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On September 11 more people clicked "on documentary news photographs than on pornography for the first (and only) time in the history of the Internet," reports writer David Levi Strauss. The archive of images associated with the tragic events of 9/11 merits careful analysis. Artist Damien Hirst has suggested that the attacks were designed to be viewed - "The thing about 9/11 is that it's kind of an artwork in its own right. It was wicked, but it was devised in this way for this kind of impact. It was devised visually."

Starting from the tremendous fascination with images of 9/11, Karen Engle asks what, in the context of a national trauma, makes an image appropriate or scandalous, exploring how diverse visual media have been mobilized in political projects of identification and personal narratives of empathy. Focusing on themes of memory, mourning, and history, Engle examines sculptural, photographic, and new media responses to the 9/11 attacks in both contemporary and historical contexts, considers the public's reaction to these visual productions, and suggests that earlier presentations of America at war play a pivotal role in the representations of 9/11 in both official and popular media.

Seeing Ghosts is a groundbreaking theoretical study of how we remember, how we mourn, and how images of a particular event influence our imagination of the future.