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AMERICAN DISASTERS

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"Piecing Together What History Has Broken to Bits"

Air Florida Flight 90 and the PATCO Disaster

Ralph James Savarese

History, wrote the German-Jewish critic Walter Benjamin in 1940, is "one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage." Inspired by Benjamin's hope of jolting history out of its catastrophic standstill, Ralph James Savarese seeks the utopian possibilities in the 1982 Air Florida crash in Washington, D.C.—in the heroism of the mysterious "man in the water" who came to the rescue of his fellow passengers and the convict–con artist who posed as a priest to comfort the bereaved families of the victims. Defying the formal conventions of traditional history and criticism, Savarese creates a "remembrance" of the disaster that is both imagistic and analytical. His essay juxtaposes scenes of the crash with descriptions of Ronald Reagan's ruthless suppression of the air traffic controllers' strike a few months earlier, discussions of the history of aviation, and illuminating references to Sigmund Freud, Herman Melville, Karl Marx, Walker Percy, and others who have ruminated on trauma and rescue.

Washington is a sad city. It is depressed. It is stunned and it is cold and its faith in the future is shaken. The economy is rotten and the federal government is cutting back and unemployment has spread to white-collar jobs and the Potomac River is a morgue for people who were heading for the sun. . . . There's been a plane crash, a train crash. A town that works for the federal government has been told over and

over by its boss, the president of the United States, that it's the enemy. The belief that government can do good is out of style. The belief that government ought to at least try to do good is also out of style. This administration does not want to even try. . . . In Washington, poor women walk miles for some free American cheese. They stand for hours in numbing temperatures and then, after having done that, they have to produce documents to certify their poverty. A day later, the administration parties in honor of Lynn Nofziger. The party cost something like $30,000. The paper brings a daily outrage, another dollop of insensitivity from the White House. The ears of Mrs. William French Smith dangle earrings that cost more than a house.[1]

—Richard Cohen

GRAND SPOILER

JANUARY 1998. The House of Representatives is debating a bill that would rename Washington National Airport in honor of Ronald Reagan. Perhaps worried about his own future memorialization, President Clinton has expressed support for the bill, as have a host of other Democratic congressmen and senators. Describing something very much like the phenomenon of traumatic recall, German-Jewish critic Walter Benjamin writes in "Theses on the Philosophy of History," "To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger."[2]

INSTRUMENT PANEL/AIRSPEED DISPLAY

January 13, 1982. On its way to Tampa, Florida, a Boeing 737 takes off from Washington National Airport after sitting for fifty minutes on the runway in a snowstorm without being adequately de-iced. A minute later, it plows into the 14th Street Bridge, thoroughly pulverizing four cars, then "dives" (as the headline in the *Washington Post* will put it) into the Potomac River. For a brief moment, its badly fractured fuselage floats eerily on the surface. Six people in the tail have survived: five passengers and a flight attendant. The people in the four cars have been killed.[3]

FIGURE 12.1. Salvage crews hoist the tail section of shattered Air Florida Flight 90 from the ice-choked Potomac River. (UPI/Corbis-Bettmann)

The rescue is being caught on videotape—to be replayed ceaselessly this late January afternoon and evening. As an article in the *Post* (titled "Views from the Bridge—and of It on TV") will state, rather nonchalantly, "Without benefit of television, those on the bridge saw the tragedy only once."[4] Indeed, what television viewer won't remember that large, metallic bird hovering above the wreckage, that dazed woman floundering again and again in the icy water, too weak to grab hold of the Park Police helicopter's lifeline?

COACH SEAT: 15A

In her introduction to *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Cathy Caruth proposes that "to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image," and she suggests that the "transformation of the trauma into a narrative memory that allows the story to be verbalized and communicated, to be integrated into one's own and others' knowledge of the past, may lose both the precision and the force that characterize traumatic recall." She worries, in other words (extrapolating from Freud), that the assimilation into consciousness of the disturbing event (image), the transformation of involuntary into voluntary memory, signals mastery, which ironically constitutes a kind of protective forgetting: prelude, perhaps, to a more literal or actual forgetting. As the epigraph for her book, Caruth presents a remark by an anonymous Vietnam veteran who, suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, movingly laments, "I do not want to take drugs for my nightmares because I want to remain a memorial to my dead friends."[5]

SIDEWALL DECORATIVE PANEL

Walter Benjamin, writing in the 1940s, pays particular attention to what allowed Freud to theorize the problem of shell shock in World War I: namely, an observation concerning dreams "characteristic of [railroad] accident neuroses which reproduce the catastrophe in which the patient was involved" and the speculation that such dreams "endeavor to master" the traumatic event "retroactively." Put simply, in Freud's model, dreams serve a dual purpose: they strive for the neutralization of the traumatic memory even as they traumatize the dreamer.[6]

In his allegorical appropriation of this framework for the task of writing capitalist history (to him, an unending disaster), Benjamin imagines delaying recovery for as long as possible—indeed, until it coincides with revolution. If "all reification is a forgetting," as T. W. Adorno insists in a letter to Benjamin in 1940—if the oppressive social relations of commodity capitalism constitute an injury that "we" at best perpetually recover from and at worst never even acknowledge—then Benjamin sets out with a nearly apocalyptic "blasting" operation to arrest this "continuum," to reopen any number of specific wounds.[7]

INTERPHONE HANDSET

A waterlogged flight attendant? A fallen angel? A panicked altar girl for the once fussy (now dead) consumer? What is she doing there on the screen, cleaving mid-sentence the incredulous narratives of the afternoon soaps, appearing exaltedly—though, for a split second, unidentifiably—as the content of a *Special Report*?

HORIZONTAL STABILIZER

"History," Benjamin declares, "*breaks down* into images not into stories."[8] By "stories" he means both the conventional narrative of progress (the official record of capitalist consciousness, with its barbarous elisions and technological triumphalism) *and* traditional, demystifying critique (the record's familiar reprimand, with its haughty presumption of repair and jejune depiction of human suffering and utopian desire).

COACH SEAT: 16C

Shortly after the crash, a media critic will assert, "We go to our televisions now in times of tragedy the way our ancestors used to go to churches and town halls. We have to watch it over and over." He will not fully sense, however, the way this repetition actually presages the dissolution of the arresting spectacle or the way such images remain compelling only as long as they remain tantalizingly enigmatic.

"The images lost none of their power," he will argue, "and made sense of the disaster in the kind of terrible ceremony that repetition gave them." Implicitly acknowledging the collective stream of consciousness that makes up afternoon and evening TV and suggesting that the Air Florida disaster managed precisely to rupture this ho-hum procession of soap-opera entanglements, talk show guests, one-minute messages from Hamburger Helper, Clear-Stick Antiperspirant ("so that no one can see you sweat"), and "lemon-fresh" Joy (not to mention later, on the evening news, reports of a deepening recession, rising interest rates, further layoffs, drug-related inner-city murders, a bank hold-up, etc.), and even appealing instinctively to lyric poetry for an adequate model of catastrophic articulation and remembrance, he will conclude, "'After the first death,' as poet Dylan Thomas once wrote, 'there is no other.' And after the crash there was nothing else to watch or think about as long as television had us there."[9]

SINGLE SERVE MEAL CART

What of the incongruity and allegorical implications of this uniformed cherub flailing in the water? Has she no poise, no marketing savvy, no commitment to the flight attendant handbook? How might the flailing woman's forebear, Ellen Church, the very first stewardess, have responded to this unexpected, certainly unscheduled, touchdown?

OVERHEAD STOWAGE BIN

Recognizing, in the words of Caruth, that trauma's power derives precisely from "the truth of its incomprehensibility," "the force of its affront to understanding," Benjamin also recognizes that, left to its own devices, a traumatic memory might, as Adorno said of Benjamin's early plan for a fundamentally imagistic critique, be "consumed by its own aura." In other words, while such a memory might certainly command a form of compulsive and disturbing attention, it might also inhibit specific comprehension. And any project of historical remembrance without some "mastery" would hardly be remembrance at all. As the notion of a simultaneously traumatizing and recuperative dream should make clear, Benjamin is interested finally in a position somewhere between injury and recovery, between memory and forgetting. After all, in "Theses on the Philosophy of History," he states that "historical materialism wishes to *retain* that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to a man singled out by history at a moment of danger," thereby implying the inclusion of a good deal of fairly conventional mediation. It seeks to retain "that image" while moving toward analytical clarity.[10]

FLIGHT ATTENDANT JUMPSEAT

In the 1930s, as Carl Solberg explains in *Conquest of the Sky*, the stewardesses for United Airlines (the first carrier to employ such caregivers) were all undercover nurses and rugged air enthusiasts. In a letter to company executives proposing his idea, Steve Simpson, manager of the San Francisco office, had written,

> Of course it would be distinctly understood that there would be no reference to their hospital training or nursing experience, but it would be a mighty fine thing to have available, sub rosa, if necessary for airsickness. Imagine the psychology of having young women as regular members of the crew. Imagine the national publicity we could get from it, and the tremendous effect it would have on the traveling public. Also, imagine the value they would be to us not only in the neater and nicer method of serving food but looking out for the passenger's welfare.

Of course, Simpson had failed to say anything about the "welfare" of his prospective stewardesses. Certainly no second set had been envisioned to take care of the first in the event of a different kind of "airsickness." Surveying the long history of "sky girl" unionization and pointing to the marketing that would sexually inflect these workers' economic objectification—in one ad from the late 1970s a female voice giddily exclaims, "We really move our tail for you!"—Georgia Nielsen cites a remark that perfectly captures the persistent attitude of airline management toward its ethereal employees: "Use them till their smiles wear out; then get a new bunch."[11]

ENGINE THRUST REVERSER

Joseph Corn reminds us in *The Winged Gospel: America's Romance with Aviation, 1900-1950* that the airplane was initially conceived as an instrument of social reform—though one abandoning the problems of capital, rising literally above them; an instrument "ending humanity's long and frustrating earthbound existence"; an instrument ushering in an "era beyond history when everything would be perfect, as in a utopia." Even more than the locomotive, it came cloaked in religious garb, what with the obvious, traditional association of flight with the divine and the irresistible (and updated) invitation to heavenly allegory: the pilgrim's *material* progress.[12]

OVERWING EMERGENCY EXIT

In an interview with Solberg, one of the original stewardesses for United speaks of planes frequently touching down in places unspecified by the official schedule. In one such landing in a wheatfield in Wyoming, "people," she says, "came in wagons and on horseback to see the plane. They'd never seen one before. They wanted to touch it and touch me."[13]

FUEL HOSE ASSEMBLY

A government employee on his way home from work stops his car and, seeing the woman, runs down to the river's edge. As scores merely look on passively at the drowning angel, the man jumps into the water and swims out to rescue her. "Her body just went limp," he will say. "I think she passed out. Her eyes rolled back and she started to go under. Something told me to go in after her." Later, this congressional budget office gopher and father of three, who makes $14,000 a year, will meet President Reagan at the White House and be proclaimed an American hero. In fact, two weeks after the crash, Reagan will again use the gopher as a potent symbol when, in another upgrade of sorts, he will be seated next to the First Lady during Reagan's high-flying State of the Union address. With the economy in recession, with the demise of all sorts of government aid programs, with homeless people camping out on the

streets of Washington, with an additional 1.25 million industrial jobs to be eliminated by year's end—with critics, in short, calling the first twelve months of his presidential stewardship a veritable disaster—Reagan will point to a beaming Lennie Skutnick (and, in effect, to the sunken airliner being lifted from the frigid Potomac), saying, "Don't let anyone tell you that America's best days are behind her. We've seen it triumph too often in our lives to stop believing in it now."[14]

FIRST-CLASS SEAT: 3B

Nearly six months before the crash, a strike was called by the least likely of unions: in fact, by one of the few—the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO)—that had voted for Reagan the previous year. PATCO had been demanding amelioration of a particularly debilitating commitment to "passenger welfare" that forced the average air traffic controller to retire as a result of stress-related disorders by the age of thirty-five.[15] A group of well-educated, relatively well-paid government employees had renounced their consumerist identities and reconceived of themselves as combatants in an old-fashioned labor struggle, and it had been met by a recalcitrant majority refusing to be inconvenienced and refusing to imagine any other social antagonists but the ones identified by the president. Those antagonists were, of course, communism abroad and greedy, self-interested labor unions at home.

At the very moment he was orchestrating massive government cuts, the president was branding the controllers, who were forbidden by law to strike, as neglecting their solemn governmental duty to serve the public and as jeopardizing the safety of "all Americans" (even, apparently, those who, by continuing to perform their jobs, would have been welcoming further psychological and bodily injury, and certainly those who, in their poverty, couldn't afford to fly). In what would become a recurring problem with memory, the Gipper had somehow forgotten that during the campaign he had explicitly promised to reform the FAA and, in doing so, to address the controllers' pressing concerns (including exactly the prospect of more aviation disasters). In the Cabinet Room, where a portrait of Calvin Coolidge hangs, Reagan spoke admiringly of Coolidge's brutal response to the Boston police strike of 1919, parroting his infamous remark: "There is no right to strike against the public any time, anywhere."[16]

PASSENGER BUSINESS CARD

Emphasizing the sheer potential of modern productive capabilities and, at the same time, the ceaseless assimilation of "the new" into the profit nexus, a younger Benjamin, in an earlier and less dire appropriation of Freud, described the goods of the nineteenth-century arcade, precursor to the shopping mall, as "wishful fantasies"—in effect, as the dozing century's utopian dreamwork. As images in a dream, the goods of the nineteenth-century arcade thus housed a distorted, even censored utopian wish. They actually reflected, Benjamin believed, a perverse awareness of the inequity and divisiveness of wage labor and capital accumulation and a desire for some truly collective alternative. Planning, in an early version of the *Arcades Project*, to mobilize a series of "found" dialectical images, Benjamin hoped to rescue the egalitarian promise of these once innovative commodities, which at the moment of their spectacular inception (that is, before they had become quotidian and, eventually, obsolete) had most clearly manifested the belief in a perfectible society and in the ability of industrial technology to bring it quickly about.[17]

Of course, an unconscious striving can be detected, as Benjamin himself implied, in almost any capitalist phenomenon, whether or not it is actually obsolete or even strictly a commodity: from the lipsticked pandering of lofty service workers to the agitated vigilance of air traffic controllers to, perhaps most compelling of all, the rapid transport innovations themselves. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century transport innovations functioned, after all, as *the* referents of progress, especially, according to Susan Buck-Morss, "as spatial movement became so wedded to the concept of historical movement that these could no longer be distinguished."[18] Through the creation and provisioning of distant markets, these engines of capital made possible the enticing merchandise and hellish factories of a consumer society, and in their continuous movement they majestically enacted, Benjamin would say, the paradox of an imperceptible historical standstill. They majestically enacted, that is, the energetic stasis—the parodic advancement—of commodity capitalism.

COACH SEAT: 26D

With the flailing woman rescued by the Congressional Budget Office gopher, the Park Police helicopter turns its attention to the passengers

clinging to the plane's tail—the only part of the plane that is not completely submerged. (Upon being salvaged, the tail will quickly receive a splash of paint as part of a marketing strategy designed to hide the insignia of the airline and thus to prevent it, in future wreckage photographs, from being associated with disaster. By some reports, the accident will end up costing the airline nearly 100,000 reservations and, eventually, bankruptcy itself.[19]) The passengers seem confused. As the helicopter's paramedic will later report, "At first they didn't understand what to do with the rope. I guess they were in shock. They just wanted to hold on to it."[20]

AFT TRASH BIN

In "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," when the younger Benjamin asserted that "ambiguity is the pictorial image of dialectics, the law of dialectics seen at a standstill," he was alluding to the arresting tension between an object's utopian potential and its inglorious utilization. And he was alluding additionally to the general cycle of frenzied innovation and obsolescence that produced one technological marvel after another but that, in failing to produce an egalitarian society, contributed instead to "the sterile continuum of the always the same" (or, as a nearly disconsolate Benjamin would put it in 1940 just before his death—actually hoping for some final, demonstrative calamity—to the "one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage" at the feet of the Angel of History). Similarly, when Benjamin stated that "this standstill is utopia, and the dialectical image is therefore a dream image," he was boldly characterizing his project's intended effect: a jolting intimation of the century's reified longing and, hence, of the possibility of genuine historical movement or belated revolutionary consciousness.[21]

EMERGENCY FIRST AID EQUIPMENT

"You want to know what being an air traffic controller is like?" Tina Clark asks sardonically in an interview with Bob Reiss. "Imagine 200 blind two-year-olds wandering around on the interstate, and you're driving 100 miles an hour and trying not to hit them." Another controller, in an interview with James Kaplan, reports that there can be as

many as 110 takeoffs and landings per hour at Kennedy Airport. "That's one every thirty seconds," he says, "and you have to make a couple of transmissions for each. Theoretically we are responsible in one hour for more lives than a doctor could be in his entire career, and billions of dollars in equipment."[22]

MAGAZINE RACK

The walkout received almost no support from the people whom the recession and, in particular, Reagan's policies were hurting the most. Like fish circling an outboard TV, they continued to swallow the culture's consumerist bait. Not only did they refuse to acknowledge the oppressive working conditions that undergirded air traffic control; they refused to distinguish at all between the material positions of the relatively well off (or middle-class) controllers and the material positions, for example, of the indisputably well off (or essentially upper-class) profiteers of Wall Street. Exhibiting an emblematically vicious and displaced resentment, Mary June, who at the time of the strike was earning $14,000 a year working with the mentally disabled and who would later become an air traffic controller at John F. Kennedy International, recollects with sublime incomprehension, "In 1981 I saw all this strike stuff about air traffic controllers on TV. And they were crying about making forty to fifty thousand a year. Soon as they all got fired, my husband went and got me an application." Robert Poli, President of PATCO, would struggle unsuccessfully to dispute this depiction of the controllers as "spoiled," at one point writing in a letter to the editor of the *Washington Post*, "In the past four years, nearly 90 percent of all controllers who have retired have not done so because they completed a long and rewarding career. Rather, they were forced from their profession because an FAA Flight Surgeon ruled that their health had deteriorated to the point that they could not be allowed to continue."[23]

COACH SEAT: 31C

After a while, amid the haze of falling snow and failing light, an elderly gentleman, a bald man whom *Time* magazine will dub "the man in the water," helps a woman to tie the rope around her body, then courteously passes it, after she is rescued, to his fellow survivors. This passenger, the pilot will contend, "seemed the most alert."[24]

ARM REST

The public's disdain for the strikers wasn't simply a function of its consistent failure to recognize consumer society, in Winifried Wolf's phrase, as a poor "substitute for democracy" or to understand how, according to David Gartman, consumer goods "unite classes not in reality, by narrowing the gap of economic and political power, but merely in appearance, by obscuring class differences behind a façade of mass consumption." It was also a function of the specific exigencies heaved up during the agonizing death throes of industrial Fordism—that shift to an economy characterized by heightened competition and correspondingly merciless "strategies of flexible accumulation." Frequently called the "golden age" of postwar capitalism, Fordism had been soothingly predicated on the notion of an expanding middle class and an uneasy but nevertheless lasting truce with labor: two things that had made possible, as never before, precisely the "façade of [truly] mass consumption."[25]

INTERIOR INSULATION

One by one, the helicopter lifts them from the frigid water. Time is of the essence, the TV anchorman remarks (a bit too enthusiastically), for, like the flailing woman, they are in danger of succumbing not to their broken limbs but to hypothermia.

PORTABLE CREW OXYGEN BOTTLE

As Evan Watkins argues in his book *Throwaways*, a majority of Americans had been led to believe, ironically, that "variables of conflict" such as income differentials—which had in the past given rise to unions and bigger, progressive government (and, in turn, to a larger middle class)—were, in the convulsions of a burgeoning global service economy, like manual typewriters and eight-track cassettes, now themselves

obsolete.[26] And just as obsolete, then, was the tactical standstill of the strike—really any attempt, not least one by civil servants, to impede the furious circuits of the "free" market. In this way, the air traffic controllers, with their efforts to "shut down the skies," unwittingly performed Reagan's specter of obtrusive, crisis-producing unions and big government.

It didn't matter, in other words, that unions and the welfare state might have appeared more necessary than ever or that the narrative of obsolescence might have constituted, as Watkins argues, an ideological production in the present, designed to serve the needs of a corporate elite and its vision of a post-industrial economy with an increasing number of unavoidably dismal, low-paying jobs. (And in the end, it certainly didn't matter that the crash dramatized, in the figures of Skutnick and the Park Police helicopter, the crucial interventionary role of government, however inadequate and always after the fact, in responding to the inevitable injuries of capitalism.) What mattered was the mythic hold of freedom on the consumptive imagination, the disingenuous reinvigoration of "rising social expectations," as a function of individual lifestyle choices, in a paradoxically more competitive and less accommodating marketplace.[27]

CENTER FUEL TANK

Undeterred by past egalitarian failures, the Benjamin of 1935 still believed in the viability, we might say, of a conductive relationship with the masses—in the tellingly progressive figure of "calm and adventurous traveling," which he would employ the following year in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" to evoke the egalitarian potential of the new image-making technologies. In "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," he confidently declared, "In the convulsions of the commodity economy we begin to recognize the monuments of the bourgeoisie as ruins even before they have crumbled"—or, as the case may be, *crashed*. It isn't difficult to see how, four years later, a much more pessimistic Benjamin preserves the notions of ambiguity, image, and stasis while recasting them as the essential components of involuntary or forcible remembrance. "The concept of progress should be based on catastrophe," he complains in "N [Theoretics of Knowledge; Theory of Progress]," referring, with great frustration, to the incorrigible vehicles of capitalist forgetfulness: department store, airplane, popular film—the endless stream of enticing novelties. "That things just keep going *is* the catastrophe. It isn't that which lies ahead but that which always is given." By 1939, phenomena must be "rescued by the *demonstration* of the fissure in them," he contends, everywhere emphasizing his own arresting antidote to reification. In "Theses on the Philosophy of History," he even makes the historical materialist out to be a kind of necessary terrorist, describing him as someone "man enough to blast open the continuum of history."[28]

LEFT RUDDER PEDAL SHAFT

It was precisely the expedited movement of the new steam-powered vehicles and its ostensible fulfillment of the Enlightenment ideal of "communication"—which had arisen, Armand Mattelart tells us, from the tradition of political anatomy and its conception of a vitally interconnected *body* politic—that had initially inspired, both in this country and abroad, so many instances of "the technological sublime" (Leo Marx's term for the rhetoric expressing a progressive faith in technology). In 1832, for example, the Saint Simonian Michael Chevalier ecstatically proclaimed,

> To better communications is therefore to work for real, positive, and practical freedom. . . . I would go farther, and say that it amounts to making equality and democracy. Perfected means of transportation have the effect of reducing the distance not only from one point to another, but also from one class to another.[29]

In 1851, a Manhattan minister similarly extolled the unifying virtues of the locomotive and steamboat, using a metaphor that reflected at once a utopian wish and a casual unfamiliarity with the oppressive working conditions of the average textile laborer:

> These pillars of cloud by day and of fire by night are heralding our modern civilization to conquests and results not possible before. The fast-flying shuttles are weaving nations inextricably together in bonds of mutual acquaintance, friendship, and commercial intercourse. They will soon make war impossible. . . . They will lift the masses. . . . They will make—are making—a highway for our God.[30]

Again and again, in the sort of cycle Benjamin described, transportation enthusiasts would celebrate some new vehicle—its increased velocity and interior "communicating" spatial features—as a critical agent of democratization, and all the while an older vehicle of capital would be undermining the values of republican America.[31] The automobile would save democracy as the locomotive had not, the plane would save democracy as the car had not, and so on. With the progress of industrialization and the advent of suburban living, mid-to-late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Americans would express, as late twentieth-century Americans would not, unmistakable anxiety about social stratification, proposing all sorts of ways—including public transportation, parks, and libraries—of bringing the classes together. However disingenuous such projects might be, they stand in stark contrast to the utter lack of them under Reagan. One need only point, for example, to the proliferation of gated communities and, in contrast, to the abandonment of the public park as a place of homelessness and crime to get a sense of the fortieth president's brazenly anti-egalitarian agenda.

SPARE LIFE VEST

If, as Saint Simon insisted in the late eighteenth century, "money is to the body politic what the blood is to the human heart," then even in the best of times the patient, Washington, D.C., would be in trouble. "Any part where the blood ceases to circulate," he explained, "languishes and is not long in dying." Thus, even before the recession of the early 1980s, when unemployment among African Americans reached 17.5 percent, Southeast Washington, for example, was almost entirely neglected. Under Reagan, the trickle-down theory of circulation, the policy of a clever heart, would simply leave the foot with even less blood.[32]

COACH SEATS: 21A-C

With his loose association of recession, the president's attack on big government, the proverbial dreamed-of Florida vacation, and the crash of a commercial airliner and a rush-hour Metro, Richard Cohen will come very close in his column on the event to proclaiming capitalism—and Reaganism specifically—a communication disaster. He will struggle poetically to articulate a blow to the historical project of democracy and a

turning point in the history of this particular republic. In fact, he will come close to depicting the capital itself as a traumatized passenger, enduring, first, the economy's gruesome (and continuing) plunge and, then, the chilly finality of the Great Communicator's *opposition* to "rescue." "Washington is a sad city," Cohen will report, personifying the capital, imagining some darkly communicating body. "It is depressed. It is in mourning. It is stunned and it is cold and its faith in the future is shaken." In his dreamlike reproduction of the catastrophe, even the weather will cooperate in providing the proper symbolic backdrop for the demise of a people who were "heading for the sun": that collective destination once unforgettably advertised by the country's founding travel agents but in the late twentieth century increasingly pitched as a balmy shopping mall or golf course, an individual's private, brand-name heaven. The image of the once revolutionary vehicle in ruins, ceaselessly reproduced in the city's suddenly collective head, signifies the acquisition of a kind of political insight: the apt condensation of a fundamental conflict between the needs of an ever faster capitalism and the requirements of democracy.

FLIGHT CONTROL CABLES

Writing in 1853, during a period of similarly monumental social and economic upheaval, Herman Melville more explicitly alludes to a communication disaster in his story "Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!" as he attempts to convey, with respect to the new industrial technologies, the moment of initial utopian shock and disappointment. In the story, he constellates a series of dispirited egalitarians, proposing that each is the equivalent of a locomotive or steamboat accident victim—capital's hurled passenger (or rail kill). And his figure for such an injury to equality (that incompletely realized ideal), for the backward movement (or standstill) paradoxically accomplished by modernity's unregulated velocity and power, is also something like trauma: what he calls a "knocking on the head" and what, for a time, doctors in the latter part of the nineteenth century evocatively called "Railway Brain."[33]

Melville's constellation includes the failed European revolutionaries of 1848; American railroad and steamboat enthusiasts, who were, for the first time, confronting not only the actual horrors of the ever-proliferating railroad and steamboat accidents themselves but the accident reports, which customarily cited gross negligence and indifference to passenger

safety on the part of profit-hungry operators; and, finally, the story's impoverished, debt-ridden narrator, whose creditor (the narrator says) "seems to run on a railroad track, too." "In all parts of the world," the story begins, "many high-spirited revolts from rascally despotisms had of late been knocked on the head; many dreadful casualties, by locomotive and steamer, had likewise knocked hundreds of high-spirited travelers on the head (I lost a dear friend in one of them); my own private affairs were also full of despotisms, casualties and knockings on the head." Understanding expedited movement as the agent not only of a sometimes literal annihilation ("for two hundred and fifty miles that iron fiend goes yelling through the land, crying 'More! more! more!'"), and imagining in the future still faster and more efficient vehicles of exploitation, the narrator of Melville's story (like many a floundering present-day liberal) clings to the values of an imperfect past. "Who wants to travel so fast?" he asks. "My grandfather did not, and he was no fool."[34]

FORWARD LAVATORY

Suffering from peptic ulcers, severe indigestion, hypertension, exhaustion, and any number of other medical problems, the almost parodically caring and elevated controllers seem, at least with their bodies, to register the toll of capitalist progress—that frenzied, competitive movement whose signature is often debilitating stress. Indeed, we might contrast a portrait of the beleaguered PATCO workers with a portrait of those other "controllers" and industry captains in the months before the strike (Melville's "thousand villains and asses who have the management of the railroads and steamboats, and innumerable other vital things in this world"): in other words, administration officials pedaling supply-side economic policy; Federal Reserve Board members trying from the summit of Mount Abstraction to prevent an even harder "landing" for the U.S. economy; corporate executives making decisions about layoffs according to the dictates of profitability and corporate earnings.[35]

VERTICAL STABILIZER

In "The Communist Manifesto," Karl Marx speaks of "the icy water of egotistical calculation."[36]

COACH SEAT: 28B

After three of the five have been rescued (half-lifted from, half-pulled across the shattered ice), and after the helicopter has returned to the scene of the wreckage, the bald man points to a woman who has decided rather injudiciously and impatiently to swim away from the bobbing tail. The 'copter follows her and pulls her to safety as well. But when it is finally his turn to be extricated, the bald man has disappeared, perhaps slipping beneath the surface of the river. The pilot and paramedic—who will later swear, like the passengers they rescued, to the presence of such a man—search desperately, even compulsively for him, but to no avail. "We looked in the water," the paramedic will explain, "in the wreck, everywhere, but he was gone. You can't stay in the cold water for too long. Whoever he was the people who were saved owe their lives to him."[37]

STOWAGE UNIT

By actually embodying the historical standstill, the transportation disaster fortifies the lesson of jolting ambiguity, all but hanging a banner above itself that reads "Progress in Ruins." From this "demonstration" of ambiguity—what Benjamin calls "a messianic cessation of happening"—comes forth an irrepressible hint, in F. D. Reeve's phrase, of "the alternatives behind experience," alternatives both past and present. Said differently, if "the imperceptible tending of all things toward utopia" is the activity, according to Fredric Jameson, of a "type of unconscious . . . formed not by the past [as with the Oedipal Complex] but by the future," then the future waits, paradoxically, for an instant of collective utopian *remembrance*: not of what is, but of what could be and, even more important, of what (since modernity) could always have been.[38]

In this way—conceding the veritably unshakable persistence of the capitalist status quo and imagining exactly the kind of moment in which a man might give up his life for others while the spouse of the Attorney General flaunts her diamond lobes (and in which other women, within reach of a different kind of government helicopter, swim miles for free American cheese)—Benjamin proclaims in the notes for the *Arcades Project*, "The dialectical image is to be defined as the *memoire involuntaire* of a redeemed humanity."[39] The wordlessly didactic "man in

the water" (who will as quickly return to the murk of our national unconscious as he has risen to its icy surface) suggests, in other words, an escaped intimation of both a future that hasn't arrived and a present, a catastrophe, that has. With his final conception of imagistic montage as anything but "calm and adventurous traveling," Benjamin seeks analogously to "demonstrate" capitalism's perpetual communication disaster. And yet precisely because an actual transportation accident's own "demonstration" doesn't come with such a banner, the historical materialist must provide his peculiar form of mediation: reactivating a specific injury and at once facilitating and sabotaging its second recovery.

FIRST-CLASS SILVERWARE

The Southern writer Walker Percy, in his 1975 book *Message in a Bottle*, succinctly captures this notion of a disaster's stubbornly ambiguous "demonstration," but instead of unearthing the actual utopian potential that inheres in commodity capitalism, he exhumes a lurking and neglected Judeo-Christian god. Like other dire religious critics of American consumerism, he believes that such "demonstrations" are, paradoxically, welcome events, disturbing the quotidian and pounding some sense into a spiritually bankrupt and death-denying culture. The public's morbid interest in disaster reflects a nagging, if unspecified, dissatisfaction with capitalism's material comforts and technological accomplishments. An intimation of the divine ripping through modernity's metallic hubris, exposing the failure of the relentlessly new to vanquish death, the moment of ineffable illumination waits, Percy implies, for those who imagine that the divine itself has been rendered obsolete. "Why," he asks, more than a bit rhetorically, "is the good life which men have achieved in the twentieth century so bad that only news of world catastrophes, assassinations, plane crashes, mass murders, can divert one from the sadness of ordinary mornings?" "Why did the young French couple," he continues, "driving through the countryside with their baby, having heard the news of a crash nearby of an airliner killing three hundred people and littering the forest with bits of flesh, speed frantically toward the scene, stop the car, and, carrying the baby, rush toward the dead, running through thickets to avoid police barricades? Did they have relatives on the plane?"[40]

FLIGHT ATTENDANT SHOE

Several weeks after the crash of Air Florida Flight 90 and the appearance of Cohen's column on the disaster, another writer will refer to the heroism the crash elicited in terms ironically similar to commercial aviation's original consumer fantasy: as a brief respite from "the meanness of everyday life"—the meanness, that is, of late-capitalist social relations. For a few hours, the city will have appeared startlingly magnanimous, following the advice of Alyosha in *The Brothers Karamazov*, who, having been sent out into the world by his spiritual elder and searching for a viable ethics of human interaction, remarks with some naïveté to the crippled Lise, "Perhaps we should treat people as if they were patients in a hospital." The entire city will have seemed to become an emergency room—with simple goodwill and triumphant professionalism abounding. The flailing woman, it will have turned out, was really a passenger and not a panicked flight attendant, as the media will have been reporting. Moreover, to everyone's great relief, an attendant who did survive the crash (one of Ellen Church's deregulated, no-frills, but, alas, non-nursing descendants) will have apparently managed to cling to her training—or, rather, to something suddenly emerging from that training—inflating the only available life preserver for another injured passenger even as she herself was in danger of drowning.[41]

(A sense of mystery, however, will linger concerning the flailing woman's identity, as the day after the crash the Congressional Budget Office gopher will have maintained that the flailing woman *was* indeed a flight attendant because the only surviving flight attendant's roommate in Florida, recognizing the flailing woman on TV, will have called to thank him for rescuing her. The airline, though, will have released a statement to the contrary, claiming that the flight attendant distinctly remembers being rescued by a helicopter and not a low-level government employee.)

LEADING EDGE FLAPS

In S. A. Howland's popular 1840 *Steamboat Disasters and Railroad Accidents in the United States*, one of the first collections of its kind, we can observe the American origin of this mysterious fascination with

transportation disasters. The book's first chapter, titled "Wreck of the Steam Packet Home, *On her passage from New York to Charleston, Oct. 9, 1837, by which melancholy occurrence ninety-five persons perished,*" begins like this: "An occurrence so awful as the loss of the STEAMBOAT HOME, excites in the mind of a civilized and humane community, the most intense and painful interest." In fact, Howland writes again and again of an "intense interest," "a tragic interest," of "satisfying public curiosity." And yet nowhere does he attempt really to explain the nature of this morbid attraction, except to appeal to a sense of general Christian charity that, by definition, purports to care about the fate of virtually anyone in distress. About the wreck of the *Lexington*, he remarks,

> Amid this raging destruction, the Christian stands as the sun among the flying clouds of heaven, calm and serene; one moment lost in the confusion, the next emerging from it to utter words of comfort, or raise a prayer to God for the pardon of the guilty and horror-stricken.[42]

As it turns out, this facile explanation does in fact flirt with an awareness of the sort of equation between capitalism and catastrophe that Benjamin provocatively sets forth. "The heart must be callous, indeed," Howland writes, vaguely alluding to some equivalent social disaster, "that turns not from scenes like these with awakened and better feelings, and, looking back on past sufferings as beyond the reach of help, extends not the hand of charity to relieve those of the present,—sufficient of which ever exist around us."[43] Whereas Percy looks to religion for a way of renouncing the blandishments of commodity capitalism, Howland looks to religion for affirmation of these very blandishments, even as he senses their lurking inadequacy. Even, we might say, as he delights in their (and their consumers') horrific dismemberment and, in his melancholy, simultaneously holds out for the possibility of rescue.

FORWARD PRESSURE BULKHEAD

The media will not let go of "the man in the water," luxuriating in the idea of a supremely Good Samaritan. "That guy is amazing," the paper will report, quoting the paramedic. "All I can tell you is I've never seen that kind of guts. It seemed to me like he decided that the women, the men who were bleeding, needed to get out before him, and even as he

was going under he stuck to his decision and helped them get out. Man that was bravery."[44] Unable to resist the temptation of Christian parable and allegory, the city's pastors will similarly cling to "the man in the water," so moved will they be by the man's nearly incomprehensible act of self-sacrifice—the mystery of his identity (and of his very existence) only adding to the act's tantalizing richness. Based on a rough description of the Samaritan, a grieving family will proudly claim him as their husband and father, though even they will not be entirely sure that the description fits their loved one.

LEFT WING

In speaking of "present [sufferings],—sufficient of which ever exist around us," Howland seems inescapably to be referring to America's growing poor, large numbers of whom were the victims of industrial forces that by 1840 had already been set in motion, though, of course, he doesn't actually mention these wage laborers or their oppressor—industrial capital—by name. Or, perhaps we should say that at least in *this* context he doesn't mention the latter by name. In "thrilling narrative" after narrative, however, he directly addresses the catastrophe that results when profits are chased with wild abandon. Concluding his narration of the wreck of the steamboat *New England*, Howland complains, "This running of machinery as long as it will last, and discovering its weakness and inefficiency but at the expense of the lives of scores of human beings, is not only recklessly heartless, but in the highest degree criminal, and should be frowned down by an indignant community, and rendered severely punishable by the laws of the land."[45] Though such an indictment would apply quite nicely to the treatment, say, of mill workers, Howland doesn't speak directly of *their* condition.

CENTER FUSELAGE

George Landow recalls how Friedrich Engels represents capitalist industrialization as an unacknowledged shipwreck in his 1844 *Condition of the Working Classes in England*. Engels, Landow says, "frequently emphasizes that 'nobody troubles about the poor as they struggle helplessly in the whirlpool of modern industrial life.' The worker 'sinks'

into degradation 'owing to the introduction of steam power,' and once 'engulfed' by his surroundings, he soon perishes. No matter how hard he works, no matter how virtuously he lives, the worker may perish 'through no fault of his own and despite all his efforts to keep his head above water.'"[46] But whereas Engels uses the popular figure of shipwreck to proclaim a social disaster that no one sees, apparently unaware of having chosen a vehicle of comparison that customarily garnered all sorts of public interest and sympathy, Rebecca Harding Davis in her 1861 short story "Life in the Iron Mills" uses the figure very nearly to suggest that the public *does* "trouble" about the poor—only in displaced and condensed form.

An aspiring artist, Harding Davis's protagonist, Wolfe, dreams of a life beyond the factory. Then he becomes implicated in the robbery of his employer, is sent to jail, and, shortly thereafter, kills himself. Instructively linking Wolfe's debilitating employment making the materials needed for America's railroads and steamboats with the reading public's persistent, melodramatic fascination with transportation disasters and its habit of sentimental, Christian moralizing, Harding Davis's narrator bitterly asks,

> You wish to make a tragic story out of it? Why, in the police-reports of the morning paper you can find a dozen such tragedies: hints of shipwreck unlike any that ever befell on the high seas; hints that there a power was lost to heaven,—that there a soul went down where no tide can ebb or flow. Commonplace enough the hints are,—jocose, sometimes, done up in rhyme.[47]

Seventy years later, the German Marxist Ernst Bloch also hypothesizes a drama of apt condensation and displacement in his account of the nearly hysterical attention the nineteenth-century transportation disaster regularly commanded. Alluding to Marx's understanding of economic crisis (as Wolfgang Schivelbusch concisely puts it, "the disruption of the uncertain balance between buying and selling in the circulation of goods" and the fevered incorporation of technological innovation for competitive advantage), Bloch cleverly couples the capitalist economy with the locomotive disaster, referring to each as "the crisis of the uncontrolled thing." In fact, he provocatively suggests that we might read "the crash of collision, the roar of explosion, the cries of maimed people" as standing in for the pernicious effects

of an economic downturn and, thus, as conveying for the bourgeoisie their own otherwise unarticulable objections to such well-dressed Christian barbarism.[48]

WING SLATS

In their coordinating function, air traffic controllers intimate not so much the need for a welfare state as the need for a radical alternative to the "free" market itself. Picture the controllers as trying to minimize "the uninterrupted disturbance, everlasting uncertainty and agitation" that Marx insisted characterized capitalism. In the summer of 1981, however, such a thoroughgoing and undiscriminating commitment to human life ("You worked traffic, you stayed cool, and you puked your guts out in the bathroom afterwards") found fuller expression, ironically, in a criminal act: a renunciation of duty that had potentially deadly consequences.[49]

We might regard the PATCO strikers, in some important respect, as having done their jobs most faithfully not in their towers in front of screens filled with moving blips but out on the picket line attempting to prevent the continuation—in fact, the worsening—of an undeclared disaster. Placards bobbing like signals just above their heads, they were trying, however consciously, to talk down a different kind of jet, a different kind of future. While the motivation for the strike had begun as a series of relatively narrow demands about better wages and working conditions, it culminated in a more "high-spirited" response to Reagan's bullying and in a fleeting glimmer of the lift of a genuine and, possibly one day, broader collectivity. "We knew the strike was inevitable," one controller remarked, "and we *really* got an emotional high out of it. Shift work had kept us from ever getting more than two-thirds of us together, but we got 89 percent to go out! The mood was *very* positive, and when all of us were together, we were *high*—only later when we were apart from each other, some began to doubt, and some began to have reservations."[50]

FLIGHT SPOILERS

"Identity of Plane Crash Hero Remains a Mystery," a headline in the *Washington Post* will exclaim a few days after the disaster.[51] Despite the

mystery, a medal will be proposed for this passenger who gave up his life so that others might be saved. What is more, talk of glorious, triumphant altruism will continue to abound—exactly as some of the fired air traffic controllers will beg to have their old jobs back and as the murder rate in Southeast Washington will continue to climb. Still later, after more than half of the wreckage and bodies have been recovered and after the requisite autopsies have been performed, serious doubt will be cast on the existence of such a man. The D.C. medical examiner will have just reported that, of the fifty passengers so far examined, only one passenger, a bank examiner from Atlanta, died of anything other than blunt force trauma—in other words, that only one passenger died from drowning. And this person was not, the Park Police helicopter pilot and paramedic will stress again and again, the man seen passing the lifeline. That man did not have a beard. Now, like a politician switching parties to win an election, or merely to be on the side of the majority, the media will pursue the subtle disparagement of the celebrated ideal, luxuriating in its newly revealed phantom improbability. (Eventually, other bodies with water in their lungs, twenty-five of them, will be retrieved, and a conceivable hero will be selected.)

CARGO LINER

In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson describes "a process whereby otherwise dangerous and protopolitical impulses are 'managed' and defused, rechanneled and offered spurious objects." Even—or, rather, especially—those commentators who will vigorously contest the cynical depreciation of "the man in the water" will end up working, like a toxic cleanup crew, to contain the threat implicit in his impractical heroics. Without a hint of resignation, Roger Rosenblatt, essayist for *Time* magazine and the man responsible for the Samaritan's resonant epithet, will champion him as "the best we can do." Finally no different from Reagan's panegyric, Rosenblatt's will allow the gesture to float free of the many laid-off workers, homeless people, and other floundering victims of Reaganism just on shore. By refusing, in other words, to make of the gesture a specific reprimand of late-capitalist social relations, he will efface the larger social arena to which the gesture might point and from which an alternative politics might emerge. Sentimental to the core, such approbation will isolate the

gesture in a realm that requires absolutely nothing of the reader—nothing perhaps but an inspired gift of unwanted clothing to the local homeless shelter at Christmas time.[52]

Appearing amid the controversy, an editorial in the *Post* will reject what Paul Ricoeur has called a "hermeneutics of suspicion," intuitively understanding how the impulse to demystify can do away with utopian possibilities altogether. At the same time, it will reflect the clever alternative of merely incarcerating the desire for a better world, retaining it as a malnourished ideal that exerts only a limited influence on earthly (that is, capital's) affairs. The editorial will proceed,

> It never seems more than a few days before the contention, the bickering, the tugging at the idol begins. And now, right on schedule, it is here: was there really a heroic "man in the water" who gave his own life in the course of helping other Air Florida Flight 90 victims to live? Maybe it was more than one. Maybe it was no one. Maybe the whole thing was a misperception. . . . One gets an intimation from all this that even if and when the existence and identity of the man in question is established it will only be a matter of time before some researcher somewhere is quoted as saying that the poor fellow, suffering from hypothermia, probably didn't even know what he was doing.
>
> Our feeling is that very little of this argument matters. . . . The act itself has been memorialized already in the emotions of those countless Americans who heard of it, who gave it full range in their imaginations, who felt their own humanity honored and enlarged because of it. . . . The anonymity, so far, of the hero does no more to diminish the grandeur of his act than such anonymity does, say, to diminish the sacrifice made by the unknown soldier. On the contrary, in a strange way it merely universalizes it.

In vigorously defending the possibility of such altruism against the scrutiny of the academic researcher, the editorial will nevertheless fail to establish a link between the ennobling gesture and the arena in which it appeared. Indeed, by arguing for the gesture's "universality," it will occlude important differences between social actors—between the president, say, and the fired air traffic controllers. The editorial's treatment of the "man in the water" will thus manifest (like the early work of Benjamin) the need for a hermeneutics that is neither deflationary in its rational mastery nor exculpatory in its slavish veneration of ambiguity.[53]

COACH SEATS: 13A-C

At the center of this frantic management of protopolitical impulses will be the actual salvage operation itself. In the days following the crash, one won't be able to help being impressed by all of the sophisticated equipment, mobilized as in some sort of underwater ER to bring about the patient's dramatic, because improbable, recovery. With what compulsiveness will the patient's many parts (and patrons) be retrieved, this medico-religious ritual enacted. How remarkable the many elaborate, even bureaucratic, procedures. Disaster *does* have a schedule, the TV will exclaim! Civilization *can* conquer the uncivilized, which is to say the terrifyingly immobile and unshapely. One won't be able to help feeling better, though clearly feeling better will be a part of feeling bad—nonetheless an important step on the road to renewed faith. Technology, alas, can both take life and give it back; it can participate in its own watery recuperation.

The newspaper will keep meticulous track of the divers' progress. In one article, the names, ages, and former residences of the dead will appear as part of a chart whose headings proclaim (as if with joy, as if with New Testament jubilation), "Recovered Wednesday," "Recovered Thursday," "Recovered Friday," "Recovered Saturday."[54] Like Jesus reproaching the incredulous relatives of a naturally refrigerated (and, thus, not, as the Bible would have it, already decaying) Lazarus, the pun will attempt to wheedle the unconscious. And yet, what will be salvaged, of course, are not the lives of the passengers of Air Florida but the myth of progress and the urgent conflation of capitalist technology with religious promise.

FLIGHT DATA RECORDER

If "technology is theology modernized and made aesthetic," as Geoffrey Hartman claims—made actual or literal, he might have said—then the sudden, massive failure of a commercial airliner provokes a dark night of the machine, a reexamination of technological materialism and indeed an anxious, if for most people entirely implausible, glancing back at religion.[55] For there is nothing like a commercial aviation disaster and its obliterating dismemberment to reintroduce the obsolete (because immaterial) god, from whom aviation borrowed so much of its

mythic packaging. Not only does an airliner invade the space formerly reserved for the divine, but the very language of commercial aviation is itself redolent of religion. Think of terms, to name just a few, like "pilot," a religious leader or guide; "souls," passengers on board; and "stick-shaker," a cockpit warning device designed to inform a pilot that his church—his holy "sky mall"—is about to fall due to loss of lift. The device owes its name to the hymn Protestant children used to be taught to sing each morning when they awoke; its refrain, "shake the devil stick," was said to dispel the devil.

It's the sort of alarm that sounds, for example when an inappropriately genuflecting 737 encounters wind shear, and it almost always receives a bit part in the postmodern morality play that is the battered black box recording. "Sound of stickshaker," a doomed recording will advise just before its standard closing line, which is "Sound of Impact." (The black box, it should be pointed out, is really a rather fearful yellow.) "Who will go with me into the ground?" might be the uncaptured refrain of Everyperson the Consumer. To my great distress, I've never heard of a pilot who implored his faithful to consume more enthusiastically or less perfunctorily, though the conditions have at times clearly demanded it: "Shop till you suddenly drop 14,000 feet!" Once, however, a remark like this did slip out while a plane I was on encountered severe turbulence during its Final Approach. The head flight attendant had just instructed us, her demanding brood, to return our seatbacks and tray-tables "to their fully *uptight* and locked positions." Then, after having remarked, with all of the sincerity that an intercom and a uniform can muster, "It's been a pleasure serving you," she said, "We'll be *in* the ground shortly."

Fractured for a moment beyond repair, commodity capitalism's vaguely salvific narrative, whose initial, explicit, nineteenth-century impulse was to understand technological innovation as the vehicle of *earthly* egalitarian transformation (clothed in familiar religious garb), thus nervously turns with the demise of an airliner to the spectacle of a massive, many-pronged assault on death. What the Park Police helicopters (and, later, the various commentators and clergy) can't accomplish, the floating cranes and divers will! Of course, the progressive narrative achieves its nearly imperceptible deflation when, for example, a given plane lands successfully in Toledo or Dallas, not heaven—when the last are again last: last off the plane or never on it.

INFLATABLE SLIDE

The night of the crash, a priest will appear with Ted Koppel on *Nightline*. He will have spent the evening consoling the relatives of the victims who have gathered at the Crystal City Marriott Hotel not far from the airport. Interviews with these relatives will confirm that the priest has been an enormous help. The priest himself will talk convincingly about the management of loss and the infinite refuge of God's love. Several days later, the public will learn that the priest was really a convict who had escaped from a federal penitentiary in Danbury, Connecticut. Missing since December 16 of the previous year, he will have at some point driven down to Washington, purchased his costume, and arrived at the Marriot in time to begin comforting the relatives of the victims of Air Florida Flight 90. Apparently, no one will have checked his credentials. Policewoman Rosiland Parker will be quoted in the paper as saying that the convict "has a history of showing up at disaster scenes. He gains the confidence of the relatives and later burglarizes their houses."[56] A police officer in Trenton, New Jersey will have been watching *Nightline* and will have recognized the priest as someone who did a number of jobs in his area. As a result, the convict will have been quickly reapprehended.

FIRST-CLASS COAT COMPARTMENT

In addition to an extraordinary fear of death, Don DeLillo, like Walker Percy, posits an ardent, masochistic wish for it. In fact, in the novel *White Noise*, DeLillo presents two pilots who seem to be reveling not just in death but in the prospect of complete, and therefore somehow redemptive, annihilation:

> The plane had lost power in all three engines, dropped from thirty-four thousand feet to twelve thousand feet. . . . Almost immediately a voice from the flight deck was heard on the intercom: "We're falling out of the sky! We're going down! We're a silver gleaming death machine!" This outburst struck the passengers as an all but total breakdown of authority, competence and command presence and it brought on a round of fresh and desperate wailing. . . . Then there was a second male voice from the flight deck, this one remarkably calm and precise, making the passengers believe there was someone in charge after all, an element of hope: "This is American two-one-three to the cockpit voice recorder. Now we know what it's like. It is worse than we'd ever imagined. They didn't prepare us for this at the death simulator in Denver. Our fear is pure, so totally stripped of distractions and pressures as to be a form of transcendental meditation. In less than three minutes we will touch down, so to speak. They will find our bodies in some smoking field, strewn about in the grisly attitudes of death."[57]

It is precisely the disparity between the apparent seamlessness of corporate culture's slick negotiation of death, symbolized impressively by the plane's shiny skin and the crew's "command presence," and the rupturing return-of-the-repressed without a moment's notice that arouses such paradoxically welcome anxiety. Only the force of a crash, DeLillo implies, can shake the false utopia of the commodity. (Obviously, this sort of humor, proverbially linked to the gallows, can itself be a kind of skillful negotiation of death: deflection disguised as a spurious frontal assault. Shock jock Howard Stern will first make a name for himself in the days after the Washington crash by calling up Air Florida and asking, on air, to purchase a ticket to the 14th Street Bridge.)

SAFETY INSTRUCTION CARDS

Not surprisingly, the media will fail to draw a connection between the mysterious man in the water and the fraudulent priest, though both hint at a kind of alternative theology: one in which the promise of immortality might be discredited but not the promise of the collectively human—the promise, as Adorno characterizes it, of death's "epic unity with a full life," "what was once said to make death bearable." "As subjects live less," Adorno writes in *Negative Dialectics*, exposing the alienating and certainly undemocratic achievement of commodity worship, "death grows more precipitous, more terrifying. The fact that it literally turns them into things makes them aware of reification, their permanent death and the form of relations that is partly their fault."[58]

Surely, both the "man in the water" and the convict-priest point to something other than a reservation for Tampa's sunny, time-shared afterlife or an advertisement, near the barf bag in the in-flight magazine,

for the new Mercedes. The convict-priest begs to be understood as mischievously separating the bereaved from their beguiling valuables—in a sense, as underscoring, along with the shock of disingenuous religion, the inadequacy of these two historically linked bulwarks against death. (The figure of the convict-priest thus only gives more resonance to Marx's disparaging description of commodity fetishism as a "theological caper."[59]) Death comes to represent for Adorno something like a final but terribly costly victory: an unbearably ironic life preserver, preserving not life itself but the space in which collective life might have been lived. We fear death, he suggests, precisely because we understand how well we forget and know that like the congealed labor in a set of tires, like the tires themselves once they have been discarded, we, too, will be quickly forgotten.

FIRST-CLASS SEATS: 3A-B

"None of these people will ever be permitted to come back. We don't want these people back. . . . It's taken 200 years for this democracy to develop as a system of law, and we just can't see that deteriorate based on a few people that just want to make more money. . . . As far as we are concerned, this is a nonstrike situation, and we're rebuilding the system. . . . It's over with"—the words of Drew Lewis, Secretary of Transportation, upon executing the president's order to terminate the striking controllers.[60]

CAPTAIN'S SEAT

Rolf Tiedemann refers to "dialectics at a standstill," Benjamin's term for the materialist practice of imagistic montage, as "piecing together what history has broken to bits." The Frankfurt School philosopher as National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigator, member of a historical "go team"? Benjamin imagines producing an accident report that carries the force of the event it strives to explain, which is to say a report that is in some way profoundly inconclusive (and thus a plane, on which that report is based, that is far from completely put back together). The last thing Benjamin wants is a lesson learned—or, as Richard Wolin puts it, for "redemption [to have to] preserve itself in a

small crack in the continuum of catastrophe," a small crack in the continuum of the essay or consciousness itself. Hope should not consist merely of the possibility of another devastating "demonstration," another instance of critical utopian me(n)tal fatigue. Refusing to put the plane back together as it was, Benjamin asks us instead to make out a vague, still-to-be-clarified figure on a hangar floor and then to project it piecemeal onto some barely discernible horizon. In this way, as an allegory of reactivated and unresolved trauma, dialectics at a standstill suggests not one but a series of occupations for the historical materialist: terrorist, diver, recalcitrant reassembler or utopian engineer—each the servant of potentially revolutionary remembrance.[61]

In a sense, Benjamin expresses his fidelity to the past by imagining that the past might still be up for grabs, so convincingly (if elusively) would a given catastrophe be "reproduced" by the "blasting" historical materialist. So distressingly vital are the Pullman strikers, for example, milling about at the bottom of our collective Lethe. Picture Benjamin's reader as having just crashed the past's clandestine meeting, a reader who, as one witness will describe the passengers of Air Florida Flight 90, is "looking straight ahead" and is "still in [her] seatbelt" behind the window of a once airborne vehicle.[62] The voices of capital's recent and long-ago aggrieved growing ever louder, now organizing, now resolving to act. . . . Benjamin thus conspires to redeem the countless missed opportunities for revolutionary change by having the reader travel traumatically to these opportunities, by having her relive or experience them as if they weren't over, weren't beyond caring about *or even transforming*.

AFT TOILET SEAT

Just after the hard landing of Air Florida Flight 90, as if in accordance with some sort of secret catastrophe time table, a crowded Metro derails near the Federal Triangle Station in downtown Washington, killing three and injuring more than twenty. Both disasters occur at the worst possible moment: as federal workers attempt to flee the city in advance of rush hour and the worsening storm. Mysteriously, five and a half months after PATCO went out on strike and Reagan quickly (and permanently) fired some eleven thousand of its members, dismantling the union and forcing it into bankruptcy as a result of more than $150 million in fines, the weather suddenly decides to express its pro-union

sympathies. It suddenly decides, let us say, to act. As if to the tune of an old Joe hill song—

If we workers take a notion,
we can stop all speeding trains;
every ship upon the ocean
we can tie with mighty chains;
every wheel in the creation,
every mine and every mill,
fleets and armies of all nations
will at our command stand still—

the organized and conspiring snowflakes fall.[63] The planes that were supposed to have been "silent," as the strikers' handheld signs predicted in early August, are in fact (at least in the nation's capital) now temporarily "silent." (The military controllers, the "scabs" brought in to replace their union counterparts, stand idly—or, rather, less busily—in their tower.) In fact, virtually all of the ascendant vehicles of capitalism are "silent" but for the jittery police car and ambulance, themselves stuck in traffic and whining almost pointlessly. The entire city has come to a standstill in the snow.

CABIN WINDOW

When Benjamin asserts that "a historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop" and that "this notion defines the present in which he himself is writing history," he should be understood as trying to embody the predicament—indeed, the compulsive and compulsory retrospection—of the transportation accident victim or shell-shocked veteran. Such figures, Caruth suggests, "carry an impossible history within them" or are "themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess"; she might have said, that they cannot (or should not) *entirely* understand.[64]

Accordingly, the historian practicing conventional demystifying critique might be thought of as unwittingly contributing, in the capacity of therapist, to what can only be called a presumptuous recovery: in fact, a smug accommodation to an unacceptable historical

failure. Twelve years after the collapse of Communism, when even the hope for different social relations lies in ruins, the operation of critique now eerily confirms the speculation of the Right: that History itself has been demystified, that the century has finally worked through the trauma of *utopia* and its murderously unrealistic alternatives, arriving at a definitive and triumphantly gleeful clarity.[65] On the level of form, it suggests that it, too, has gotten over somebody else's injury.

ALUMINUM FLOORING

We might say that, for a period, there is, in the words of Marx, no "driv[ing] beyond every spatial barrier" by capital, no "annihilation of space by time" (though plenty of annihilation), no "locational movement . . . [which is] the necessary condition . . . of the transformation of [an] object *into a commodity*." Call the afternoon of January 13 a revolution (and, simultaneously, a performance of depression). At the decisive moment, these engines of capital, discovering their bondage, quickly change sides. The plane, for instance, refusing to go to Tampa, shucks off its corporate obedience and smarmy, mechanical alacrity, pursuing instead something akin to social seriousness or *gravity*. (As John McCole writes of commodity capitalism, "No limits are set to this unrelenting drive to violate the dignity of objects.")[66]

And so, the snowstorm clogs the central arteries into and out of the city; the Air Florida jet shuts down the sky and, in the process, tries to take out the 14th Street Bridge (that example of what Marx, and really any nineteenth-century student of the capitalist economy and its technologically generated utopian possibilities, would call "improved communications"); and, finally, the committed Metro renders the Orange and Blue line essentially useless. Only the collective vehicles of our nation's capital can be counted on, let us imagine, for real historical awareness and political resolve. Believing technological innovation to be the tool ultimately of the proletariat, Marx averred, "Revolutions are the locomotives of world history." Sadly echoing this fond hope, we might say, as Paul Virilio says in *Speed and Politics* of capitalism generally, that what the city witnesses is *literally* "a revolution in transportation, not in happiness."[67]

LOWER NOSE COMPARTMENT ACCESS

Famously, "The Communist Manifesto" takes solace in the fact that "man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind."[68] And yet, at this particular moment, such an awakening, such sobriety, plays into a sense of inexorably diminished expectations: a kind of "been there, done that" approach not only to unions and big government (and certainly to communism) but to human suffering and social injustice themselves. It is an approach in which the Left's voluntary memory turns out to be worse perhaps than no conscious memory at all. Now more than ever, reason itself functions as a kind of beefed-up stimulus shield and not as an expression of the still unsettled claim of utopia, a claim that can only be filed by an impractical imagination, an explosive or wily unconscious (which, perpetually reapprehended by the authorities, is forced to plot its next unauthorized parole). Benjamin envisions a future that might be properly disenchanted: when the movement of anything (whether reopened airport or reconstructed essay) won't signify resumptive forgetting and, hence, a much less anxious endorsement of the status quo.

LANDING GEAR

At the meeting honoring the Congressional Budget Office gopher, Reagan will be badgered about the PATCO strike and its possible involvement in the crash. The Soviets will already have commented unofficially on the disaster, suggesting that there is indeed a relationship between the oppression of the working man and the fate of Air Florida. As the *Washington Post* will have reported, a bit prosaically, "*Trud*, the Soviet labor union newspaper, said the replacement of the dismissed air traffic controllers by inexperienced 'scab' labor may have been 'fatal' for the Boeing 737. The newspaper *Sovietskaya Rossiya* published a similar account asserting that the administration was trying to avoid responsibility for the catastrophe by insisting that there were no reasons to believe that it may have been caused by a mistake by air traffic controllers."[69] Much later, at a moment of equivalent social meanness—indeed, of danger—the former president, his faculties all but gone, will himself be honored with the renaming of National Airport, despite his having crushed the PATCO strike and, in general, done more damage to

the causes of government and labor than perhaps any president in the twentieth century.

FORWARD ENTRY

Resisting the move to rename all of Washington National Airport, a group of Democrats will have proposed a provocative, though unsuccessful compromise: that merely a particular *terminal* be named after the former president. And yet, with Democratic support for welfare reform, with a widening chasm between rich and poor, with more than 35 million people living in poverty during the biggest economic boom since the 1920s, with the absence of any discussion whatsoever of alternatives to the free market or of an inherent conflict between capital accumulation and the values of democracy, such resistance to wholehearted memorialization might, in the end, have done more damage than good. It might have indicated a considerable difference between the two parties' agendas, instead of just some awful nostalgia (or guilt) on the part of the Democrats about their progressive past. More important, it would still have failed to acknowledge the general calamity of the Reagan-Bush-Clinton era and the specific calamity of the PATCO defeat, which, as Arthur Shostak notes, left the labor movement "weaker and more vulnerable in the aftermath."[70]

"An appreciation or apology," writes Benjamin, "seeks to cover up the revolutionary moments in the course of history. It misses the points at which the transmission breaks down, and thus misses the roughness and jaggedness that offer a hold to someone wishing to get beyond those points"—like the very survivors of Air Florida Flight 90 who, knocked unconscious by the collision with the water, their legs broken, awoke suddenly, and, as one will have put it, "saw a hole in the plane two rows up" and "pulled up there somehow." Or indeed like those now struggling to get beyond the cynical repudiation of the welfare state and even the contradictory "apology" of liberalism itself.[71]

STICKSHAKER

Nearly a month after the crash, before the final recovery of the insurance settlements and the release of the official NTSB report (citing both

inadequate de-icing procedures and insufficient thrust due to a faulty indicator), the cockpit voice recordings will appear toward the back of the first section of the *Washington Post*, under the faintly religious headline "Transcript of the Last Words" and adjacent to a large jewelry advertisement whose text will read, in giant print, "ASSISTANT BUYER'S SALE." At once an attempt to "stop up" and preserve "the last holes left open by the world of merchandise"—or, as Adorno might also describe it, our "constant panic in view of death"—the page will labor to produce, with its own form of montage, an allegory of astonishingly belated recognition.

The struggle by the pilot, copilot, and "speaker undetermined" (an off-duty pilot, it will have turned out, was sitting in the cockpit at the time of the crash) to convince themselves that everything was as it should be, though their gauges told them otherwise; the copilot's moving direct address ("Larry, we're going down, Larry") and the pilot's simple acknowledgment ("I know it") at the end; and, in the background, the irrefutable admonition of the throbbing stickshaker ("Pull up!" "Pull up!")—all of these will appear in the context of the equally beseeching ad. All of these will appear, more broadly, in the context of the Great Communicator's boundless optimism: engine of a jeweled assault on the very dream of equality. The president's problems with memory, both in and out of office, will speak for a people wanting a more perfect oblivion—reaching, that is, for each other only in death.

(1600:00) COPILOT: God, look at that thing.
(1600:02) COPILOT: That don't seem right, does it?
(1600:05) COPILOT: Ah, that's not right.
(1600:07) COPILOT: Well.
(1600:09) PILOT: Yes it is, there's eighty [apparent reference to airspeed of 80 knots].
(1600:10) COPILOT: Naw, I don't think that's right.
(1600:19) COPILOT: Ah, maybe it is.
(1600:21) PILOT: Hundred and twenty.
(1600:23) COPILOT: I don't know.
(1600:31) PILOT: Vee one [go or no go speed].
(1600:33) PILOT: Easy.
(1600:37) PILOT: Vee two [120 percent of normal stall speed].
(1600:39) Sound of Stickshaker [starts and continues until impact].

(1600:45) PILOT: Forward, forward.
(1600:47) SPEAKER UNDETERMINED: Easy.
(1600:48) PILOT: We only want five hundred.
(1600:50) PILOT: Come on, forward.
(1600:53) PILOT: Forward.
(1600:55) PILOT: Just barely climb.
(1600:59) SPEAKER UNDETERMINED: We're falling.
(1601:00) COPILOT: Larry, we're going down, Larry.
(1601:01) PILOT: I know it.
(1601:02) Sound of Impact.[72]

NOTES

1. Richard Cohen, "Depression," *Washington Post*, 17 January 1982, B1. *Washington Post* hereafter cited as *WP*.

2. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1968), 255.

3. Lawrence Meyer and Howie Kurtz, "71 Feared Dead as Jet Hits Bridge, Dives into Potomac," *WP*, 14 January 1982, A6; Macarthur Job, *Air Disaster*, vol. 2 (Fyshwick, Australia: Aerospace Publications, 1996), 88.

4. Michael McQueen and Mary Battiata, "Views from the Bridge—and of It on TV," *WP*, 16 January 1982, A10.

5. Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 4-5, 153, vii.

6. Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations*, 161.

7. T. W. Adorno, quoted in Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 163; Benjamin, "Theses," 253-64. Words such as "blasting" and "continuum" appear throughout Benjamin's writings but attain a nearly cataclysmic urgency in this final work from 1940.

About halfway through a much more extensive project on commercial aviation disasters, I came across Hillary Jewett's unpublished dissertation, *At the Scene of the Accident in the Nineteenth Century*, in which she rather offhandedly suggests that Benjamin's later work could be used to illuminate the phenomenon of the locomotive disaster.

8. Walter Benjamin, "N [Theoretics of Knowledge; Theory of Progress]," *The Philosophical Forum* 15, nos. 1-2 (fall-winter 1983-1984): 25.

9. Henry Allen, "TV's Images of Tragedy," *WP*, 14 January 1982, C1.

10. Caruth, *Trauma*, 153, 154; T. W. Adorno, "Letters to Walter Benjamin," in *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. Ronald Taylor (London: NBL, 1979), 127; Benjamin, "Theses," 255.

11. Carl Solberg, *Conquest of the Skies* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1979), 246; Georgia Nielsen, *From Sky Girl to Flight Attendant* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Industrial Labor Relations Press, 1982), 117, 81.

12. Joseph Corn, *The Winged Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 31-32, 31.

13. Solberg, *Conquest*, 214.

14. Job, *Air Disaster*, 86; Lou Cannon, "A Promise to Stick with the Basic Script," *WP*, 27 January 1982, A14.

15. In the early 1970s, the newly created American Academy of Air Control Medicine reported that peptic or gastric ulcers were found in 36 of 111 air traffic controllers who said they felt ill during a one-year period. In fact, A. A. Hoehling reports that "on a given day fourteen controllers at Chicago's large flight operations center, not far from O'Hare International, were off duty with ulcers." See A. A. Hoehling, *Disaster: Major American Catastrophes* (New York: Hawthorne Books, Inc., 1973), 193.

16. Warren Brown and Laura Kiernan, "Reagan Threatens to Fire Striking Controllers," *WP*, 4 August 1981, A7.

17. Walter Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," in *Reflections* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1978), 148.

18. Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), 91.

19. Kevin McKean, "Anatomy of an Air Crash," *Discover Magazine*, April 1982, 20.

20. Juan Williams, "Passenger Aids Others, then Dies," *WP*, 14 January 1982, A7.

21. Benjamin, "Paris," 157. The phrase "the sterile continuum of the always the same" is Richard Wolin's. See Richard Wolin, *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 123; Benjamin, "Theses," 257.

22. Bob Reiss, *Frequent Flier* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 193; James Kaplan, *The Airport* (New York: William Morrow, 1994), 182.

23. Kaplan, *Airport*, 182; Robert Poli, "The Air Traffic Controllers Reply," *WP*, 7 August 1981, A14.

24. Williams, "Passenger Aids Others," A1.

25. Winifried Wolf, *Car Mania* (Chicago: Pluto Press, 1996), 72; David Gartman, *Auto Opium* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 15; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993), 141. A good deal of Harvey's book elucidates precisely this shift to a post-industrial economy.

26. Evan Watkins, *Throwaways: Work Culture and Consumer Education* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993), 49. Watkins usefully explains the president's perplexing appeal in terms of an adept "capitalization" of massive economic change. This capitalization involved, in his words, "a discursive restructuring of [social] expectations as a matter of freedom from constraints" (171). By "constraints" Watkins means, of course, Reagan's sense of the "imbalances by which government regulation, union power, and the 'welfare establishment' had undermined the potential productivity of American business" (179).

27. Watkins, *Throwaways*, 198.

28. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, 236; Benjamin, "Paris," 162; Benjamin, "N [Theoretics]," 21; Benjamin, "Theses," 262.

29. See Armand Mattelart, *The Invention of Communication* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) for a detailed discussion of political anatomy and, more generally, of what he calls "a history of utopias of communication" (47); Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 195; Michael Chevalier, quoted in Mattelart, *Invention of Communication*, 106.

30. Quoted in Edward Spann, *The New Metropolis: New York City, 1840-1857* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 16.

31. See Glen Holt, "The Changing Perception of Urban Pathology: An Essay on the Development of Mass Transit in the United States," in *Cities in American History*, ed. Kenneth Jackson and Stanley Schultz (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 326.

32. St. Simon, quoted in Mattelart, *Invention of Communication*, 89-90.

33. Herman Melville, "Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!" in *Billy Budd, Sailor and Other Stories* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 103; see Schivelbusch, *Railway Journey*, 134-49, for a discussion of "Railway Brain" and the history of traumatic neurosis.

34. Melville, "Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!" 105, 103.

35. Ibid., 105.

36. Karl Marx, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 475.

37. Williams, "Passenger Aids Others," A1.

38. Benjamin, "Theses," 263; F. D. Reeve, *The White Monk: An Essay on Dostoevsky and Melville* (Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press, 1989), 123; Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), 121, 129.

39. Benjamin, quoted in Graeme Gilloch, *Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 114.

40. Walker Percy, *The Message in the Bottle* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1982), 7, 6.

41. Blaine Harden, "The Impresario of Heroism: How Reagan Fulfills Our Desperate Need for Reflected Glory," *WP*, 7 February 1982, B1; Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), 260.

42. S. A. Howland, *Steamboat Disasters and Railroad Accidents in the United States* (Worcester, Mass.: Dorr and Howland, 1840), 13, 14, 201, 199, 205-6.

43. Ibid., vi.

44. Williams, "Passenger Aids Others," A1.

45. Howland, *Steamboat Disasters*, 138.

46. George Landow, *Images of Crisis: Literary Iconology, 1750 to the Present* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 110.

47. Rebecca Harding Davis, *Life in the Iron-Mills*, ed. Cecelia Tichi (New York: Bedford Books, 1998), 65.

48. Schivelbusch, *Railway Journey*, 132; Bloch, quoted in Schivelbusch, 129, 131.

49. Marx, "Communist Manifesto," 476; Arthur Shostak, *The Air Controllers' Controversy: Lessons from the PATCO Strike* (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1986), 22.

50. Shostak, *Air Controllers' Controversy*, 248.

51. Kenneth Bredemeier, "Identity of Plane Crash Hero Remains a Mystery," *WP*, 20 January 1982, A1.

52. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981), 287; Roger Rosenblatt, "The Man in the Water," *Time Magazine*, 25 January 1982, 86.

53. See Paul Ricoeur, *De l'Interpretation* (Paris: Seuil, 1965), 33-44; Editorial, "The Unknown Hero," *WP*, 21 January 1982, A18.

54. "List of Air Crash Victims Identified to Date," *WP*, 17 January 1982, A10.

55. Geoffrey Hartman, *Criticism in the Wilderness* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1980), 83.

56. Mike Sager and Sandra Boodman, "Priest at Crash Scene is Held as Fugitive," *WP*, 17 January 1982, A10.

57. Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 90.

58. T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (New York: Continuum, 1973), 369, 370.

59. Marx, quoted in Buck-Morss, *Dialectics of Seeing*, 120. Buck-Morss's translation captures both the tone and the content of Marx's argument in the famous "fetishism of commodities" section of *Capital*.

60. Shostak, *Air Controllers' Controversy*, 123.

61. Rolf Tiedemann, "Dialectics at a Standstill," in *On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Reflections* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 286; Wolin, *Walter Benjamin*, 130.

62. McQueen and Battiata, "Views from the Bridge," A10.

63. Joe Hill, "Workers of the World, Awaken," in *Rebel Voices: An I.W.W. Anthology*, ed. Joyce Kornbluh (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964), 143. Reprinted by permission of Industrial Workers of the World, 103 West Michigan Avenue, Ypsilanti, Mich., 48197.

64. Benjamin, "Theses," 262; Caruth, *Trauma*, 5.

65. I have in mind the work of someone like Francis Fukuyama. See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

66. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 524, 534; John McCole, *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 146.

67. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 542; Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics* (New York: Semiotext[e], 1986), 29.

68. Marx, "Communist Manifesto," 476.

69. Dusko Doder, "Soviets Hint Air Controller Firings Caused Crash," *WP*, 17 January 1982, A10.

70. Shostak, *Air Controllers' Controversy*, 183.

71. Benjamin, "N [Theoretics]," 22; Mary Battiata and Jura Koncius, "A Survivor: 'We Weren't Going to Make It'," *WP*, 14 January 1982, A6.

72. The official report didn't entirely exonerate the air traffic controllers; it wondered why the airport had remained open during such a storm. Though the pilot in command was ultimately responsible for deciding whether or not to take off, a controller first had to clear him to do so. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 370, 371; "Transcript of the Last Words," *WP*, 5 February 1982, A10.