Summary:
Against the backdrop of the U.S. government’s “performance or interpretation of torture as somehow a moral and necessary value” (713), Diana Taylor examines the erosion of analytical methodologies precipitated by the practice of torture (from the Latin *torquere*, “to twist, distort”). Framing torture as a force that simultaneously reproduces and threatens to undermine civilization, a paradoxically rampant limit, Taylor locates the impetus for her thinking in questions about her place in the discourse, carefully unfolding the “where” and the “how” of her intervention, and the purchase of the critical methodologies she utilizes. Contextualizing and teasing apart the (exemplary) case study, the limit case, and the scenario, for what they each offer in the way of instruction as well as the ways in which they lose integrity and buckle under the pressure of torture, Taylor seizes upon the double-blind study as an apt metaphor for grasping the terrain of methodology in times of state-produced terror.

Quotes:
“While scenarios are ubiquitous and multivalent, used extensively by military strategists, scientists, game developers, and social scientists to simulate specific situations and predict outcomes, they have not been generally recognized in the humanities as critical meaning-making systems.” (728)

“While it seems urgent to insist on the exceptional status of these events, why, as Giorgio Agamben asks, ‘confer on extermination the prestige of the mystical?’ The tight frame and bracketed quality of exceptionality can dehistoricize the occurrences, obscuring a long history of particulars.[58]” (730)

“This does not mean that torture cannot or has not been studied,[65] but the insights seem neither to illuminate the current ‘dark side’ nor to uncouple the *shown* from the *not known* of percepticide. The modes of investigation and pursuit of knowledge that define method twist under the pressure of this criminal practice As Berlant notes, the normalization of torture signals a ‘stunning defeat for the empirical and the analytical.’[66] ” (732)

Questions:
At least part of Taylor’s rationale for the usefulness of the “scenario” seems to be its utility for the military, the scientific establishment, and the gaming industry. To the extent that these are institutions that (help) map the terrain for torture and help normalize its existence, what does it mean to borrow methods from these projects of empire? Or is the institutional academic always already engaged in this kind of tool-sharing with the state in ways that render such a question moot?

What might be on the other side of this world-historic defeat of the empirical and the analytical?

What does it mean to (de)historicize 9/11? How far back do we need to go and what is the scope of the network of actants and discourses we need to engage in order to (de)exceptionalize torture and the “war on terror” by which it is authorized?