. Furthermore, by having multiple part-time narrators, every actor gets the chance to momentarily step outside the theatrical space to – again – get closer to the audience.

1.6 To conclude

Come From Away tells its version of 9/11's story again, giving the audience the opportunity to critically reflect on the horror and their feelings from that day. As described earlier, the musical does so by taking some of the classic elements of narration, but also very cleverly distances itself from it to insert more means of communication. By directly speaking to the audience, their existence is acknowledged and validated. Theatre perfectly lends itself to this interactive and dynamic communication that's needed to rethink and re-open the interpretation of the attacks, and does so fluently by using the presence of both the actors and audience in a performance. Through playing out the story, it invites the audience to relive and remember their own stories. By inviting

¹⁹ Knapp (2011): 11.

²⁰ Taylor (2014): 200.

different perspectives, the musical does not claim to hold one truth. In doing so, *Come From Away* thus seems to rely on the communication between audience and actor a lot.

Chapter 2: Text / Reader

2.1 ‘Fill in the blanks’

Post 9/11 texts act as complexly as the original event, Silva says. By doing this, they force readers to rethink and interact with the attacks on an intimate level. The texts mix different styles and techniques to try to resemble the initial effect of confusion and fragmentation that 9/11 had on Americans: “The text mimics ‘uncertainty’ and ‘fragmentation’ and, instead of giving answers to confusion, recreates the blank spaces of 9/11 for readers to fill in. This ‘fill in the blank’ move creates a new dialogue between the text and its readers”.²¹ The blank spaces Silva talks about can be interpreted in numerous ways: they can for example mean only hearing snippets of conversation (this happens in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* when Oscar overhears a conversation between his mother and his psychologist), but can also aim at more abstract notions like the confusion and ignorance people experienced shortly after the attacks (in this way, feeling uncertain and not having all the answers represent the blank spaces). In *Come From Away*, however, the blank spaces appear on a quite shallow level: gaps have been snuck into the performance by leaving things unspoken or by only showing parts of a story. This chapter will elaborate on concrete examples of these blank spaces, which are mostly found in the libretto and scenery.

2.2 Hannah’s phone calls

A clear example of a ‘fill in the blank’ move is the phone calls that Hannah makes. In the search of her son, she leaves message after message for anyone she can reach. When she finally speaks to someone, you only hear her part of the story.

Hannah: “I am here – I am here on an island. Hello? Hello! It’s me again. Yeah, my son – He’s with rescue two – any news? I am his mother, I’m far away, stuck here. I’m trying to find out if – fine, I’ll hold again. I should be down there and checking the hospitals (...) I’m telling you – Listen! – My son – He takes risks, he’s not missing, he’s helping or hurt, he’ll get out of this. – Yes, I’ll keep trying and yes, here’s the number and yes, at the legion in Gander, I’ll be right here.”²²

The answers she receives on the phone cannot be heard, but have to be extracted from the follow-up questions Hannah asks. In this case it is not difficult to extract a general idea of the answers Hannah receives, but still the performance demands the audience’s attention to complete the story.

²¹ Silva (2015): 16.

²² S.n. (2017) *Come From Away Digital Lyric Booklet*. <https://themusicalcompany.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/CFA-digital-lyric-booklet-4-5.pdf> (2 April 2019): 27-29.

2.3 Scenery

Another way in which the performance demands the audience to be alert and fill in the blanks, lies in the way the story is visually presented: the scenery. According to Dana Heller, post 9/11 literatures need to be self-aware of their visuality as images played a major role in the – both direct and long term – aftermath of the attacks.²³ Every choice that is made regarding visuals thus had to be thought through well. Stage designer Beowulf Boritt touches upon this matter in an interview with Broadway World: “It’s such a delicate emotional subject to touch. (...) When we first started working on it, I think my core instinct was to find a way to acknowledge that without being too on the nose or frankly, offensive. You can’t touch it lightly in any way”.²⁴

The majority of the stage is empty. The background is a dark blue shade in which two doors can be opened (to either represent a plane door or a café entrance, see also image 8 in appendix B). On the sides of the stages, behind a few trees, the audience sees the band play the music live. On the floor, different tables and chairs are positioned. During the performance, the actors perform a very strict choreography of moving the chairs and tables to represent the different locations, amongst which a plane (see image 1 in appendix B), a bus (see image 2 and 3 in appendix B), a church (see image 4 in appendix B), a bar (see image 5 in appendix B), a cafe (see image 6 in appendix B), a dormitory (see image 7 in appendix B) or a cliff (see image 9 in appendix B). There is one chair on wheels: used by Beverley Bass as she moves across the stage during scenes and thus needs to be able to move while sitting down. There are some props, but a lot of the visuals are imaginary too: the bus drivers hold imaginary steering wheels and people hold phones that are not connected to wires. Mostly, though, the audience needs to join the cast’s imagination and draw the conclusion that the chairs in different positions are portraying different locations.

This style of set design is what Julian Woolford, dramaturg and MA in Musical Theatre at Goldsmiths College, would describe as a mixture between abstract and suggestive: although no specific period or location is depicted, certain elements are still realistically represented to create the suggestion of a space.²⁵ This suggestion of said spaces, however, remains vague. Beowulf Boritt himself has described it as a ‘no-set show’.²⁶ The scenery in itself does not give much away about the story. It is not until the actors sit down on the chairs or move in a particular way that the audience realizes the location in which the scene is set – and fills in the blank.

2.4 Television screen

When the plane passengers arrive in Gander, they are welcomed by Beulah. She shows them where they can find beds, clothing and food, but the characters are only interested in hearing what actually

²³ Heller (2005): 7.

²⁴ Rosky, Nicole. (2017) *Broadway By Design: Beowulf Boritt and Toni-Leslie James Bring COME FROM AWAY from Page to Stage*. <https://www.broadwayworld.com/article/Broadway-By-Design-Beowulf-Boritt-and-Toni-Leslie-James-Bring-COME-FROM-AWAY-from-Page-to-Stage-20170416>. (3 April 2019).

²⁵ Woolford (2012): 186.

²⁶ Rosky, Nicole. (2017) *Broadway By Design: Beowulf Boritt and Toni-Leslie James Bring COME FROM AWAY from Page to Stage*. <https://www.broadwayworld.com/article/Broadway-By-Design-Beowulf-Boritt-and-Toni-Leslie-James-Bring-COME-FROM-AWAY-from-Page-to-Stage-20170416>. (3 April 2019).

happened. Beulah leads them to an imaginary television screen. All the characters face the audience and look over them, as if there's a screen hanging above their heads (see image 10 in appendix B).

Janice: "I didn't even think – they haven't seen any of it yet"

All (singing): "Lead us out of the darkness"

Hannah: "We're all staring at those images"

Beulah: "And we just stand helpless watching them"

All (singing): "Lead us somewhere to safety"

(...)

Kevin T: "We watch those images for hours."

They all suddenly react in shock.

Kevin T: "Until someone finally turns it off"²⁷

Even though it is not specified what Kevin T. means by 'those images', there's no doubt that everyone in the audience knows which images they are watching. The images that were repeated over and over again are still very well imprinted in our own memory. Moreover, it's clear that the characters are watching a television broadcast, even though the audience does not see a screen. It is because Beulah told them she would show them what had happened and because the images of 9/11 are so well-known, the audience can quite easily figure out what is happening. On the day of the attacks American citizens watched an average of eight hours of television news coverage, so it's important for *Come From Away* to have this self-awareness and perform with it in its restaging of 9/11.²⁸

2.5 Language barrier

Another 'fill in the blank' move in *Come From Away* revolves around language barriers. There are numerous occasions in *Come From Away* in which characters and/or the audience are faced with this barrier. An example is the conversation Ali has on the phone, which will later be described in paragraph 3.2.2, and the distress Muhumuza feels when he and his family are not able to understand the English language, but can also not make themselves comprehensible to the Gander residents. The language difference is, however, also a celebration of differences and portrayed as a beautiful thing. An example of this is the song Prayer, in which Kevin T. recognizes an old hymn from church and sings it with Hannah. Then a Rabbi joins them with prayer, and soon Ali and other Hindu passengers join as well.

Kevin T. and Hannah: "Make me a channel of your peace / where there's despair in life, let me bring hope / where's there's darkness only light / and where there's sadness / ever joy"

Rabbi: "Oseh Shalom Bim'romav / hu ya'aseh shalom aleinu / v'al kol yisrael / v'imru, v'imru amen / There is a man here in town. He's lived here nearly his entire life. He heard that there was a Rabbi diverted here and he came to find me and tell me his story"²⁹

²⁷ S.n. (2017) *Come From Away Digital Lyric Booklet*. <https://themusicalcompany.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/CFA-digital-lyric-booklet-4-5.pdf> (2 April 2019): 29.

²⁸ Heller (2005): 7.

²⁹ Oseh Shalom is a Hebrew prayer for peace.

Actor 11: “I was born in Poland, I think. And my parents – they were Jews – they sent me here before the war started – I still remember some of the prayers they taught me. As a boy, I was told I should never tell anyone I was Jewish. Even my wife. But after what happened on Tuesday – so many stories gone – just like that. I needed to tell someone”

Ali: “During El-Fagir, when most people are asleep it is easier to pray. But at Dhuhur, I can feel them watching me. Sometimes I catch them when they think I’m not looking – and I can see the fear in their eyes”

Annette: “Excuse me? Beulah wanted me to check on you. The library’s open – for anyone looking for some peace - and a quiet place to pray”³⁰

They then all sing and the languages (English, Arabic and Hindi) mix, creating a symphony of tongues that feels as if everyone is truly together. This fragment also functions as an extra level in acceptance: Beulah sending Annette to look for Ali, making sure that everybody’s religious needs are met, even though these needs might differ from their own.

Another meaning behind the different languages might be in regards to the notion that 9/11 exceeded and ruined all language, which means that after the attacks, new words had to be found in order to vocalize and capture into words what had happened. This notion of helplessness, the concept of not being able to make yourself comprehensible, can be linked to the language barriers portrayed in *Come From Away*. “If the event is seemingly outside of language, definitions and possession, how is it to be represented?”, Silva says. Without having interaction, exchanges and new modes of communication, there would be no comprehending and recognition. Moreover, the performance would remain static and therefore out of reach.³¹ Making sure that a way in which everyone can communicate is found, is essential to exceed the static image of the event. Besides, telling the story in this way can also be an enhancement of an audience’s own thoughts and desires, John Russel Brown says in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Theatre*: “The ability to transcend difficulties of verbal language and customs, to use the apparently simplest of means – a person’s hand or face, an inarticulate cry, an empty space – (...) theatre has learnt how to draw these means together for moments of performance that can seem an enhancement of an audience’s own thoughts and desires”³² In this way, exceeding boundaries of language can be of great value in interpreting and dealing with post 9/11 distress that the audience might carry.

2.6 To conclude

As shown, the creators of *Come From Away* have left blank spaces in the musical for the audience to interact with. Having part of the story filled in and interpreted by the audience makes sure that the audience – the reader – does not get to sit back to watch a static image, but instead the performance – the text – needs the audience’s train of thought. This creates an extra level of communication. Leaving visuals and feelings of uncertainty for the audience to interpret, enables them to think beyond what’s presented to them and think of their own experiences and

³⁰ S.n. (2017) *Come From Away Digital Lyric Booklet*. <https://themusicalcompany.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/CFA-digital-lyric-booklet-4-5.pdf> (2 April 2019): 29.

³¹ Silva (2015): 14.

³² Brown (1995): 535.

uncertainties, while maybe recognizing some of character's feelings. Besides, by elaborately portraying the language barrier, cultural differences are emphasized to introduce the audience to fragmentation. Moreover, the language can be a barrier to the audience, as it's not able to understand what's being said, but it is also a difficulty for the characters. In this manner, both the characters and the audience face fragmentation and uncertainty, once again creating a bond between the two.

Chapter 3: Terrorist / Victim

3.1 Bringing back nuance

One of Silva's key points is reintroducing so-called 'complexities' back into the nuanced event that 9/11 has become in terms of its scope and consequences: "Opening up new communication pathways, post 9/11 texts formally act out the paradoxes and complexities that came to light through the original attack. They also offer themselves up as new stages of audience interaction and interpretation focusing on communication and communion rather than detachment and inertness"³³ Post 9/11 works need audiences to actively read the text – or in this case interpret the performance – as discussed in chapter two, in order to get rid of the binary thinking in categories as good and evil, or terrorist and victim. Trying to bring back nuance into an absolute tragedy might be controversial, but there are numerous moments in *Come From Away* in which the audience is faced with ignorance, racism and the binary way of thinking into good and bad. It is then up to them to conclude that nuance is needed in order to open up conversation.

3.2 Leitmotiv

The *Come From Away* soundtrack is based on traditional Newfoundland music and relies on instruments like bodhran, (Celtic) fiddles and mandolin. This is to further deepen the portrayal of Newfoundland and its authenticity, and to create a place that feels pleasant and like home. However, there is an element that stands out. Sankoff and Hein say the following about *Come From Away*'s music: "The hand drums from Newfoundland are contrasted with hand drums from Africa to find commonalities, fusing to create a musical metaphor that says we are greater together than apart"³⁴ At a few moments in the musical, an unsuspected motive can be heard. It has an oriental sound and relies on hand drums and a low whistle. We hear this motive only at times when Ali enters the stage or speaks. This recurrence of a musical theme can be traced back to Wagner's compositions:

"Numerous themes and motives that are each associated with a particular character, thing, event, or emotion. (...) Analysts since Wagner's time have called such a theme or motive a Leitmotiv (...) The Leitmotiv is a musical label, but it becomes much more than that through its symphonic treatments in the music drama."³⁵

³³ Silva (2015): 15.

³⁴ S.n. (2017) *Come From Away Digital Lyric Booklet*. <https://themusicalcompany.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/CFA-digital-lyric-booklet-4-5.pdf> (2 April 2019): 6.

³⁵ Burkholder (2014): 689-690.

This so-called Leitmotiv is often characterized by specific instruments, which in this case are the African hand drums. By integrating this motive in the music, emphasis is put on themes that need emphasizing. Although Hein and Sankoff claim the music is meant to say we are greater together than apart, in the beginning of the musical – and also when we hear the Leitmotiv for the first time – it is mostly used to sketch the distrust and the void and differences between people or groups. It is not until the Leitmotiv is repeated that the audience starts to recognize, make meaning of it and connect it to Ali.

3.3 Suspicion amongst the characters

When the attacks had just occurred and there was no clearance about the exact happenings, a lot of fragmentation was formed. The fear of not knowing what had happened, whether every family member was safe and when the plane passengers could go home, made many of them suspicious. This suspicion – experienced by both Gander residents and plane passengers – is portrayed on numerous occasions in the musical.

3.3.1 On the bus

As the travellers finally get to exit the planes, they are taken to shelters by bus. We see the passengers distrust one of their co-travellers.

Claude: “11:48 P.M. Busses and drivers are now taking passengers to shelters (...)”

Passenger 12: “Our bus sits there forever”

Passenger 5: “While all the others leave”

Passenger 4: “Finally, this other passenger gets on”

Passenger 11: “This guy from the Middle East”

Passenger 2: “Someone says he got questioned”

Passenger 7: “Someone says he got searched”

Passenger 1: “And now... he’s on our bus”³⁶

Later, in the song On the Bus, Garth is not feeling very comfortable with his passengers. It’s not just Garth that feels distress, though, as the people he distrusts are also in clear discomfort themselves. Everyone is scared, tired and might not speak English, so while communication runs short, tension rises.

Garth (to the audience): “Every school bus we got is goin’ back and forth all night. Out to the Salvation Army Camp, we’ve delivered passengers from Germany, England, and France. And around three in the morning, my bus is designated to take all these... African people out there”

Muhumuza: “My family and I try to see out the bus windows. No one tells us where we are going”

Garth: “Silence comes on the bus. We get outside of Gander and you could hear a pin drop”

³⁶ S.n. (2017) *Come From Away Digital Lyric Booklet*. <https://themusicalcompany.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/CFA-digital-lyric-booklet-4-5.pdf> (2 April 2019): 21.

Muhumuza: “My wife and daughter are scared. They ask me what is happening and I do not know”³⁷

Instead of trying to communicate, the passengers keep their feelings and thoughts to themselves and we see fragmentation take form. Not much later, this fragmentation escalates, leading to actual conflict. According to Richard Schechner, performance theorist and theatre director, this is no surprise, as “Both bin Laden and Bush reduced the complexities of the situation to a performative either/or by casting the other side as ‘evil’”.³⁸ Seeing both the media and politics cover the attacks in a binary manner, does not stimulate the people in Gander to do better.

3.3.2 “I am an American citizen”

After the plane passengers have arrived at their destination, there is dialogue between the passengers while they wait for phones to check on their loved ones. A fight breaks out.

Ali (on the phone): “Ana Kwayiss Alhamdullillah. El aakl hena helw awi. Hagga Faw’a el wassif. Lekin, fee ness, fee naass kateera hena, Be-yeboosooly akiny Irtakept gereema”

Passenger 11: “Hey. Hey! What the hell are you saying?”

Ali: “I beg your pardon?”

Passenger 11: “You celebrating this? You praying for your friends?”

Ali (into the phone): “MaaMa, Laazim ‘afil el sikha delwaa’ty salaam. Hahibik –”

Passenger 11: “Why doesn’t he speak English?”

Ali: “Excuse me?”

Passenger 8: “Are you telling your Muslim friends where to bomb next?”

Ali: “This was not all Muslims! And I was not –”

Passenger 11: “Go back where you came from!”

Passenger 2: “I’m Muslim and I was born in Connecticut! I’m an American citizen!”

Passenger 11: “You don’t look American”

Passenger 2: “What does that even mean?”³⁹

This is the most straight-forward example of the racism some of the plane passengers were faced with during their stay in Gander. We see passenger 2, a black woman, bravely attempting to stand up for Ali, but passenger 11 is not having it. To him every non-white person is likely to be Muslim and all Muslims are likely to be terrorists. His behaviour embodies the binary that’s still shaped in this part of the musical – and was also very much shaped during the actual attacks in which the non-white people in Gander were (scared to be) faced with racism. In doing so, this example is both an example of the blunt racism as it is an example of the first trials to break the binary division.

³⁷ S.n. (2017) *Come From Away Digital Lyric Booklet*. <https://themusicalcompany.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/CFA-digital-lyric-booklet-4-5.pdf> (2 April 2019): 21.

³⁸ Schechner (2002): 265.

³⁹ S.n. (2017) *Come From Away Digital Lyric Booklet*. <https://themusicalcompany.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/CFA-digital-lyric-booklet-4-5.pdf> (2 April 2019): 31.

3.3.3 “Be anxious for nothing”

When Garth arrives at the Salvation Army camp, the Gander residents have put on their Salvation army camp uniforms, but Muhumuza interprets these as soldier uniforms, which makes him even more scared. Not being able to understand one another or explain the situation is the main issue, until Garth finds a clever solution.

Muhumuza: “There are soldiers everywhere”

All: “Pande zote sisi”⁴⁰

Muhumuza: “The man at the front opens the door”

Garth: “I say, ‘here you are. Out you go!’ . But he doesn’t understand. And he’s not getting off. None of them are”

All (singing): “Giza na miti”⁴¹

Garth: “But then I notice his wife – well, she’s clutching a Bible. Now, obviously I can’t read it, but their bible – it’ll have the same number system ours does – so I ask to see it and I’m searching for something and then in Philippians 4:6. I give ‘em their bible and I’m pointing, saying, look! Philippians 4:6 – Be anxious for nothing. Be anxious for nothing”

Garth and Muhumuza: “And that’s how we started speaking the same language”⁴²

This is the first moment in the musical that the initial distrust is passed and we see the characters bond and find solutions to the language barrier, and in doing so show more humanity and solidarity. The binary between good/bad, trust/distrust, terrorist/victim seems to start to fade.

3.3.4 “I am an international chef”

Another subtle storyline that highlights the initial distrust is between Beulah and Ali. Beulah is in charge of food and although I believe she has every right intention, she ignorantly judges people based on their appearance and turns Ali down when he offers his help.

Beulah: “There’s this one man – from The Middle East – well, we don’t really know. Hasn’t said a word to a soul – and some of the other passengers seem a bit wary of him. So it’s a little odd to find him poking around the kitchen”

Ali: “Hello”

Beulah: “Hello. Can I help you with something?”

Ali: “I would like to be of assistance with the food”

Beulah: “Oh, no. That’s not necessary”

Ali: “But I am –”

Beulah: “Really. You go out there and sit down”⁴³

⁴⁰ This translates to ‘All around us’ from Chichewa, a language that is spoken in Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Zambia.

⁴¹ This translates to ‘Darkness and Trees’ from Chichewa.

⁴² S.n. (2017) *Come From Away Digital Lyric Booklet*. <https://themusicalcompany.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/CFA-digital-lyric-booklet-4-5.pdf> (2 April 2019): 22.

⁴³ S.n. (2017) *Come From Away Digital Lyric Booklet*. <https://themusicalcompany.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/CFA-digital-lyric-booklet-4-5.pdf> (2 April 2019): 25.

A little later, Ali tries again. Beulah is still not fond of having him around, but when she lets Ali speak, she is faced with her own judgemental behaviour and ignorance.

Ali: “Miss Beulah. Please let me help with the food.”

Beulah: “No, m’love – you’re a guest –”

Ali: “Please. I am a master chef for an international hotel chain – I oversee restaurants around the world. I would like to help with the food”

Beulah: “Get in there!”⁴⁴

Ali learns about traditional Newfoundland dishes and soon the suspicion between Ali and Beulah seems to have faded. They bicker about the recipes and turn their different cultural backgrounds into a joke by laughing at the seemingly weird traditional Newfoundland dishes that Beulah loves, like fish combined with cheese. At the end of the musical, when the passengers have returned home, the Gander residents tell the audience that they keep receiving thank-you cards from the plane passengers. Ali has sent one to Beulah.

Ali: “Dear miss Beulah. When my daughter asks about what happened to me over those five days, I tell her about your kindness. Thank you again. Sincerely, Ali. P.S.: Please send me the recipe for the fish and the cheese.”⁴⁵

3.4 To conclude

In comparison to the first dialogue between them, and also in comparison to the racism that is described in paragraph 3.2.2, this last quote feels like closure and proof that the characters have developed, learned and now love instead of distrust. This same development is asked from the audience. The examples from paragraph 3.3 are from situations that still happen nowadays and might have happened to or because of audience members. Being confronted with the blunt ignorance of some characters and maybe recognizing themselves in the characters, requires the audience to self-reflect and rethink their actions. Silva writes about the need to self-reflect in order to regain the complexity that was lost in the political performances following 9/11: “Audiences are asked to engage with the text not only through physical movement and immediate response that comes from the physical act of scanning a page, but also through critical analysis. (...) Interactive texts require readers to wrestle with meanings as well as physically engage with the text in such a way that readers can add their voices to the convoluted theater of 9/11.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ S.n. (2017) *Come From Away Digital Lyric Booklet*. <https://themusicalcompany.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/CFA-digital-lyric-booklet-4-5.pdf> (2 April 2019): 32.

⁴⁵ Ashley, Christopher (director). *Come From Away* by David Hein and Irene Sankoff. Phoenix Theatre, London. Live performance of March 12th, 2019.

⁴⁶ Silva (2015): 15.

Chapter 4: Reality / Fiction

4.1 Reinventing boundaries

According to Ann Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn, post 9/11 texts explore ‘the space between the real and the imagined, between image and trope, and between the private realm of memory and the public realm of history.’⁴⁷ After 9/11, all existing boundaries of fiction and reality needed to be reinvented. As has already been elaborately discussed in this thesis, post 9/11 texts play a major role in reinventing, reinterpreting and making meaning of the attacks and their aftermath and in that manner also in the ‘new’ boundaries of reality. Silva further builds on this fiction / reality field of tension by elaborating on it as the fourth communication level in her essay. To make sense of the attacks, she says, artistic representations must push boundaries, therefore exploring the relationship between fiction and reality.⁴⁸ Through acting and uncovering the anxieties that came with 9/11 and its aftermath, the audience is able to witness the story, process their contradictory feelings and interpret the show.⁴⁹ What happens, however, when the story that’s presented to the audience is not fiction, but a representation of true events? This last chapter will explore to what extent the division between reality and fiction is presented in *Come From Away*. Mostly this division is to be found in the libretto and it can also be traced back to the process of creating the musical. Therefore, this chapter will touch upon the creators and the making-of the musical, too.

4.2 Based on a true day

Many texts, including Silva’s essay and this thesis, elaborately explain the ways in which works of fiction can help reinvent and reinterpret. In the case of *Come From Away*, however, there is an extra level as instead of presenting the audience with a work of fiction, *Come From Away* is completely based on true events and existing people. Irene Sankoff and David Hein were able to create a musical that not only honoured the interviewed people but also invited the audience to commemorate the attacks to make sure they will never be forgotten. They felt the pressure to do the event worthy, as writing about a day that impacted everyone alone is weighty enough, but basing the characters on real people that will see the show sooner or later added more to the sensitive task Sankoff and Hein took upon themselves and their actors: “‘To play a living person is one thing, but then to have that person present so often, and I can see her’, Ms. Colella (the actress portraying Beverly Bass, red.) said, ‘it’s trickier than anything I’ve ever done’”.⁵⁰ It’s safe to say that Sankoff and Hein did the stories justice, though, as the people that the characters are portrayed on have seen the shows multiple times and are touched and taken back every time they see it: “Using her free-flying privileges as a now-retired pilot, she has followed the musical’s developmental journey (...) often with other female pilots in tow. Ms. Bass is both watching the show and reliving the events, clutching her husband’s hand as the emotions return”.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Keniston & Follansbee Quinn (2008): 2.

⁴⁸ Silva (2015): 15.

⁴⁹ Idem.

⁵⁰ Paulson, Michael. (2017) *A Pioneering Pilot, a Broadway Show and a Life-Changing Bond*.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/16/theater/come-from-away-jenn-colella.html>. (3 April 2019).

⁵¹ Idem.

4.3 Based on existing characters

The twelve cast members of *Come From Away* are based on – and named after – people Sankoff and Hein met during their time in Gander.⁵² The actors, six male and six female, all play multiple roles in order to portray many people without needing an enormous cast. Generally speaking, every actor plays at least a plane passenger, someone from the flight crew and Gander resident. They also play the small roles that would elsewhere be done by an ensemble. They switch roles by changing costumes on stage, which asks for minimal and easy wardrobe changes that are still clear enough to witness. By inserting characters into cultural memories of the event, their cultural impact can be rethought, Silva says.⁵³ Thus, by having the characters go through 9/11 again, the audience gets a chance to relive, rethink and maybe reinterpret the stories and the way they have dealt with the attacks. The fact that the characters are based on real people that have lend their stories to Sankoff and Hein is an extra dimension to the story, making it more real to the audience that might be able to emphasize with the characters, thinking about the way they must have felt.

4.4 Imagination and communication

As mentioned before in paragraph 2.3, *Come From Away* demands quite some imagination from its audience. This has elaborately been explained in chapter 2, mostly regarding the notion of ‘fill in the blanks’. A lot of the objects that are used on stage are imaginary, leaving it up to the audience to interpret and form their own opinion. As Silva writes, sometimes going through the happenings a second time can help shape a new opinion or heal some trauma. *Come From Away* might be a good opportunity to do so, as the terrorist attacks are very central in the story, yet there is both a physical – it’s set in Newfoundland, not New York – and also emotional distance: we see the characters struggle, but no-one is directly involved and after all, the audience will be able to leave the theatre after two hours.

4.5 To conclude

Having a true story told on a daily basis by characters based on real people, expands Silva’s notion of reality and fiction. An important move in post 9/11 literatures, she says, is having the distance between fiction and reality collapse before the eyes of the audience.⁵⁴ *Come From Away* fades the boundary between fiction and reality by actively inviting the audience into the story and encouraging them to rethink their own experiences. However, *Come From Away* goes one step further than Silva describes in her essay, as the story that’s presented daily to filled theatres is not an act of fiction, but a remembrance and honouring of actual events. By presenting it to the audience with enough distance to not let it directly get to them, while simultaneously asking the audience to relive, rethink and reinterpret the story and their own experiences, the musical goes beyond the binary division of thinking in two categories of fiction and reality.

⁵² Hoagland, Heather. (s.a.) *Meet the people who inspired the characters of ‘Come From Away’*. <https://www.fords.org/blog/post/meet-the-people-who-inspired-the-characters-of-come-from-away/> (3 April 2019).

⁵³ Silva (2015): 19.

⁵⁴ Silva (2015): 12.

Conclusion

The central question to this research is whether Elise Silva's levels of communication in post 9/11 works can be found in the musical *Come From Away*. To be able to answer this question, I turned to an article by Elise Silva that was published in 2013 in which she researches the relationship between several post 9/11 works and the static image according to Baudrillard's definition. Her work was mostly text-based, so to be able to analyse the notion of the static image in another medium I analysed both the libretto, music and scenery of the musical. Most of the elements of interaction examples that were given come from the musical's libretto. Music seems to play a supporting role, as does the scenery, but the main aspect in which Silva's levels can be found is the text. This does not come as a surprise, firstly because Silva aimed her own research – and the levels that came with it – mostly on text-based works, but furthermore because a text-based medium might be the most suitable for this kind of interaction and communication. After all, language is our main form of communication. I do, however, think theatre – and musical theatre in particular, as it has both the music and scenery to support the text – is an excellent medium for communication. By literally having an audience and actors in the same room, interaction is within reaching distance. Moreover, the combination of scenery, music, libretto leaves the audience with a weightier impression than text alone is capable of doing. Besides, in this musical where the audience might feel addressed or confronted with uncomfortable feelings, theatre has a way of grasping its audience to keep paying attention whereas a book can simply be closed with the smallest movement of a hand.

In four subsequent chapters I analysed the four levels Silva introduces: actor / audience, text / reader, terrorist / victim, and reality / fiction. A connection between *Come From Away*'s actors and their audiences turned out to be funded by the structure and the way the musical is narrated. By having every character step into the role of narrator at one point, but also by switching between telling about storylines and then proceeding to play them out, the audience's presence is confirmed while they are encouraged to actively join the characters in their thoughts and acts. The second level, text / reader or the so-called 'Fill in the blanks' can also elaborately be found in the musical. Either be it by hearing only part of a conversation, experiencing language barriers or by having to imagine objects like television screens, the audience is expected to stay alert and connect some dots to follow the plot. In the case of the television screens there is another level asked from the audience as they not only have to imagine a screen hanging above their heads, but they can also fill in what images this screen displays to the characters. Because of the excessive media coverage and the repetition of the same images, the audience can find the answer to the musical's blank in the real world. In this way, reality and fiction is mixed, connecting this example to the fourth level too. This level can mostly be found in the story and creation of the musical. After all, it is based on a true story and told with characters that are strongly based on existing people that actually lived the story. Having a faded boundary between fiction and reality, *Come From Away* invites its audience to mix its own stories and memories with those of the characters. It also offers them an opportunity to hear other sides of the stories that they might not know them and potentially even confront them to nuance some of their memories. This perfectly ties in with the terrorist / victim level, as during the musical a few of the characters have to adjust their opinions and set aside their prejudice.

Having these characters admit they were wrong and introducing the audience to multiple perspectives invites them to do the same. The first scenes in *Come From Away* show quite the distrust and suspicion from both the Gander residents and the plane passengers, mostly because of racist prejudices and language barriers. This suspicion is emphasized by a musical leitmotiv that encourages the audience to notice the theme. At the climax of the tension, we see conflict between Ali and conservative American citizens when Ali doesn't speak English on the phone. Quickly after this confrontation, however, the initial suspicion between the characters seems to fade. Ali and Beulah become friends and people start to stand up for one another. By confronting the audience with a fight and unconcealed racism, there is no option for the audience to look the other way. Furthermore, by first showing distrust and then seeing what people can accomplish when they nuance, admit they were wrong, communicate, and let their guard down, the audience is encouraged to do the same.

Come From Away is not one of those moral stories that has one happily-ever-after conclusion after which the audience leaves the theater with a smile. Still, the musical warms hearts. I think the most valuable aspect in accomplishing this is showing the audience a story in which they can interpret their own stories. The audience is introduced to existing people, real stories and actual struggles they were faced with. Instead of then pushing them towards a conclusion or presenting them with a right or a wrong, the musical leaves it up to the audience to take from it what they want, all the while honouring the victims of, and raising awareness for, the terrible deeds of September 11th, 2001, that should never be forgotten.

Concluding this research, I believe it can be claimed that Silva's four communication levels can very well be found in the musical and thus it can be said that *Come From Away* distances itself from the static image that Baudrillard introduced regarding the excessive media coverage that followed the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, and turned the attacks into a neutralized, symbolic, static and hollow image. This comes to no surprise: before and during this research I very well had the feeling that the four levels were present in the musical, partly because during the performance I saw it is impossible not to feel the connection that the actors try to make with the audience and partly because Silva already showed that post 9/11 works tend to contain the four levels. What did enlighten me, however, was researching in what exact ways the connection is made and seeing the way characters and plot lines developed. Therefore it has been very valuable to analyse the four levels separately and discover their recurrences. Finding that the levels recurred frequently, *Come From Way* seems to follow Silva's expectations that makers of post 9/11 works henceforth will put emphasis on incorporating interaction and communication into their work. Whether it is by reawakening audience's trauma like with *Falling Man* or by elaborately addressing the feelings of losing someone like Jonathan S. Foer does in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, drawing the audience's attention to their own presence and feelings from the day of the attacks seems a trend that *Come From Away* follows. I encourage further research on the development of this 'trend' and the potential change in our cultural memory that Silva aims for – if post 9/11 works from now on incorporate communication and interaction into their plot, one would suggest that in a few years our own interpretation will have blended with the static visuals we now have in mind. In this manner, we will commemorate the attacks and honour what was lost while simultaneously

healing from the wounds that were created. Art can be of great value in doing so, but will not succeed on its own. As I have tried to prove in this thesis, the presence of an audience that interprets, communicates and interacts is essential to break down the objectified stage and the static spectacle. In this respect I accompany Elise Silva in the conclusion of her research and the essence of post 9/11 works, as she claims that “breaking this stage is the first step in not only understanding and responding to these events ethically, but also healing from them”.⁵⁵ This, however, could be found in – and concluded from – *Come From Away* itself from the very beginning:

*“When the sun is setting and it’s darker than before / If you’re hoping for a harbour then you’ll find an open door / In the winter from the water through whatever’s in the way / To the ones who have come from away, we say / Welcome to the Rock.”*⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Silva (2013): 20.

⁵⁶ S.n. (2017) *Come From Away Digital Lyric Booklet*. <https://themusicalcompany.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/CFA-digital-lyric-booklet-4-5.pdf> (2 April 2019): 42.

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Appendix A: Character scheme

| Name | Character type | Job/occupation | Important remarks |
|------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| Garth | Gander resident | Bus driver | Quits his strike to transfer the plane passengers to shelters |
| Annette | Gander resident | Teacher | |
| Claude Elliott | Gander resident | Mayor | |
| Janice Mosher | Gander resident | News reporter | September 11 th is her first day at her new job. |
| Bonnie Harris | Gander resident | SPCA worker | Looks after the animals on the planes, married to Doug |
| Oz Fudge | Gander resident | Police constable | |
| Doug | Gander resident | Veterinarian | Helps Bonnie care for the animals |
| Beulah Davis | Gander resident | Teacher | In charge of food, forms a friendship with Hannah |
| Kevin Tuerff | Plane passenger | CEO of a marketing firm | In a relationship with Kevin Jung |
| Beverly Bass | Plane pilot | Pilot | First female pilot for American Airlines |
| Bob | Plane passenger | | Is very suspicious of all the unknown people, but slowly lets his guard down |
| Ali | Plane passenger | Chef for an international hotel chain | Is faced with a lot of racism |
| Kevin Jung | Plane passenger | Secretary | In a relationship with Kevin Tuerff |
| Nick Marson | Plane passenger | Works in the oil business | On his way to a conference, falls in love with Diane |
| Hannah O'Rourke | Plane passenger | | Hasn't found her son (a fire fighter in NY) yet, forms a friendship with Beulah |
| Diane Gray | Plane passenger | | Falls in love with Nick |
| Muhumuza | Plane passenger | | Does not speak English, travels with his wife and daughter |

Appendix B: Images of the scenery



Image 1: staging when a scene takes place in a plane.



Image 2: staging when a scene takes place in a bus.



Image 3: staging when a scene takes place in two buses (the drivers hold imaginary steering wheels).



Image 4: staging when a scene takes place in church.



Image 5: staging when a scene takes place in a bar.



Image 6: staging when a scene takes place in a café.



Image 7: staging when a scene takes place in a dormitory.



Image 8: this hatch in the back of the stage symbolizes a plane entrance. Bonnie finds the animals on the plane here. On the right the outline of a door that can open (to symbolize the entrance of a café or church) can be seen too.



Image 9: staging when Nick and Diane stand on the edge of a cliff shortly before they leave Gander.

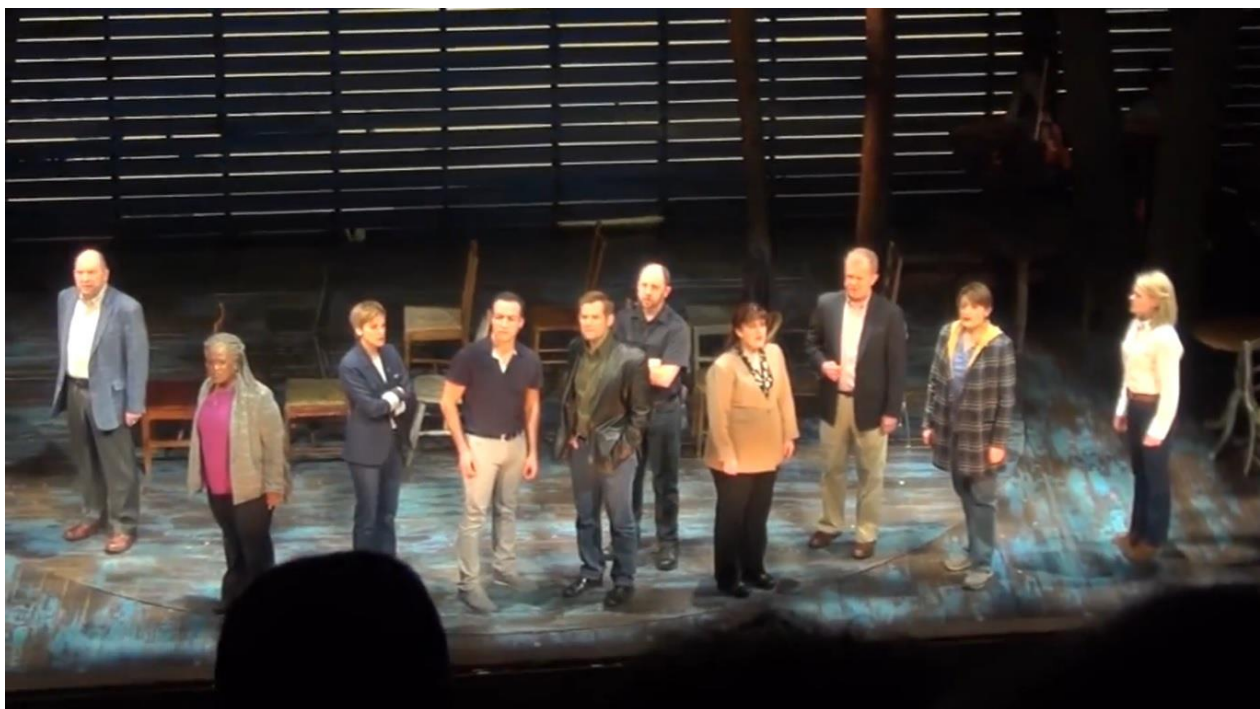


Image 10: the characters all look over the audience as if there is a television screen hanging there.