The "Image-Event" in the Early Post - 9/11 Novel:

Literary Representations of Terror After September 11, 2001

Ewa Kowal

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After September 11, 2001

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"image comes before thought"
"dream is more powerful than thought"
"childhood is certainly greater than reality"
Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (xx, 16, 16)

"Media have the same claim to reality
as more tangible cultural artifacts;
photographs, films, and computer applications are as real
as airplanes and buildings."
Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin,
Remediation. Understanding New Media (19)

"reality is a principle"
Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism* (28)

For my parents
Dla moich rodziców

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FOREWORD: WORD ON TERROR

The first public words on the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks were produced the moment the events began to happen. Merely reporting bare facts broadcast live, they were stunned and sparse, "as if the media itself had gone into shock" (Houen, 2). Significantly, from the very beginning their relation to the reality of what was happening was problematic. At first it was just lack of information. At 8:46 a.m. the first plane hitting the North Tower of the WTC was described in exactly such terms: a plane hitting a skyscraper. For the next sixteen minutes, to the onlookers' knowledge, nothing more sinister than a tragic accident was taking place. But then, after a pause "to give the world time to gather round its TV sets" (Amis, 4), the second plane hit the other tower and this excessive doubling of events dominoed an excess of information seemingly impossible to process.

However, already on September 11 the process of managing of the ensuing chaos began: the ordering vocabulary, first "attack" and then "war," soon became the dominant words on terror, especially after "war on terror" was announced. After the initial stutter, the public language became more fluent, rigorous, as if it could reverse or at least replace what the "big picture" "spelled out": "If one were to slow down a videotape of the first plane approaching then hitting the north tower (...) and then zoom in to the instants of impact, one would see the word 'American' slide, letter by letter, into oblivion" (Smith); one would also see "the violent obliteration of the word 'UNITED'" (ibid.).

The attacks of September 11, 2001 were "the most heinous and gigantic terrorist mission ever perpetrated" (Borradori, 48), a "unique new catastrophe" (Kaplan, 137) – and with it, says Martin Amis, we "entered a distinct phase in history" (21). "September 11, 2001, has been much inflated, its impacts exaggerated, its real effects smothered in hyperbole," says Terry Smith, adding nonetheless that "the deeper shifts" of which this day is a symptom "cannot be denied." When the towers, two of the tallest buildings in the world, located at the heart of the greatest economic and military power in the world, ceased to exist in our reality, they acquired a symbolic, ghostly presence in alternative reality, the virtual reality of the mind: memory, myth and imagination, language and all modes of representation. 9/11 today "carries so many burdens – of interpretation, of sentimentality, of politics, of war – that sometimes it's hard to find the rubble of the actual event beneath the layers of edifice we've built on top of it" (Rich). This abstract edifice will remain under construction a long time after the National September 11 Memorial in New York has been completed, and alongside the monument it will stand for the pivotal point in recent history, marking the beginning of the 21st century in every aspect of global culture from politics to art.

The present study will concentrate on one layer of this developing structure: literature, an alternative stratum to the "word on terror." The metaphor of architecture

introduces this subject matter most fittingly, not only because it comes to mind in an unconditional reflex, considering what the literature is about. Architecture will be shown here as more than just the starting point for writers. What this study will be mostly interested in is the architecture of a literary work.

Also an anthropomorphic way of thinking comes to mind naturally in the case of the Twin Towers: the very word "twin" suggests it and, as Lakoff tells us in "The Power of the Images," "tall buildings are metaphorically people standing erect." For New Yorkers these were close "people" – above all literally speaking, since nearly three thousand actual people were killed in their destruction. This is why after the tragedy *The New Yorker* needed for its cover "an image of the towers that [would help New Yorkers] come to terms with their loss" (Spiegelman 2002, 286). Words would not have sufficed, and a required image was produced by Art Spiegelman. His black-on-black "phantom towers"[1] managed to depict what one New Yorker called "our phantom limb" (Ric Burns qtd. in Marks): "You feel it, but it's not there; you look to where you feel it should be" (ibid.). Many felt the towers were "beloved in the way a departed relative may be thought of more fondly after death than in life" (ibid.). Spiegelman's black towers "accurately reflect[ed] the painful new emptiness [that many] needed to see" (Spiegelman 2002, 286). Paradoxically, what they needed to see was invisibility. In fact, in Spiegelman's image of the "phantom towers" invisibility was double, because its complete blackness covered the original colourful sketch which later was *re*covered for the collection *110 Stories: New York Writers After September 11*. The original version showed the towers "float[ing] against a tranquil Magritte sky above a Lower Manhattan cityscape" (ibid.), shrouded in black like two coffins, or two bodies.

The reference to René Magritte and his surrealism is very apt here: breaches in the reality/fiction division, shifted borderlines, cutouts against the horizon – *The Lovers I* and *II*, *The Unexpected Answer*, *The Human Condition* and *The Treachery of Images* all come to mind. The two bodies on Spiegelman's cover were such an *anomaly*, such a surreal puzzle, because what they reflected, the reality, was an anomaly, too. But above all, these "bodies" were an ersatz, a necessary by-product of the need and yet inability to save and see *other* bodies. "The rescue and salvage operation that continues near my front stoop has allowed me the luxury of trying to rescue and salvage my first image," said Spiegelman regretfully and guiltily, as the ironic word "luxury" suggests (ibid.). "Not especially well equipped to help in the search for survivors" – he admitted a little earlier – "I applied myself to searching for an image of the disaster. Despite what felt like the irrelevance of the task, it gave me a way to fend off trauma and focus on something" (ibid., 285–286).

This impulse: engaging oneself in what is painfully felt to be a substitute and not very useful activity, which yet may play some therapeutic role, led one artist to depict the events of September 11 in now iconic images, and later in the form of a graphic novel. But it has also led others to search for their own "images of the disaster." This

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[1] Later the cover of his graphic novel *In the Shadow of No Towers*.

drive may well characterise all other authors in this study of the (Western) post-9/11 novel – the edifice or the body of work that is *instead*.

As it has been suggested, it is also a growing body. And it belongs to a family which has been growing rapidly over the years. Since 2001, thousands of articles and books have been published on the subject of 9/11 and related topics. Ranging from special editions of Marvel Comics, via memoirs of the 9/11 widows and *The 9/11 Commission Report*[2] (also in the form of a graphic adaptation[3]) to countless works by various theorists including conspiracy theorists – literature on 9/11 and its aftermath has itself become the subject of further literature analysing not the "original" events and "facts" (it must be said: always elusive), but rather examining their perception and interpretation, *their* representation.

In a way, the present study is such a work: "repurposing" the earlier "repurposing." More specifically, it aims to be an in-depth systematic study of a fairly large number of post-9/11 literary works, predominantly novels, written by various authors from four Western countries between 2003 and 2007, and thus providing the earliest literary responses to the attacks and/or their aftermath. I believe that such a category ("the earliest response") is already justified, as all the works discussed here belong still to the George W. Bush era and are likely to differ from anything produced after January 2009, and the beginning of Barack Obama's presidency, let alone the killing of Osama bin Laden (May 2, 2011) and the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks.

This temporal framework is one (and the major) criterion according to which the works analysed here will merge into one, albeit heterogeneous, "body" in the eyes of one critic. The "body" will be analysed in search for its own particular features such as the authors' collective motivation behind writing, illustrated above by Spiegelman's example. In particular, the question of form produced by this similar drive behind writing will be raised: are there common strategies and recurrent motifs in these works, created roughly speaking at the same time, independently from one another (as opposed to the books to come later, which will "know" this "tradition")? The works will also be shown speaking their individual voices, but always in a dialogue – with one another as well as with non-literary modes of expression, as they will be examined in a broader cultural context. All this should allow us to see the group as a collection characterised by more than just the fact of addressing, or being related to, the same subject.

Furthermore, just as "addressing the same subject" can be carried out in various ways in literature addressing (post-)9/11 terror (notably, not "the same" subject for everyone), the way of addressing the subject of the post-9/11 novel employed here is surely one of many (and many to come) and, likewise, cannot be, and does not pretend to be, definitive. On the contrary, it is selective and subjective. All the same, it tries to provide an open-minded approach to the literature, which is still too recent to have been thoroughly scrutinised.

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[2] National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2004.

[3] Sid Jacobson and Ernie Colon, *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation*. Hill and Wang, 2006.

In fact, this openness is a quality of the literature itself. It is my impression that with time some of the books examined here increasingly open up to interpretations, gaining new meanings. For example, in the context of the continuing economic crisis in the Western world, Beigbeder's pornography in *Windows on the World* involving two stockbrokers so close to Wall Street acquires a prescient aura: pornography may be an apt metaphor for the immoral practices justified by the free market economy and permitted by the *laissez-faire* policy that lies at the bottom of the current troubles. "That is the subject of this book: the collapse of a house of credit cards" (8 [8:32][4]) – the author's words sound particularly true today. Also the performance artist in a business suit gradually and spectacularly committing symbolic (but to a large extent also literal) suicide in DeLillo's *Falling Man*, may be seen as a broader allegory. It is not unlikely that the emergence of other new contexts for these and other post-9/11 works is just a matter of time.

But what exactly is my way of addressing the subject of early post-9/11 novel? What makes it, as I claim, an "open-minded" approach? The answer is: not limiting myself only to literature in the most literal sense, i.e. the written word. My interest lies primarily in "the image," visuality and audio-visuality in the analysed literary works as well as in their materiality, their structure and form. Thus, frequently, interdisciplinary references will be made to visual arts and contemporary aesthetics, to architecture and the architecture of the word, to contemporary critics of technology, to new media, but, above all, to the mass media. It must also be added that the newest medium, i.e. the internet, has played a crucial role in working on this project and, beside the primary sources, constitutes the main source of information, which is only partially reflected in the Bibliography.

Such importance attached to the World Wide Web in a literary study is only natural in discussing the subject of global terror. Art Spiegelman, among many others, has noticed the simultaneous and shared widespread impact of the 9/11 attacks: their image "burn[ed] itself into our collective retina" (2002, 284). This giant tissue, "our collective retina," could only have evolved with the development of global television and internet networks.[5] The very term "retina" comes from the Latin word for "net" and the membrane's working is comparable to the film in a camera. It is this focus (another optical term) on one event at one time and place perceived by millions and millions of eyes, which thanks to one technologically advanced medium (TV), supported by another (the internet), fused into one organ of vision that provides a unique, extremely condensed moment in history – a moment which then instantly exploded into a myriad of questions in all areas of human activity.

Part of this general human activity is literature, for which this condensed tragic moment poses a great challenge. The authors of the earliest post-9/11 works undertook

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[4] The numbers in the square brackets refer to sections in the book. All quotations from Beigbeder's novel come from the American 2005 edition, unless indicated otherwise.

[5] Already in 1964 Marshall McLuhan suggested that "we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace (...) we have already extended our senses and our nerves by the various media" (2008, 3–4).

this subject for various, but most likely related, reasons: because it was such a dominant part of our reality, it still is widely debated and controversial and – in the case of more prominent, celebrated authors – because they felt a sense of responsibility, and, in fact, were expected to provide some artistic response. However, by addressing this topic, writers have often been, almost automatically, accused of exploiting it, in other words of hypocrisy: "fictional terrorism (...) is clearly somewhat parasitic on the real thing. The terrorist novel feeds off the glow of the violence it condemns – and in effect turns actual terrorists into advance publicists for your book" – one critic observed (Kunkel). Another critic expressed the following common reservations: "Should novelists write about the mass-murder of 9/11 at all? 'Post-9/11' fiction often seems to use the attacks and their aftermath too cheaply, as background for books that would have been written anyway" (Cummins). The second and consequent default accusation has been that of not giving justice to the problem, or even of trivialising it, of excessive artistic self-indulgence. Either way, failure to a lesser or greater degree may be the fate that all post-9/11 books are doomed to. Because of the scale and weight of the tragedy, and of the additional symbolic load attached to it, whatever the writers do is bound to "buckle under the pressure" (ibid.).

This is one of the reasons why post-9/11 literature tends to be self-conscious. And this and the abovementioned complications in reception pose a dilemma for critical analysis, too – hence my application of less traditional methods. But having mentioned the challenges facing the post-9/11 novel, let me also add some opportunities: apart from provoking a revision of the nature and process of literary analysis, the condensed tragic and symbolic moment in history forces literature to ask several crucial questions:

1. about the relation between:
   a) literature and reality,
   b) (more broadly speaking) reality and fiction,
   c) reality and literature on the one hand and the developing and new media on the other;
2. about the form of contemporary literature;
3. and finally, about the role of literature today.

Let me now list the selected early post-9/11 works. They will be given below in an order corresponding with the scale assumed for the whole study. The scale – it must be admitted, difficult to establish mathematically – measures the distance in time and space between the literary works and the event of a terrorist attack (predominantly the September 11 attacks, but in one case, *Córeńka*, the Bali Bombings of October 12, 2002). What is meant by the distance is not, of course, the date and place of writing or of publication, but the distance between the narrator/main character (in other words: the subject who acts as the centre of consciousness and the source of the point of view in the text) and the explosion, the central threat in the work *and* in reality. Already here the fluidity between reality and fiction or reality and the literary work (which may be non-fiction) can be marked, as it will be widely discussed later. In fact, a dissolution of various clear-cut boundaries will be shown as a result of close proximity to the explosion, being the epicentre of disruption (in reality and in the literary work) towards

which the work needs to locate itself. What can be noticed is that the closer the work is to this epicentre, the greater the dissolution, and consequently the level of the work's formal unconventionality. The following list starts with a group of the most hybrid/ unconventional works to be analysed here, and ends with formally more traditional works. Below, the second list presents the same works in chronological order.

1. Frédéric Beigbeder, *Windows on the World* (*WoW*[6] 2003), Art Spiegelman, *In the Shadow of No Towers* (*ISNT* 2004), Jonathan Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (*ELIC* 2005), Wojciech Tochman, *Córeńka* (*C* 2005)
2. William Gibson, *Pattern Recognition* (*PR* 2003), Nick McDonell, *The Third Brother* (*TB* 2005), Don DeLillo, *Falling Man* (*FM* 2007)
3. Claire Tristram, *After* (*A* 2004), Philip Beard, *Dear Zoe* (*DZ* 2005)
4. Ian McEwan, *Saturday* (*S* 2005), Lynne Sharon Schwartz, *The Writing on the Wall* (*WR* 2005), John Updike, *Terrorist* (*T* 2006), Jay McInerney, *The Good Life* (*GL* 2006).[7]

2003: William Gibson, *Pattern Recognition* (US); Frédéric Beigbeder, *Windows on the World* (French)
2004: Art Spiegelman, *In the Shadow of No Towers* (US); Claire Tristram, *After* (US)
2005: Jonathan Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (US); Ian McEwan, *Saturday* (British); Nick McDonell, *The Third Brother* (US); Lynne Sharon Schwartz, *The Writing on the Wall* (US); Wojciech Tochman, *Córeńka* (Polish); Philip Beard, *Dear Zoe* (US)
2006: Jay McInerney, *The Good Life* (US); John Updike, *Terrorist* (US)
2007: Don DeLillo, *Falling Man* (US)

As it can be seen, out of the thirteen books, ten are by American authors; the remaining three are by a British, a Polish and a French writer (the last book will be analysed in its English and Polish translations). Therefore, the present work is a comparative study; I believe that at least an attempt at an international approach is suitable in the discussion of such a global subject as the post-9/11 terror.

One final remark before briefly signalling the content of the following chapters. Norman Mailer told another novelist to wait ten years before starting to write about September 11 (McInerney 2005), but he and many others did not wait. Five years later, the result according to Donadio was that "no novels ha[d] yet engaged with the post-Sept. 11 era in any meaningful way" (2005a). The present study will try to test this verdict as well as V.S. Naipaul's explanation for it: in his view, the reason for

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[6] The letters preceding the date of publication are abbreviations which will be used to indicate citations from all the primary sources.

[7] Three other works which will be mentioned or quoted here are: *The Second Plane* by Martin Amis (2008), a collection *110 Stories: New York Writers After September 11* edited by Ulrich Baer and Arthur Nersesian's novel *Unlubricated* (2004, popular fiction). Of course, the list of all post-9/11 works, including the most recent ones, is much longer. Some novels have been listed in rather misleadingly titled "Complete Annotated Guide to 9/11 Novels" by Myers.

this disappointing, but not surprising, situation was not writing too early, but writing in the wrong medium. For the great novelist, the novel is "of no account" (qtd. in Donadio 2005b) – "fiction is no longer adequate to make sense of the world," as it is "nonfiction [that] is better suited than fiction to capturing the complexities of today's world" (Donadio 2005a). I will propose a different option in the light of the above list of books, where the very division into fiction and nonfiction becomes problematised as a reflection of their very subject matter. Perhaps it is this mix of fiction with nonfiction, rather than either of them in separation, rather than any single hitherto established medium or genre, that most effectively captures the complexities of today's world.

The present study consists of an Introduction, three Chapters and a Conclusion. The Introduction to this study focuses on the image and follows the Baudrillardian concept of the 9/11 attack as an "image-event." Consequently, I will refer to visual arts and audio-visual media indicating a reality/fiction confusion which corresponds with/ increases a sense of immaturity at the heart of today's Western culture. I will delineate the role of literature in this context and will further define my approach by analysing William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* in Chapter I, where a pattern recognised in all early post-9/11 novels will be presented. Chapter I, drawing on such theorists as Jacques Derrida, Marshall McLuhan, George Lakoff, Paul Virilio, Wolfgang Welsch, Susan Sontag and Susan Faludi, will be devoted to audio-visual and visual media in the post-9/11 novel, with special focus on television. However, also visual works of art present in the novels will be discussed here. The aim of the Second Chapter will be to analyse the wide range of form of the selected post-9/11 works by placing them on the already mentioned scale with the most conventional and the most unconventional works at its respective ends. The form of the works from the latter category will be related to Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of carnivalisation. In Chapter III, I will concentrate on motifs of childhood and magical thinking in early post-9/11 novels, showing how the two are intertwined. I will make references to the works of two anthropologists, Bronisław Malinowski and Marcel Mauss here. Finally, in the Conclusion, I will offer some general observations on the (largely therapeutic) role of the post-9/11 novel.

INTRODUCTION: THE IMAGE(-EVENT)

The first work of visual art to depict the September 11 terrorist attacks was in all probability *Untitled* (2001) by Wolfgang Staehle. The status of being "the earliest" could only be achieved by its being simultaneous. On September 6, 2001, three panoramic live web-cam views, showing an 11th-century monastery in Bavaria, the television tower in Berlin and the New York skyline, offering a giant postcard vista or a contemporary veduta, were projected on the walls of Postmasters Gallery in Chelsea (NYC), and from then on were to be incessantly transmitted there via the internet. This could have been a repetition of one of Staehle's previous works, *Empire 24/7* (1999–2004), a static take of New York's Empire State Building, which echoed – and brought into the 21st century – Andy Warhol's notoriously 8-hour-long film *Empire* (1964). However, five days after the exhibition opened, the still image of lower Manhattan captured the unfolding events of 9/11, updating them every few seconds like a TV coverage – but putting them in the context of art.

Until that morning, any changes in the pictures, limited to light and the weather, were slow and hardly noticeable, which suited Staehle's intention: "I wanted viewers to consider how they experience time... We're all running around all the time. I wanted to make people feel aware" (qtd. in Lehner). However, this very morning, this slowness and stability, "the key intent of the work," which Magdalena Sawon from Postmasters Gallery defined as "to continuously stream in an unedited and unaltered reality," was exploded by the editing and alteration of that reality by terrorists. Therefore, the terrorists' intention in choosing and focusing their – and our – attention on the same object as the one chosen by the artist was completely opposite, but perhaps based on their shared awareness of the same common assumption: that the famous cityscape symbolising the greatest world power *stood* for order, permanence and unchangeability. Staehle wanted to confirm this by means of distant passive perception, the terrorists wanted to negate it by means of close active intervention – amplified by our passive perception.[8] Just like Staehle, relying on visuality and also using the tools of modern technology, the terrorists wanted to make people feel aware – of the fact that they were wrong to take the present state of the world for granted and took no time to think differently. But, as we know, Staehle's mediaeval + contemporary architecture-continuum spanned by live internet broadcast proved much less thought-provoking than hijacking airplanes and committing suicide while killing nearly three thousand people. Nevertheless, interestingly – and disturbingly – on the morning of September 11,

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[8] Derrida speaks of "a loop" here: the terror that was "revealed" then was also "doubled, or squared" (qtd. in Borradori, 6), since its object (America) was "exposed" both to violence and to "its own cameras" (ibid., 95). Derrida was "stunned how naively the media contributed to multiplying the force of this traumatic experience" (ibid., xii).

2001, on the gallery screen and on our TV screens, the results of these two entirely different acts of two entirely different kinds of people looked exactly the same.

Juxtaposing the terrorists and their actions with art and the artist should not appear as striking or new, since it already happened on September 11, when the hijackers literally entered the picture of art, in the Postmasters Gallery in New York, becoming both the subject and the agents – or even accidental co-authors? – of Staehle's untitled work of art. This is because, at that moment, they entered every picture – they made only one picture matter.[9] The web-cam and the screen in the gallery and we, the audience, in front of TV sets showing identical images – were mute witnesses; the terrorists were the hidden directors and cameramen and performers of a spectacle of killing and destruction;[10] the victims were their method.

But the connection between artists and terrorists had been noticed much earlier – in literature. Frank Lentricchia and Jody McAuliffe point out in their *Crimes of Art + Terror* that "[t]he desire beneath many romantic literary visions is for a terrifying awakening that would undo the West's economic and cultural order (…). It is also the desire, of course, of what is called terrorism" (2). In an article tracing the history of the "terrorist novel" before 9/11, Benjamin Kunkel writes: "In the fantasy-nightmare of the terrorist novel, the terrorist was the public symbol maker the novelist wished and failed to be." Referring to Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* and the dynamite-vested Professor, Kunkel said "with good reason did Lenin call terrorism the violence of intellectuals." In *Violence in Early Modernist Fiction*, Izabela Curyłło-Klag says in the context of Conrad's 1907 novel that some major intellectuals were *attracted to* explosions:

> At the turn of the twentieth century (…) explosions had a certain *allure*: their energy and potential for energising appealed to the human need for an instant change, a radical break with the past, a complete redefinition of reality. The new was to arrive with a cathartic big bang – a starting point for a transvaluation of all values that, according to the epoch's key philosopher, Nietzsche, could finally redeem the erring human race. (31, italics mine)

Finally, in Don DeLillo's 1991 novel *Mao II*, we see that intellectuals must lose in competition with the bomb. As the main character, the novelist Bill Gray notices:

> There's a curious knot that binds novelists and terrorists. (…) Years ago I used to think it was possible for a novelist to alter the inner life of the culture. Now bomb-makers and gunmen have taken that territory. They make raids on human consciousness. (41)

In a later part of the book, we find the following dialogue. Gray says: "What terrorists gain, novelists lose. The degree to which they influence mass consciousness is the extent of our decline as shapers of sensibility and thought. The danger they

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[9] Edward Rothstein, commenting on the exhibition "Here is New York" organised in New York on the sixth anniversary of the attacks, noticed that 9/11 and its immediate aftermath "was probably the most photographed series of days in history." Moreover, "The proliferation of these images globally was virtually unprecedented" (Gill).

[10] Jonathan Franzen called them "the death artists," and he referred to all the planners of the attacks as "these glad artists" "rejoicing over the terrible beauty of the towers' collapse."

represent equals our own failure to be dangerous." To which his friend answers: "And the more clearly we see terror, the less impact we feel from art" (ibid., 157).

Can *Untitled* (2001) still be seen as art? What impact does it still have as (only) art? Or is any impact that it now has solely the impact of terrorism? Or the impact of the combination of the two, the impact of their indistinguishability? In *Internet Art*, Rachel Greene called the work "an ongoing meditation on media voyeurism" (173). But it was only after the attacks, which destroyed or at least altered the initial artistic intention, that this "meditation" became really intense: "the attacks (…) usher[ed] in an era in which surveillance, controlled media environments and individual freedoms became heightened topics for debate" (ibid.). A note on *Untitled* (2001) from Tate Modern says that "web-cam projections collapse the usual codes governing the way we view our surroundings."[11] It only seems to follow that web-cam projections of collapse "collapse the usual codes governing the way we view our surroundings" (and art, since the surroundings can become art) all the more.

The present thesis is largely devoted to the collapse of hitherto clear-cut borderlines, to the all-level general art/non-art, reality/fiction ambiguity in artistic perception and expression following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 – as reflected in literature, especially the novel. A discussion of post-9/11 works of literature created in response to this event and concerned with its aftermath – the changed world in the wake of the tragedy and the global threat of terror – could not, however, begin without extensive observations on the image and its troublesome relation to the visual arts. In fact, the notion of the image will always be central to this study, and the reason for this is that – in accordance with Jean Baudrillard's thought which I will refer to often – the event of 9/11 was itself an "image-event" (2002, 27). Consequently, this "image-event," this hybrid, borderline phenomenon which, as a subject is already elusive due to its traumatic, morally sensitive dimension – becomes even more difficult to capture in the written word. In *The Spirit of Terrorism*, the French philosopher writes: "at the same time as they have radicalized the world situation, the events in New York can also be said to have radicalized the relation of the image to reality" (26–27). The question I intend to examine is whether – and if so: how – they have radicalised the relation of literature to reality. These two alternations took place, and need to be analysed, together.

Introducing the term "image-event," Baudrillard says that "[t]he image consumes the event, in the sense that it absorbs it and offers it for consumption" (ibid., 27). Therefore, the image is the only thing available in an attempt at reaching the reality of the event. Consequently, literary reactions must refer primarily to the image, while themselves creating another layer distancing us from "the original."[12] But as "[t]he whole play of history and power is disrupted by this event, (…) so, too, are the conditions of analysis"

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[11] On the basis of http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/exhibitions/timezones/artists.shtm (all the internet links in this study were accessed on 3.12.2011).

[12] Cf. H. White: in the historical text, which is structured just like a literary artifact, "the originals," being "historical structures and processes," are not available for adequacy check: "we cannot go and look at them in order to see if the historian has adequately reproduced them in his narrative" (17–18).

(ibid., 4). Thus the event cannot really be "original," as, to use Baudrillard's words, "[i]t is not 'real.' In a sense it is worse, it is symbolic" (ibid., 29) – it is the first "symbolic event on a world scale" (ibid., 3). And "the fascination with the attack is primarily a fascination with the image" (ibid., 28–29): "[t]he spectacle of terrorism forces the terrorism of spectacle upon us" (i.e. the Western world) (ibid., 30).

"Where were you when you *saw* it?" (Nersesian, 128, italics mine) is probably the most frequently asked question on the subject in small-talk and "bigger" talk in and outside post-9/11 literature. "Everyone knows precisely where they were on September 11, 2001," writes Frédéric Beigbeder, one of the narrators of his novel *Windows on the World* (83 [8:56]). Most of us, no matter where we were and what we had been doing before hearing the news, soon found ourselves in front of TV sets, our windows on the world. There, "[t]he inexperienced" – because how could anyone be experienced in commenting unprecedented events? – "TV news anchors seemed disbelieving" (*WoW* 84). In their difficult role of those who watched while being watched, "[t]hey were reluctant to stick their necks out, content to let the live feed run uninterrupted, terrified of saying something that would be on every blooper reel for the next thirty years" (*WoW* 84). Still in the following days, even months, almost anything said on the subject could be the wrong thing to say. The really *right* thing is very hard to find, but sooner or later, at least one of the renowned figures (on the Western side) asked at press conferences for their "reactions to the terrorist strikes" was bound to provide the really wrong thing.

As it appears, one of such figures was found in the late German pioneer of electronic music Karlheinz Stockhausen, who reputedly called the attack "the greatest work of art that is possible in the whole cosmos" (qtd. in Lentricchia and McAuliffe, 6). In fact, what Stockhausen meant was that the attack was "*Lucifer's* greatest work of art," and exactly by saying so he condemned it as proof that "the devil was still an active force in the world," as one newspaper apologetically corrected its earlier accusations (Cohen, italics mine). However, not everyone was as open to reasoning and to later explanations that the composer's actual words were taken out of context by the media, and that the tone and intention behind them were not those of envy and admiration for the terrorists. For many just mentioning the tragedy and art in the same sentence was immoral. A tacit border was crossed.[13]

However, the composer's "faux-pas"[14] was not unique. For example, a British artist, Damien Hirst, said something similar, if not ostensibly more objectionable, calling the attacks "visually stunning" and adding that "on one level [the terrorists] kind of need congratulating, which a lot of people shy away from, which is a very dangerous thing" (qtd. in Scott). Still, it is Stockhausen who is most remembered for admitting to having had an aesthetic experience on 9/11. It "is a very dangerous thing," indeed, and despite the fact that both artists insisted on the obvious: their abhorrence of the atrocity, and

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[13] Stockhausen's words remained misremembered and misquoted for a long time; several of his concerts were boycotted or cancelled (Connolly).

[14] By "faux-pas" I mean here mainly the speech as it was reported by the media; but even in its undoctored version the remark was somewhat risky just five days after the tragedy.

both "apologised for any offence caused to the victims' families" (ibid.), the stigma stuck to the composer.

"Poor Stockhausen, who in the paroxysms of the Bataille-like death frenzy, saluted the World Trade towers' destruction as the greatest aesthetic gesture of the twentieth century, thereby at once becoming a pariah," said Fredric Jameson in "The Dialectics of Disaster" (303). Though recklessly outspoken, Jameson added, "Stockhausen was, however, not wrong to insist on the essentially aesthetic nature of the act (...)." Subsequently, the critic called for drawing deeper conclusions from the composer's "outburst" (ibid.).

This call may indeed be a valid one – but only if it is accompanied by drawing conclusions also from the reactions to the composer's reaction. What we can see here is blowing up of one term (art), by editing out Lucifer, so that the term engulfs everything, the whole world. Stockhausen alone cannot be responsible for this exaggeration. Using this term (art) on an enormous scale (cosmos) is truly emblematic of the Western mainstream verbal take on terrorism on the whole. "Terrorism," itself "a loaded and ambiguous term if there ever was one" (Jameson, 303), is like "Stockhausen's art"[15] – a word without limits, which leads to the "war on terror" also having no limits.[16] As Hauerwas points out: "That Americans get to decide who is and who is not a terrorist means that this is not only a war without clear purpose, but also a war without end" (430). However, the elusive enemy who is hard to define, can be easy to identify, if need be. As Jacques Derrida notices,

> certain parties have an interest in presenting their adversaries not only as terrorists (...) but *only* as terrorists, indeed as '*international* terrorists' who (...) must thus be opposed, it is claimed, not through counterterrorism but through a 'war,' meaning, of course, a 'nice clean' war. The 'facts' clearly show that these distinctions are lacking in rigor, impossible to maintain, and easily manipulated for certain ends. (qtd. in Borradori, 110)

The consequence is that everyone can become a terrorist, which "casts suspicion on every individual"[17] (Baudrillard 2002, 20). As Baudrillard notices, the 9/11 terrorists

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[15] The misconstrued comment is meant here, hence the inverted commas.

[16] As Isikoff reminds us, "the 'war on terror' was one of the signature phrases of the Bush presidency. It was formally declared in Bush's nationally televised speech to Congress on Sept. 20, 2001 – his first after the 9/11 terror attacks." With the end of George W. Bush's presidency in January 2009, the new Barack Obama administration was "searching for alternatives to the term 'war on terror'" – "a more precise phrase" and "a phrase that better articulates a hopeful message" (ibid.). Significantly and unsurprisingly, "Obama has shied away from the words 'war on terror' since he took office. He has made references instead to the 'enduring struggle against terrorism and extremism' and to an 'ongoing struggle,' pledging also to 'go after' extremists and 'win this fight'" (ibid.). But also President Bush himself "did start limiting his use of the 'war on terror' term" in the last years in office, "referring at times to a 'war against violent extremists.'" (ibid.). As Isikoff points out, it has been noticed that "overuse of the term ['war on terror'] may have 'unintentionally' rallied extremist enemies of the United States and Britain to join forces against the West."

[17] Habermas points out that "the eradication of difference in people" is "the essence of terror" (qtd. in Borradori, 7), which corresponds with Baudrillard's observation that the West now terrorises itself (2002, 87).

assimilated everything of modernity and globalism, without changing their goal, which is to destroy that power. (...) They (...) even – and this is the height of cunning – used the *banality* of American everyday life as a cover and camouflage. (ibid., 19)

In other words, the terrorists *became* American all the better to kill Americans (they also killed themselves).[18] Moreover, as pointed out by Paul Virilio, they used "not weapons, not military instruments, but simple vehicles of air transport to destroy buildings, while being prepared to perish in the operation" which had to "set up a fatal confusion between the attack and the accident" (2002b). It also blurred the distinctions between the status of "casualties" (this was the first impression that sprang to the onlookers' minds after the first plane hit the WTC) and "victims" (this became obvious after the second – now clear – attack). Later, of course, the "victims" were declared "heroes"[19] (Faludi, 61). And anyone who would as much as dispute any part of the official ideology contained in carefully calibrated rhetoric was seen as "unpatriotic" or even as the "enemy."[20] Which proves what has just been said: when "distinctions are lacking in rigor" everyone can become the "enemy," because anything can mean anything, if those in the position to pass judgments have sufficient power to reach "certain ends" (whatever they decide them to be). This was one of the "different levels through which the catastrophe was being 'managed,'" in the words of E. Ann Kaplan (5), who also added about her own experience of the aftermath of the attacks in New York: "It gradually became clear that national ideology was hard at work shaping how the traumatic event was to be perceived" (ibid., 13).

What has been sketched above, by analogy to the all-encompassing notion of "art" ascribed to Stockhausen, is the most important aspect of the now historical term "war on terror," namely: limitlessness and confusion of all distinctions and categories with little regard for the people involved.[21] I wanted to demonstrate in this way the pervasive blurring of borderlines which occurred on and after September 11, 2001. This consequence is a crucial factor that also literature responding to 9/11 and/or its aftermath needs to take into account. This consequence is thus all-important for the present study.

Also crucial is the role of mass media. A certain hypocrisy could be recognised in some media who ostracised Stockhausen for his "dissociation of sensibility" (cf. Jameson, 297), while at the same time provoking, if not imposing this dissociation

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[18] This may be another aspect of what Derrida calls "an autoimmune crisis occurring within the system that should have predicted it" (qtd. in Borradori, 150).

[19] Habermas notes, "[t]he courage, discipline, and selflessness demonstrated by the New York firemen (...) is admirable. But why do they need to be called 'heroes'?" And he adds, "whenever 'heroes' are honoured the question arises as to who needs them and why." To solidify his point, Habermas quotes Bertold Brecht: "Pity the land that needs heroes" (qtd. in Borradori, 43).

[20] As e.g. Susan Sontag was. See Faludi, 27–30 and Sontag 2001.

[21] Of course, non-Americans and non-allies are also people. The civilian casualties of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, inhuman treatment including torture of prisoners in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay, and elsewhere, are just the most graphic examples proving Derrida's words "one does not count the dead in the same way from one corner of the globe to the other" (qtd. in Borradori, 92).

on all viewers by the unrelenting media coverage of the events. "[I]n a world saturated, no, hyper-saturated with images" – said Susan Sontag – "those that should matter have a diminishing effect: we become callous" (2003, 105). In our culture, she added, "[t]he image as shock and the image as cliché are two aspects of the same presence" (ibid., 23). In the same vein Jameson pointed out that thinking of September 11, "we remember unrealistic visuals, of a special effects or computer graphics type" (297). This could be compared to the flat visual effect described by Baudrillard in *America*:

> Modern demolition is truly wonderful. As a spectacle it is the opposite of a rocket launch. The twenty-storey block remains perfectly vertical as it slides towards the center of the earth. It falls straight, with no loss of its upright bearing, like a tailor's dummy falling through a trap-door and its own surface area absorbs the rubble. What a marvelous modern art form this is, a match for the firework displays of our childhood. (17)

As I intend to demonstrate in my analysis of several early post-9/11 novels, it is the task which writers have taken upon themselves to use their own – and stimulate our – imagination in order to charge with a human dimension what otherwise might remain a mere (albeit huge) "firework display." They do this by shifting our attention from panoramic views to individual experiences, in this way emphasising the "highly ambiguous" role of images (Baudrillard 2002, 27), which cover more than reveal (the double meaning of "screen") and thus leave a space filled with absence that can be taken over by the media and is prone to political manipulation.

The awareness of the increasingly marginalised status of literature in the present audio-visual media-dominated culture has a strong impact on the very form of the novels – which are compelled to reflect on themselves, as if in a paraphrase of Baudrillard's question: "if reality is everywhere infiltrated by images, virtuality and fiction" (ibid.) – what is (the form/role of) fiction? In effect, the works not only testify to the reality/fiction indistinctness referred to above (e.g. by mixing facts with fiction), but also appear to be one of the few modes of expression to critically discuss it. Consequently, the novels analysed here encourage a general critique of all modes of representation, undoubtedly needed in the case of traumatic globally historical events and their repercussions.

CHAPTER I: (AUDIO-)VISUAL MEDIA IN THE POST-9/11 NOVEL

I.1. Technology

"When you say 'September 11' you are already citing, are you not?" asked Jacques Derrida, rhetorically (qtd. in Borradori, 8). *What* are you citing? Derrida does not explain and this itself is part of the answer. The "name" for the event, "9/11," as he suggests, is a curious name, both meaningless in itself, cryptic, provisional and tentative, and – for this very reason – "naming" all the more. For "[t]he brevity of the appellation" for "this supposed 'event'" derives not only from "an economic or rhetorical necessity," but points to the fact "that we do not know what we are talking about" (ibid., 86).

Yet, perhaps the working of the now most accepted term for the event ("9/11") is not a question of economic necessity, but of economic *sufficiency*. It is not a matter of what is needed but of what is enough: 9/11 – instant recognition – we may not know what we are talking about, but everyone knows what we are talking about (i.e. what we are referring to). We could express this in the electronic media language: it could be metaphorically said that the designation "9/11" may be the first and fastest mental hyperlink to an *event* that automatically, instantly and repeatedly opens the same *picture* in the network of an unprecedentedly large number of individual brains and, consequently, in the world wide web of collective consciousness.[22] It is as if the two digits (themselves tall and twin) standing for the destruction of the iconic buildings and the death of thousands of people were a highlighted *icon*[23] which, once selected, sends us to this one concrete pivotal location in the hypertext of the 21st century culture. This is also part of what "you are citing," when you say "September 11" or "9/11."

Such an effect could not result with similar intensity from "selecting" the terms "Pearl Harbour," "Hiroshima and Nagasaki," "the Holocaust," "liberation of Belsen," or even "the landing on the Moon," "the murder of JFK," "the sinking of the Titanic," "Princess Diana's death" or "John Paul II's death" – to name the main iconic historical events of the 20th (even in the last case) century which have been mentioned in comparison with 9/11[24] – in various contexts because of the vastly varied nature of these events. The reason why such comparisons have been made is, of course, the fact that searching for analogies in the past is probably the first way of "making sense,"

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[22] If such a thing can be said to exist – when activated in this single mental operation.

[23] The word "icon," apart from this meaning in Computer Science, has, of course, also other meanings. Thus, very aptly, the date as an icon activates an iconic image of events happening on that date in iconic buildings.

[24] These comparisons have been made in various and very numerous sources, both in literature and in the mass media. I will provide just three examples here: Kaplan, 9, 12; Houen, 2; Žižek, 386.

or of trying to understand any radical change. The reason why the abovementioned events may appear similar to 9/11 has to do with the fact that the radical change they brought about involved one or more of the following factors: tragedy, trauma, or at least a great sense of loss met with mass grief and public display of collective emotion. Even the one non-negative event, the Moon landing, was part of a space race, which itself, alongside the nuclear (and not only) arms race and many proxy wars, was a manifestation of the Cold War, breeding panic and hysteria. All of the events as well as responses to the majority of them were documented by the mass media such as radio, press photography, film chronicles or television – all of them had to do with scientific and technological advancement, if, in some cases, only by being mediated thanks to its achievements. However, these events, absolutely horrendous as some of them were, remain still limited mainly to the memory and consciousness of the Western world. The images representing them reached – usually not instantly – a smaller number of people compared to the reach of the images of 9/11. In the case of September 11, *all* of the listed qualities (tragedy, trauma, sense of loss, mass grief, public display of collective emotion,[25] ensuing context of war, mass media, scientific and technological advancement – and others such as political, economic and social repercussions) occurred at the *same* time, in *real* time, and on a *world* scale.

For this reason Jean Baudrillard called 9/11 an "image-event" (2002, 27) and the first "symbolic event on a world scale" (ibid., 3). Similarly, Jürgen Habermas called it "the first historic world event in the strictest sense" (qtd. in Borradori, 28) and underlined "the absolute uniqueness of 9/11 from the standpoint of its communicative modality" (ibid., 49). As Borradori summed up the German philosopher's observations, "never before did anyone get as much *reality* from a TV screen as people worldwide got on 9/11" (ibid., italics mine).

All of these qualities have great significance for post-9/11 literature. The two descriptions – the "image-event" and the first historic and symbolic global event – are inseparable, since the world scale could have been achieved only thanks to the event being televised live as an image – which, as a universal medium of expression, operates beyond languages and is thus immediately understandable (if, in this case, initially confusing) to everyone. Television on that day was almost "reduced" to photography, a repetition of a few images (and a set of brief moments) looped in motion. "[A] photograph," as Sontag points out, "has only one language and is destined potentially for all" (2003, 20). What is more, she adds, "[t]o remember" – "is, more and more, not to recall a story but to be able to call up a picture" (ibid., 89). In the case of September 11, this refers to an unprecedentedly large audience. This wide viewership made the image of the event (paradoxically) precede the event (as in the term "*image-event*") and overshadow it (hence e.g. the confusion of reality with visual effects).

But to produce such a powerful – and symbolic – impression (not to mention the event itself) the practical quantitive advantage provided by technology would not have

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[25] Notably, both grief *and* joy – shown by the memorable CNN footage of Palestinians dancing in the streets in East Jerusalem on September 11, 2001.

sufficed without the qualitative aspect: the tremendous emotional value that the image-event was (and continues to be) charged with. It is due to the psychological factor that the initial impression caused by the image is indelible. True, "for most of us – the very greatest majority of us" – say Lentricchia and McAuliffe in "Groundzeroland" in their book *Crimes of Art + Terror* – "the thousands slaughtered are abstract" (5), "[w]e never really did, or never really will, *grieve* for them, though we may think we do so in the world made by Oprah" (ibid.). Who we do grieve for instead is ourselves – faced with the drastic change in the landscape of the known: the "rapture in the perceptual field," the "hole in the familiar," the "defamiliarization," and "the terror of the new" (ibid., 6). This perception clearly reflects the perspective of a viewer, especially a TV viewer, since the "telepresence" (Virilio 2002a, 49) of this event is, in effect, its only presence for "the very greatest majority of us." In fact, I would suggest that on one level even the readers of the post-9/11 novels always remain TV viewers – reading words on paper, they are always mentally connected to a screen.

This has to do with an unsurprisingly large presence of TV sets in early post-9/11 novels, to be discussed later, but even when television is not mentioned, the unmistakable imagery associated with the event is brought to mind via the "9/11 hyperlink" effect. Once this "hyperlink" has been implanted in memory it does not need any devices to operate, which further augments its effectiveness: the software to run it – the human psyche – has always been there in the first place.

In "The future of the accident" Paul Virilio writes that "in total war, the sudden militarization of science, required for the presumed victory of the opponents, reverses all logic," and consequently "the ancient philo-sophy is succeeded by the absurdity of a phil-anoia[26] that is liable to destroy the knowledge accumulated over the centuries" (2003, 85). This alarming tone is not untypical for Paul Virilio, sometimes (incorrectly) given the moniker "technophob," but this diagnosis of reversals, such as beneficial knowledge used for destruction in a "total war," echoes what has been noticed in the Introduction about the manipulation of facts through specially calibrated language and "distinctions lacking in rigor." The unexpected "militarization" of means of transport, i.e. putting one invention (a plane) to a use vastly discordant with its intended application, in turn rendered other inventions (helicopters, mobile phones, walkie-talkies) useless, and in this way discordant with their intended application in the resultant unprecedented situation. Disrupted order is exactly both the tool and the goal of terror. Not only in a material and practical sense – but above all in a psychological and mental sense.

In Baudrillard's words, this was exactly "the tactic of the terrorist model to bring about an excess of reality and have the system collapse beneath that excess of reality" (2002, 18). Such phrasing brings to mind basic definitions of, or common associations with, a nervous breakdown, a mental disorder or an emotional collapse. As T.S. Eliot put it in *Murder in the Cathedral*, "Human kind cannot bear very much reality" (69). In the same vein, in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, the psychiatrist treating

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[26] A love of madness.

shell-shocked Septimus Warren Smith defines "madness" as "not having a sense of proportions" (104). However, the problem here is not only the amount, so to speak, of reality but, as it has been mentioned above, also its questionable status. Or perhaps disrupted proportions cause a change in status? Either way, the 9/11 reality, bearing striking resemblance to Hollywood disaster movies, "has absorbed fiction's energy, and has itself become fiction" (Baudrillard 2002, 28).

As Don DeLillo says about 9/11 in "In the Ruins of the Future": "It was bright and totalising and some of us said it was unreal. When we say a thing is unreal, we mean it is too real." Thus, too much (or too-accessible) reality equals fiction, and in the final analysis, "[r]eality and fiction are inextricable" (Baudrillard 2002, 28–29). Although Baudrillard does not specify it, it goes without saying that this reality/fiction confusion took place not somewhere out there – but in our perception, in human brains.

It is human brains, in particular those of Americans, that the American linguist George Lakoff is concerned with when he speaks about *the power of the images* in his article under the same title. "All of what we know," he says,

> is physically embodied in our brains. To incorporate the new knowledge requires a physical change in the synapses of our brains, a physical reshaping of our neural system. The physical violence was not only in New York and Washington. Physical changes – violent ones – have been made to the brains of all Americans.

Combining this observation with Lentricchia and McAuliffe's comments from "Groundzeroland," it could be inferred that the sudden hole in the Manhattan landscape must have caused its tiny miniature in every TV viewer's brain.

Again, this effect was caused by the extremely powerful emotions, the shock *and the terror*, involved. The image of two symbolic buildings on fire evoked them because, as Lakoff says, "there are a number of metaphors for buildings" and, as he indicates, they all have to do with anthropomorphisation (ibid.). "Tall buildings are metaphorically tall people standing erect," he points out (ibid.). "Each tower falling was body falling," he adds (ibid.). And although "[w]e are not consciously aware of metaphorical images, they are part of the power and the horror we experience when we see them" (ibid.). This psychological phenomenon, just like the analogy between the physical changes in New York and in our neural systems, indicates another blurring of borderlines in reacting to the 9/11 and post-9/11 terror, parallel to that pertaining to reality and fiction, namely: the dissolution of distinction between distant and close, outside and inside, the world outside and *my* body, the physical/material/literal and the mental/abstract/metaphorical.

"Each of us," says Lakoff,

> in the prefrontal cortex of our brains, has what are called 'mirror neurons.' Such neurons fire either when we perform an action or when we see the same action performed by someone else. There are connections from that part of the brain to the emotional centers. Such neural circuits are believed to be the basis of empathy. This works literally – when we see a plane coming toward the building and imagine people in the building, we feel the plane coming toward us. (…) It also works metaphorically: if we see the plane going through the building, and unconsciously we metaphorize the building as a head with the plane going through its

temple, then *we* sense – unconsciously but powerfully – being shot through the temple. (...) Our systems of metaphorical thought, interacting with our mirror neuron systems, turn external literal horrors into felt metaphorical horrors. (2001)

This psychological mechanism and its effect, brief and elusive but extremely violent, can be compared to a virtual experience involving immersion. A definition of the term with relation to (especially electronic) works of art says that immersion is "an engaged reception in which the work approaches and engulfs the viewer, fully affecting his/her cognitive faculties" (Ostrowicki, 204), creating an "emotional-spiritual experience" connected with "identification of the viewer with the work or experiencing it in the meaning of its reality" (ibid., 205) – in other words, immersion "enables experiencing a work as the viewer's reality" (ibid., 206).[27] A similar effect of dissolution of the physical self and engulfment by the medium has been noticed by Marshall McLuhan in the process of watching television: "In television, images are projected at you. You are the screen. The images wrap around you" (McLuhan and Fiore, 125). This corresponds with how Ian McEwan recorded watching television on September 11, 2001 in "Beyond belief": "For most of us, at a certain point, the day froze, the work and all other obligations were left behind, the screen became the only reality. We entered a dreamlike state." The British writer's description matches the account of "what happens physiologically in the brain of a person watching TV" given by Barbara Whitmer in *The Violence Mythos*, in the chapter "Technology and Interactivity." What happens was discovered in a 1970 study by Herbert Krugman, and probably has not changed:

> within thirty seconds, brain waves switched from predominantly beta waves, indicating alert and conscious attention, to predominantly alpha waves, indicating an unfocused, receptive lack of attention, the state of aimless fantasy and daydreaming below the threshold of consciousness. Further research indicated that that the brain's left hemisphere, which processes information logically and analytically, tunes out while the person is viewing TV. This tuning out allows the right hemisphere of the brain, which processes information emotionally and noncritically, to function unimpeded. (Whitmer, 213)

"To live 'sanely' in the world" – says Whitmer – "both hemispheres need to be engaged in experience, though one may predominate at times" (ibid., 214). It may be safely assumed that the right hemisphere of the brain predominated on both hemispheres of the Earth on September 11, 2001, a day of record global TV viewership. Importantly, "Television viewers (...) experience a rasure, an obliteration of critical awareness (...) that leaves them open to affective communication resonating with deeper feelings, beliefs, and symbolic expectations" (ibid., 215).

"We walk a fine line between reality and the fiction that can be created from these events," said Capt. Harold Schapelhouman, division chief for the Menlo Park Fire

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[27] Ostrowicki points out after Ryan that the immersivity of literature, in particular prose, can be much deeper than that of electronic works, because it enables, and, in fact, requires, a much greater use of imagination. Ryan and other critics, such as Olivier Grau, treat immersivity as a general quality of all art (Ostrowicki, 205–206).

District in "The latest superhero – U.S. firefighters," an article by Suzanne Herel. In the same "American Portrait," Joe Quesada, editor in chief of Marvel Comics, who turns men like Capt. Schapelhouman into superheroes, said: "Right now, the difference between Peter Parker putting on a costume to become Spider-Man and a man off the street putting on a uniform to become a fireman is really wafer-thin. Fantasy is almost matching up with reality." I will discuss superheroes and comic books in detail later, now I will just observe that this example proves that not only French philosophers noticed a reality/fiction confusion in the aftermath of 9/11.

Similar and other consequences for America have been scrutinised by Susan Faludi in *The Terror Dream: What 9/11 Revealed About America*, where the author diagnoses "a kind of cultural hypnosis," "a somnambulistic state" (2), "a national fantasy (…) our elaborately constructed myth of invincibility," "'walking in a dream,' weeks, months, years after the events of that terrible morning" (14). "By September 12," says Faludi,

> our culture was already reworking a national tragedy into a national fantasy of virtuous might and triumph. No doubt, the fantasy consoled many. But rather than make us any safer, it misled us into danger, damaging the very security the myth was supposed to bolster. (289)

If, as we can see, fantasy, myth, dream, in other words: fiction, a kind of *take* on reality, can affect and change *objective* reality, reality *per se* (an ever more untenable category), to such an extent that there are serious consequences and, as a result, this reality becomes dangerous, unsafe, insecure, and is thus revealed to be powerless, passive, malleable – then the question presents itself: which is which? Which of the two: reality or fiction turns out to be reality *to all intents and purposes*? Does it matter that "objective reality" is nominally reality, if there is little it can do, if the power to influence and shape the world belongs to fantasy, superstition and fiction?

I.2. The Pattern

In his new 1995 introduction to *Crash*, a novel published in 1973, J.G. Ballard wrote:

> I feel that the balance between fiction and reality has changed significantly in the past decades. Increasingly their roles are reversed. We live in a world ruled by fictions of every kind – mass-merchandizing, advertising, politics conducted as a branch of advertising, the pre-empting of any original response to experience by the television screen. We live inside an enormous novel. It is now less and less necessary for the writer to invent the fictional content of his novel. The fiction is already there. The writer's task is to invent the reality. (4)

It is noticeable (and understandable) that Ballard did not mention the internet and virtual reality in his introduction: broadly speaking, for most people, they were not a completely taken-for-granted part of our everyday life yet, and this is why what he described may sound premature today. It was perhaps only on September 11, 2001 that Ballard's words became an *experience* shared by millions and millions of people. Baudrillard may have described the Western world as "hyperreality" already in 1981, indicating that reality was being replaced by "simulacra," mere signs or representations

of its own existence, but not everyone read French or other "postmodern" philosophers or the fiction of Ballard in 1995. On the other hand, six years later, in 2001, everyone with access to a TV watched the television coverage of the September 11 terrorist attacks. What theory, often obscure and forbidding, only described – now visibly happened. And its development has been noticed by Gordon Burn, reflecting on today's powerful impact of reality TV:

> It is only in the last few years (...) that reality has become indistinguishable from representation in a qualitatively new way. (...) In the digital age, (...) the news itself is a novel: it's a bunch of novels instantaneously, as soon as the first reports of the latest breaking story start tickertaping across the foot of the screen.

Paul Virilio said that "each time we invent a technology, we program a catastrophe" (2002b). Orson Welles, quoted by Virilio in *Ground Zero*, said that "great technological events may change our lives but they will not create a new form of art" (45), instead "[t]hey may create a generation of art critics who will tell us, 'This is art!'" (ibid.). We might, therefore, wonder what generation of art critics, if not really *new* forms of art, can possibly be created by a great technological event that *is a catastrophe*. "Art ha[s] become *unrecognizable*," announces Virilio (ibid., 48), and this finds confirmation in works of art such as *Untitled* (2001), whose content is indistinguishable from reality, whose authorship is problematic and whose artistic status derives largely from its location within the space of an art gallery. On the other hand, the attack on the Twin Towers itself gains an artistic status by being located in Stockhausen's or Hirst's head. Perhaps, as Magdalena Sawon from Postmasters Gallery said, commenting on Staehle's work: "The ever important context in which art is made and shown changed irreversibly on September 11." To her knowledge, as she adds, this was "the only artwork for which not only the context but the content was affected directly by the attack on the WTC" (ibid.). Curiously, what is now known as the title of the installation[28] became particularly suitable when the work's content and authorship – just as all TV screens, all front pages of the next day's newspapers – were appropriated by the terrorists, who accidentally turned the work into a depiction of September 11. The title is so fitting because *Untitled* (2001) is as literally meaningless as the terms "September 11" or "9/11" are in themselves.

Similarly, there appears to be something curiously fitting in the fact that the author of the first work of art to depict 9/11, *Untitled* (2001), is "a pioneer of the uncontrollable, loosely defined field of Internet art," also known as "digital art or net.art" (Jones, B.), and that William Gibson, the author of the first novel responding to 9/11, *Pattern Recognition*, is the coiner of the word "cyberspace." Gibson is also known as the father of the cyberpunk movement, a subgenre of science fiction. The characteristic of cyberpunk writing is that much of its action takes place in cyberspace and that the distinction between reality and virtual reality is unclear there. *Pattern Recognition* often shares this quality of being dark and digital; however, it is not futuristic. As if to

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[28] Originally, the work was called *To the People of New York* (Greene, 173).

show that the future is now, that the strangeness of the present has surpassed that of the imagined future, and envisaging more fantastic times to come has become superfluous, the book is the first novel by the author of the famous *Neuromancer* (1984) to be set entirely in the present.[29]

In an interview entitled "Think Different," Gibson described the context in which *Pattern Recognition* was created – in fact, in which its creation was interrupted:

> I was about 100 pages in on September 10. I came back to it a couple of weeks later and realized that my character's backstory had ceased to exist, or diverged onto an alternate time track. It's the strangest experience I've ever had with a piece of fiction. (qtd. in Lim)

When the interviewer asked, "Did you rewrite those 100 pages?," Gibson answered, "It proved more an issue of re-inhabiting – written in one world, revised in another" (ibid.). This comment clearly demonstrates how the two close, but still parallel, lines of living and writing suddenly converged and how fiction-like reality intervened into real fiction – distorting the difference between the two.

Gibson's shift to the present seems to correspond with the divergence of his literary character's backstory "onto an alternate time track." Thus, in a way, Gibson's own "backstory" of the author of futuristic science fiction was discontinued, in other words, it seems to have "ceased to exist" in his first novel written in "another world" – a world in which reality = fiction and fiction = reality and thus books can be not only written but also "inhabited."

"Every period has a different view of reality," writes Marie-Laure Ryan in *Narrative as a Virtual Reality* (159). "The power of certain devices to convey the impression 'this is real'" – and it must be added that we are surrounded by devices everywhere, while reading all kinds of narratives – "resides entirely in cultural habit" (ibid., 160). Thus, "realism is a matter not of resemblance but of ease of decoding" which is "explained by the reader's or spectator's familiarity with a certain set of techniques" (ibid.). It is debatable whether any techniques are "inherently better suited to create [some objective] reality effect" (ibid., 160), but because some techniques are better known, they are better suited to create immersion, to make the reader/spectator involved, to make him/her feel that what they experience is known and close to them, and *therefore* is real.

This mechanism can be compared to pattern recognition – clearly a crucial concept for William Gibson, perhaps not only after 2001: "Homo sapiens are about pattern recognition," he wrote in his novel (*PR* 23). A closely related central theme to Gibson's book is apophenia, an extreme version of pattern recognition: "In psychology, [it is] the perception of connections and meaningfulness in unrelated things. Apophenia can

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[29] In fact, Gibson noticed himself: "contemporary reality is sufficiently science fiction for me" (Kazan). Consequently, his next novels, *Spook Country* (2007) and *Zero History* (2010) are set in the same post-9/11 world as *Pattern Recognition* (ibid.). This may well be indicative of a larger trend, as in his tellingly titled article "The Absence of 9-11 from Science Fiction," Andrew Fox notices that mainstream and literary novels far outnumber science fiction and fantasy novels devoted to (post-)9/11 terror.

be a normal phenomenon or an abnormal one, as in paranoid schizophrenia when the patient sees ominous patterns where there are none."[30]

In the story of *Pattern Recognition*, set in the summer of 2002, the two phenomena play a major role in a search carried out by the main character. Cayce Pollard is a 32-year-old freelance marketing consultant. Usually, a costly consultation from her consists in her saying "yes" or "no." Nothing more is required thanks to her rare skills which make her "serve as a very specialized piece of human litmus paper" (*PR* 13). This is the only somewhat "fantastical" element in this piece of speculative fiction: namely, Cayce sometimes suffers (but mainly benefits) from an acute logo phobia, or a brand names allergy, which allows her to instantly recognise whether a new marketing strategy considered by her clients is going to be a failure or a success. Thus, Cayce is very valuable, always in demand and constantly offered free first-class plane tickets to any destination, free mobile phones, laptops and unlimited access to credit cards, the internet, as well as personal 24/7 assistants. The fantastically swift, cool, high-tech ultra-rich, fashionable (despite the heroine's protestations), snobbish and rather exclusive world in which Cayce is permanently jet-lagged between New York, London, Tokyo and Moscow, makes the present of the novel appear rather like a "technocultural future-present" (Hollinger). This effect is created in the text mainly through language characterised by abundant product placement and severe brand name dropping. This results in two dangers: the novel's high chance of dating very quickly and the high likelihood of the reader's contracting the phobia and allergy afflicting the heroine herself. However, the novel may well (already or in a few years' time) have a documentary value, capturing the coolest hypes that the very beginning of the 21st century had to offer.

Another crucial element of the plot is the fact that Cayce's father was last seen on the morning of September 11, 2001 taking a taxi in the direction of the World Trade Center. His disappearance, and presumed death, constitutes one of the two mysteries of the novel. The second one has to do with "the footage," an enigmatic series of video recordings which appear on the WWW. With Cayce, who has been hired to discover the source of "the footage," the reader is to find out whether the pieces of the film are instalments of a finished work or a work in progress – independently fragmented images or parts of a larger narrative. By analogy, the reader is also to find out whether the two mysteries are not really *one* puzzle. Clearly, some pattern in this early post-9/11 novel needs to be recognised. Of course, in a study of post-9/11 literature there is a possibility that some pattern not only resides in this novel but also starts with it and develops in later post-9/11 works. Indeed, my reading of this literature does involve a search analogous to Cayce's. What results from it is the following pattern.

New technology and audio-visual media play a crucial role in *Pattern Recognition*. The mysterious "footage" is possibly one of the first works of Internet art described in

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[30] On the basis of http://www.medterms.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=39714. Gibson may have followed the same definition, as in the book he explains apophenia thus: "the spontaneous perception of connections and meaningfulness in unrelated things" (*PR* 117).

mainstream literature.[31] Unfortunately, unlike the first work of art in Western literature, Achilles' shield in Homer's *Iliad*, it is not described in painstaking detail. All we have are short "snippets" of film (*PR* 22), and short snippets of ekphrasis: thus the work is "weirdly polished and strangely compelling" (*PR* 49), "timeless" and so "utterly masterful" that it makes Cayce "shiver," when she sees e.g. "Light and shadow. Lovers' cheekbones in the prelude to embrace" (*PR* 23). All this, as she says, "matters, matters in some unique way" (*PR* 78). This impressionistic account is all we learn directly about "the footage." "You can't explain it to someone who isn't there" (ibid.) and "It's impossible to describe, but if you live with it for a while, it starts to get to you. It's just such a powerful effect" (*PR* 111) – these are two more similar impressions. But if such cryptic description does not convince us, the work's value is proved by its reception, since it quickly gained a cult status and gave rise to a subculture, while remaining an underground, "oddly invisible phenomenon" (*PR* 54) at the same time. Its most dedicated followers gather in the internet Fetish:Footage:Forum (F:F:F), where Cayce is one of the most active members – "a true believer" who "care[s] passionately about this thing" (*PR* 67).

Notably, "the footage" became so important to Cayce during the winter of 2001, "in memory the darkest" (*PR* 265), soon after her father's disappearance on 9/11. She would go to F:F:F to "give herself to the dream" (ibid.). This is exactly what she writes in an email to the author of the work: "My father disappeared on September 11, 2001, in New York" (*PR* 264) and "We don't know what you're doing, or why. Parkaboy[32] thinks you're dreaming. Dreaming for us. Sometimes he sounds as though he thinks you're dreaming us. (…) He says it's shamanic" (*PR* 265). The reference to shamanism, and a fetish (the name of the forum) suggest associating the work with magical powers, yet the reference to the dream clearly shows that for "a true believer" who has invested everything in this "thing," the concepts of virtual reality and actual reality are reversed. "The footage," together with the forum devoted to it, has immersive, hypnotic, addictive qualities and to lonely and grieving Cayce offers escape from reality, comfort and a sense of belonging. Interestingly, Cayce writes the above letter while sitting on the grass in London Kensington Gardens next to the statue of Peter Pan, a character created by James M. Barry: a boy magically refusing to grow up, living his adventures on the island of Neverland and universally known as the symbol of never-ending childhood.

These are the main elements creating the pattern which will be recognised also in other early post-9/11 works (alongside hybrid form and various reversals of binary oppositions): reality/fiction confusion, magical thinking, the motif of childhood,[33] audio-visual media. In the crucial moment leading to the dénouement in *Pattern Recognition*, Cayce defines herself as a child of a father killed by terrorists, escaping

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[31] In the novel there is another work of electronic art, probably a computer installation (involving "Sinclair ZX81 computers" and "a huge plasma display," *PR* 363). It is created by a Polish young man called Voytek Biroshak, whom Cayce befriends and later sponsors.

[32] Another character and "footagehead."

[33] In a 2007 interview, Gibson noticed about 9/11 that, "emotionally," "it caused an understandable infantilization of society" (Beers).

into a dream, an alternative reality of Internet art. There is one more crucial, in fact, central thing. As it turns out in the end, the author of "the footage" is Nora Volkova, the niece of (somewhat fantastically) "the wealthiest man in Russia" (*PR* 347). Nora's (and her twin sister's) parents were killed by a bomb. She herself was badly injured by the explosion: the last fragment of the bomb could not be removed and remains lodged inside her brain, "between the lobes, in some terrible way" (*PR* 298). It was during her convalescence at hospital that she started creating her art, which, in fact, involved cutting, manipulating, isolating and photoshopping the recording from a local close circuit camera "showing only the reception at the front of that private ward" (ibid.).

Thus, as Cayce realises, the unique work of art, "the footage," consists in editing a representation of a fragment of reality and results directly from an explosion, from the small part of a bomb "flung into the very center of Nora's brain" (*PR* 316). This sounds like a combination of *Untitled* (2001) and Lakoff's "The Power of the Images." Consequently, the visual effect could be seen as exploded reality, split into pieces scattered in the cyberspace, of which some people desperately try to make sense. In the middle there is the wound, the physical brain damage "and from it, and from her other wounds, there now emerged, accompanied by the patient and regular clicking of her mouse, the footage" (ibid.).

Gibson's narrative may be a conventional thriller, but at its core is a cutting-edge work of electronic art.[34] To some critics, the fragmentary, enigmatic "footage" metaphorically represents "the nature of the confusing and uncertain post-9/11 future" (Rapatzikou, 212–214). There is a fitting hybridity and disruption of scales to the work. Like Achilles' shield, notably a work of art that is part of a warrior's armour, "the footage" also shows the world, although not the whole world – it shows just very small fragments, "mere scraps of found video" (*PR* 315) that are continuously zoomed in, zoomed out, recut, reworked, reshaped till the film is "reduced to a single frame" (*PR* 298). Or perhaps this *is* the whole world today? Globalisation, the butterfly effect – all this means that the tiniest gesture causes unexpected ripples and disproportionate repercussions. The whole picture can change within seconds. By analogy to the martial nature of Achilles' shield, the description of Nora's artistic activity is curiously violent, military-like in a very contemporary, technologically advanced sense:

> A cursor like a bombsight whips across the image, locking on the corner of his mouth. Mouse-click. Zoom. Into image-grain. Some quick adjustment. Clicks. Out of zoom. The meaning of his expression, and the feeling of the frame, have changed. (*PR* 314)

All it took was one click. Notably, a bombsight – here used in the context of altering an image, a facial expression, and the emotion it evokes – is a device used by bomber aircraft to accurately drop bombs. They were first used during WWI, but if we add the zooming and the clicking performed by Nora in the clinical context of a hospital on the one hand and the camera capturing a location distant from her, to which she has

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[34] Now it can be described as a combination of video art (or to some extent reality TV) and Internet art.

no physical access, on the other, we obtain an image bringing to mind current warfare involving so-called drones and predators.

As for the fascination or even obsession with "the footage," it may, in fact, resemble the unstinting live coverage of the *present* of 9/11, of the events themselves. Many conspiracy theorists, but not only they, would approve of such a critique of representation and would further alert us to the ease of technological manipulation. Nora's art, like Steahle's art on 9/11, consists basically in reality TV, a continuous stream of an originally unedited and unaltered reality that becomes edited and altered as a result of an explosion, with the help of modern technology – the difference being Nora's control over the final effect.[35] She is more active, thus her position and influence on the viewers may resemble that of the decision-makers in the mass media. What is more, the status of her art is problematic: it is "rendered" by Russian prisoners (*PR* 341), a kind of modern slaves. Also, it is distributed by the "Russian oligarch's" security staff who used it as bait: they wanted it to be traced, because this would help them expose any security breaches in their distribution network. Furthermore, it is revealed that certain members of F:F:F were, in fact, spies employed by the Russians for this operation. Therefore, the whole underground avant-garde subculture of "footageheads" turns out to be a sham, a dream – indeed, as suspected by Parkaboy, but in a different, less romantic, sense. It was not dreamt *for* them – it was a dream that *they* dreamt. Thus, "the footage" *is* art, still showing the same, "utterly masterful," images, but it is also a tool, a prop in a semi-military surveillance operation, implicated in power, money, deception and violence.

I.3. Media in the post-9/11 novel

It is interesting that for the characters of early post-9/11 novels – whose world is literally turned upside-down – the only impression of order, permanence and stability continues to be provided by omnipresent and inescapable TV sets. Rarely in literature have there been so many TV sets. Their relentless emission of segmented images and arranged information seems to serve as surrogate reason – as the last repository of facts against the deluge of *apparent* fiction, which, in fact, is the unbearable reality. However, these screens – as supposedly mental prostheses – are viewed with great suspicion in literature.

In Art Spiegelman's autobiographical graphic novel *In the Shadow of No Towers*, the very first three panels show a family watching television: before, during, and after the 9/11 attacks. The family's psychological state is shown shifting from stupor through terror to terrified stupor. The first page features also the terrified author in front of a TV set. At first the screen shows an unfocused still from the live coverage of the events, repeated twice also on the next page: two gray towers against the blue sky with smoke

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[35] Unless we assume that her brain is so damaged in unknowable ways that she does not have complete control over her own perception and actions.

billowing from one of them after the first plane crashed into it. The caption underneath the image says "Those crumbling towers burned their way into every brain" (*ISNT* 1). As if to further illustrate Lakoff's comments quoted earlier, the next frame shows a TV anchor's head with the second plane's trajectory crossing through it only to hit the TV set displaying the American flag that Spiegelman is staring at in the third frame. Television itself is hit with this means of transport-turn-missile – as if to make sure that the terrorists' message reaches every mind, every head (notably, the mind/head is here equated with television). In the caption below, the American flag is compared to a logo and television is compared to comics, because the medium is "almost as well suited as comics for dealing in abstractions." This is one of many ironic remarks in the book, and perhaps the most telling one appears on page 2. Right after watching the second plane crash into the second tower on TV, the author runs outside, but cannot see the towers, because his view is obstructed by "a giant billboard" advertising "some dopey new Schwarzenegger movie about terrorism"[36] (*ISNT* 2). Now from behind the giant poster comes a cloud of smoke actually produced by real-life terrorism. The line dividing the two (the film and reality) is no longer clear. The caption under the image says: "Oddly, in the aftermath of September 11th, some pundits insisted that irony was dead" (ibid.).

The last image on this page is formed in the shape of an exclamation mark with the circle enclosing the author's brain. We recognise the brain as Spiegelman's because it appears above on a "missing poster." As we know, such posters proliferated after September 11 – many people lost their lives. However, what the author is literally saying here is that on that day *he* lost his mind.

Spiegelman's trauma is the main subject of this "slow-motion diary" (*ISNT* Foreword). What appears throughout it is the author's computer-graphics "vision of disintegration" of the North Tower's "glowing bones just before it vaporized" (ibid.). After many failed attempts, the author almost managed to digitally reconstruct "the pivotal image from [his] 9/11 morning" that "didn't get photographed or videotaped into public memory but still remains burned onto the inside of [his] eyelids" (ibid.). As he wrote, "I wanted to sort out the fragments of what I'd experienced from the media images that threatened to engulf what I actually saw" (ibid.).

What is also worth mentioning is the fact that Spiegelman was invited to take part in a "9/11 Concert for America" organised by NBC, as a "typical New Yorker." The interview that the author gave is quoted in the graphic novel as "100% non-fiction" (*ISNT* 10). It is short and unfinished, and was never broadcast, since to questions such as "Who's my favourite American hero?" Spiegelman would answer "I don't even believe in heroes." Spiegelman's wife convinced him to participate, because "[his] point of view" – being fiercely anti-Bush administration –"*never* gets on network TV" (ibid.). This time was no exception.

In Ian McEwan's *Saturday*, the eponymous Saturday is February 15, 2003, when a global demonstration against the war in Iraq took place, and was widely covered by

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[36] *Collateral Damage* (2002, dir. Andrew Davis). Notably the main hero, played by Arnold Shwarzenegger, is a firefighter whose family were killed in an explosion caused by terrorists.

the media. We can relive this day via the perception of the protagonist, Henry Perowne, who watches TV throughout the day, which starts early for this successful and happy middle-aged London neurosurgeon: at 3:40 a.m. However, the day does not start very happily nor will it develop in this way. Perowne, suddenly awaken, stands in front of the window in a state of strange elation (*S* 3), when he sees an airplane clearly about to crash. "The spectacle has the familiarity of a recurrent dream" (*S* 15), the scene is familiar "almost eighteen months since half the planet watched and watched again the unseen captives driven through the sky to the slaughter" (*S* 16). The association is obvious, and Perowne is "unable to look away," "fearing the sight of an explosion" (*S* 18). "He feels culpable somehow, but helpless too" (*S* 22).

Henry waits for the burning plane to be confirmed by the media – without it, what he witnessed "remains an unreliable subjective event" (*S* 29). At last the plane is "made real," at first on the radio (*S* 35), and from then on Henry keeps checking TV news bulletins that he watches deliberately or accidentally at regular intervals – the news is like a clock measuring his time, always ticking in the background.

TV screens accompany him wherever he goes: the kitchen (*S* 29, 150, 176), the street, the changing room after playing squash (*S* 107), the care home where his mother lives (*S* 159). TV images are reflected in mirrors, crowded on a display in a television shop (*S* 140), or display a crowd marching in an anti-war demonstration above his mother's head afflicted by Alzheimer's disease (*S* 166). This contrast is particularly striking: an oblivious defunct human brain is juxtaposed with vigorous, almost violent transmission of a perception of reality – always on time, always ready, never failing to report what is important in the world, in the most up-to-date order. The order in the montage keeps changing; what Henry considers to be "his plane" and "his own story" (*S* 69, 70, 126, 178) turns out to be disappointing: "no villains, no death" (*S* 70). Thus it is pushed down on the list of news items to be finally dropped altogether (*S* 181). The story "has collapsed" – Henry realises – "you can almost hear in the introduction the presenter's regretful tone" (*S* 179).

The accusation implicit in this remark includes also the other side of the screen: the viewers. Two pages earlier McEwan gives a full diagnosis of the post-9/11 syndrome:

> [Henry's] feeling the **pull**, like gravity, of the approaching TV news. It's a condition of the times, this **compulsion** to hear how it stands with the world, and be joined to the generality, to a community of **anxiety**. The **habit's** grown stronger these past two years; a different scale of news value has been set by monstrous and spectacular scenes. The possibility of their recurrence is one thread that binds the days. (...) Everyone **fears** it, but there's also a **darker longing** in the collective mind, a sickening for self-punishment and a blasphemous curiosity. (...) the television networks stand ready to deliver, and their audiences wait. Bigger, grosser next time. Please don't let it happen. But let me see it all the same, as it's happening and from every angle, and let me be among the first to know. (*S* 176, emphasis mine)

The kind of "longing" identified here, was also suggested by Baudrillard in *The Spirit of Terrorism*, where he said that the 9/11 terrorists carried out something that the West had secretly wished for (5). In a similar vein, Slavoj Žižek, said: "The unthinkable that happened was thus the object of fantasy: in a way, America got what it fantasized

about, and this was the greatest surprise" (387). Also Jonathan Jones in "Too Many Memories?" points to "a dark pleasure" we find in contemporary memorials, which reveals "a truth about our culture: deep down, we were eager for the depth and gravitas of great events. And we got them," because "[w]hen the planes struck, they gave reality to a passion for tragic events that already existed." Don DeLillo's character in *Falling Man*, Martin Ridnour, expresses a similar view:

> Weren't the towers built as fantasies of wealth and power that would one day become fantasies of destruction? You build a thing like that so you can see it come down. The provocation is obvious. What other reason would there be to go so high and then to double it, do it twice? It's a fantasy, so why not do it twice? You are saying, Here it is, bring it down. (116)

Ridnour, a.k.a. Ernst Hechinger, is an ex-terrorist himself, and so he knows what he is saying. It is exactly such a hidden wish to see the towers turn into ruins, such a compulsion and habit, that have been recognised also by McEwan. When Henry watches the news "with a confused sense that he's about to learn something significant about himself" (*S* 179), all he learns is that he is a junkie in need of a next fix,[37] after which even his body reacts accordingly: "His nerves, like taunted strings, vibrate obediently with each news 'release'" (*S* 181). But the mental side-effect of this, as of any addiction is that "He's lost the habits of scepticism, he's becoming dim (…), he isn't thinking clearly, (…) he isn't thinking independently" (ibid.).

In fact, even with no TV screen around, the news still enters Perowne's mind when he is feeling passionate about his wife, it permeates his subconscious when he is listening to a poem (*S* 221). It turns out it is not "possible to enjoy an hour's recreation without this invasion, this infection from the public domain" (*S* 108). Thus with good reason does Henry suspect that "he's becoming a dupe, the willing, febrile consumer of news fodder, opinion, speculation and of all the crumbs the authorities let fall" (*S* 180).

It is interesting that the words "consumer," "fodder," "crumbs" belong to the same semantic field that describes the setting where Henry watches television most often and most intently: the kitchen. The double meaning of "to cook" as in "to cook something up" comes to mind naturally in the scene where Henry is preparing dinner for his family. Various and specifically chosen ingredients are added and mixed with various bits and pieces of the news: red chillies, a helicopter, onions and garlic, a venerable politician, the skeletons of three skates, a senior police officer, a dozen mussels, an earnest reporter (*S* 177). Interestingly, just like the skates and mussels, the talking heads are silent; the TV sets that Henry watches are usually mute or too silent to hear, because Henry either does not want to or cannot touch the sound button. And when he does, he hears fragments, scraps. "His preparations are done, just as the burning plane story

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[37] This is how McEwan described his own response to watching television on September 11: "An information junkie inside me was silently instructing the cameras: go round that tower and show me that aeroplane again; get down in the street; take me on to the roof. (…) Only briefly, in this orgy of 'fresh' developments, was there time to reflect on the misery to come for all those who would learn the news of a loved one lost, a parent or a child" (2001a).

comes up" (*S* 179) – and it is dished out, burning, on "the small TV they keep near the stove for moments like this, for breaking stories" (*S* 29).

Also the characters of Philip Beard's novel *Dear Zoe*, narrated by fifteen-year-old Tess DeNunzio, watch breaking news on a "tiny kitchen set" unwilling to "[look] away long enough to move to the living room" (*DZ* 169) – while a catastrophe happens. In fact, two catastrophes happen: the first "symbolic event on a global scale" and a "little death" (*DZ* 146), also on September 11, 2001, but in a local car accident. There is an uncanny symmetry to the scene of the accident, but also an asymmetry of scales. Tess and her three-year-old sister were playing in the yard with Tess chasing Zoe and "pretending to be a monster," when a man in a car told her to "tell [her] mother to turn on the television" (*DZ* 169). While the whole world including Tess, who was "supposed to be watching [Zoe]" (ibid.), was watching the global tragedy on a tiny TV, a family tragedy happened: the child was hit by a car, with the driver speeding and "bending to adjust the volume on his radio, eyes wide at what he hears" (*DZ* 170). Then "there is only silence": Tess's "feet, pounding through the grass, make no sound" (ibid.), she is not chasing her sister any more, the game they started again is no longer a game – from now on Tess will see herself as a *real* monster, who "killed [her] sister" (*DZ* 174). Her guilt is double: for the "little crime" she committed (*DZ* 146) and for her anger at the other victims of that day. In a painfully honest voice, Tess writes to her dead sister about the impending anniversary:

> You won't be any part of what they're thinking about. You'll just be the silence itself. (…)
> And I will have to feel the guilt again (…) because I don't care about all the others, because
> I even resent them for dying on the day that should have been yours alone. (*DZ* 14)

On the first anniversary, the whole family, who is "numb to the videos – of the plane hitting the buildings" (*DZ* 194), decide to "stay at home all day with no TV, no radio, nothing from the outside world" and "watch home videos of all of us, look at photo albums," remember Zoe, "while the world is remembering everyone else" (ibid.).

This is how Beard's novel juxtaposes two scales: the world/nation and one family, the enormous and the little (Zoe on a "stretcher ten times the size of [her] body," *DZ* 171; and "tiny black grains of rice, falling. No. Jumping," *DZ* 172), the extremely loud and the silent, the global and the individual/personal/private. Both refer to the same fact: tragic death. Interestingly, Zoe's death and the death of "the others" are depicted in a similar way: the child and the buildings fall to the ground, "There is no blood" (*DZ* 170), yet "There was blood, lots of it (…) [b]ut on the inside" (*DZ* 172). As Tess's mother puts it, Zoe's death makes it feel "[l]ike something exploded in the middle of us" (*DZ* 131). In the perception of the narrator, the two events mix: she sees both her sister and the buildings "again and again" – "again and again" and "from different angles" (*DZ* 173). This is just like what is shown on TV screens, which are ubiquitous: at hospital, the people pushing Zoe on a stretcher look up at the TV sets as they pass (*DZ* 171), the doctor telling the family that "They did everything they could" is "trying not to look over Mom's shoulder at the television" (*DZ* 172). The live tragedy and the televised tragedy fuse and it is "[l]ike nothing is real" (*DZ* 171).

In Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, unlike in *Dear Zoe*, the video of the attacks is not avoided, but watched deliberately, time after time, by Lianne Neudecker. On one occasion she watches it together with her estranged husband Keith, who survived the attacks, and Lianne knows that "she'd never felt so close to someone, watching the planes cross the sky" (*FM* 134). They both still watch it unbelieving, still "thinking it's an accident" – "[b]ecause it has to be" (*FM* 135). When Lianne watches the tape alone, she "move[s] a finger toward the power button on the remote" but "[keeps] on watching" (*FM* 134) – hooked, like Henry Perowne, but more so. This is why, like Spiegelman, she sees the events exactly as Lakoff had described it: "The second plane coming out of that ice blue sky, this was the footage that entered the body, that seemed to run beneath her skin" (ibid.). Also Keith felt "[t]hat was him coming down, the north tower" (*FM* 5) when seeing it live. "[B]y the time the second plane appears" – said Keith – "we're all a little older and wiser" (*FM* 135).

This includes three child characters in the novel. After 9/11 Keith and his separated wife's son, seven-year-old Justin, and his two friends suddenly have to contemplate matters difficult for adults to deal with. Interestingly, little Justin says that "The towers did not collapse" (*FM* 72), since he "didn't see it on TV" (ibid.). Thus, in the child's mind, as in Henry Perowne's mind earlier, television becomes the guarantor of reality. In the child's case there is also the possibility of subconsciously choosing denial because it is less frightening; of course, denial is not denied to him, since he is a child. Also the perception of another seven-year-old, a boy in Frédéric Beigbeder's *Windows on the World*, is a denial of reality constructed as an amalgam of blockbuster films, computer games and comic books.[38] In both cases, what is natural for children in normal conditions, in extremely stressful circumstances may become a coping mechanism also for adults.

There is one more character in DeLillo's *Falling Man* with an interesting relationship with television. Anticipating his own terrorist attack, Hammad knows that soon he will be eternalised – but not only in a religious sense. When sitting in "a bar near the flight school" (*FM* 173), watching TV, he "like[s] to imagine himself" "appearing on the screen," as if as a ghost, "a videotaped figure walking through the gate-like detector on his way to the plane" (ibid.). Ironically, like most people today, especially those he wanted to kill most, he secretly wanted to become famous, plucked from obscurity by the camera.

In the same way, the eponymous terrorist from John Updike's novel *Terrorist* imagines himself on TV, in a kind of afterlife. Ahmad also knows how television works, what the media will focus on. He already imagines a montage of images telling his story; he has seen it before:

> His eighteen years have accumulated historical evidence, which will become (…) of great interest to the news media: cardboard-framed photos of children (…) on the brownstone steps of the Thomas Alva Edison Elementary School, (…) photos of the track team, in which Ahmad Mulloy is older, (…) a beautifully calligraphed roll of the names in his Qur'an class

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[38] Which requires a separate discussion: see Chapter III.

before it dwindled to just him; his Class C driver's certificate; a photograph of his father (…). His father's face, it will be broadcast (…). His mother, like televised victims of floods and tornadoes, will be much interviewed, at first incoherently, in shock and tears, and later more calmly, speaking in sorrowful retrospect. Her image will appear in the press: she will become momentarily famous. (*T* 268–269)

On his way to the truck filled with explosives which he intends to drive in the direction of New York, Ahmad tries to be unseen: "Later would come the headlines, the CNN reports filling the Middle East with jubilation, making the tyrants in their opulent Washington offices tremble" (*T* 281).

Generally speaking, it would not be an overgeneralisation to notice that an unreal or surreal atmosphere surrounds all the protagonists of post-9/11 novels on a regular basis. It is no different in Lynne Sharon Schwartz's *The Writing on the Wall*. Traumatised Renata, who witnessed the events in New York, is a librarian and a linguist[39] obsessively analysing language. She is perhaps the only figure in the literature discussed here to be more preoccupied with language than with images while watching television (or visiting an art gallery for that matter, as we will see later). She scrutinises everything, misses no peculiarity in the use of grammar or syntax – in particular she has no mercy for the clichés and hypocrisy of the patriotic speeches of George W. Bush. A motto from Socrates often quoted in the book says "False language, evil in itself, infects the soul with evil" (*WR* 26) and the words are clearly meant for the authorities using media for their propaganda. In the benumbed days after the attacks when "only on TV there is no shortage of words" (*WR* 76), Renata notices that "so many of the words spoken, read and heard are meaningless" (*WR* 230), and "another kind of butchery is in progress (…) an assault on the common language" (*WR* 76).

The involvement of the media in the "war on terror" is implicit also in Claire Tristram's *After*. Its anonymous protagonist is "a widow under (…) extreme circumstances" (*A* 20), which are never specified, but we can infer that the woman's Jewish husband was murdered, probably beheaded, by Muslim extremists. This is clearly reminiscent of the death of the American journalist Daniel Pearl.[40] Now the woman is "the widow on

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[39] Incidentally, a large number of characters in early post-9/11 novels are professionally connected with books or writing. Renata in Schwartz's novel is also a translator, currently of Arabic, while the wife of Jack Levy, Bess, in *Terrorist* is a librarian, too. Lianne in *Falling Man* is a book editor. Beigbeder and Spiegelman in their autobiographical books are, obviously, authors. Corrine in *The Good Life* is adapting Graham Greene's novel *The Heart of the Matter* into a screenplay (although in her "circle" this is "a code for being unemployed," *GL* 5). In *Saturday*, Henry Perowne's daughter and father-in-law are published (and in the latter's case renowned) poets. The main characters in *The Third Brother* and *Córeńka* are journalists. The main characters of *Extremely Loud* and *Dear Zoe* are too young to have professions, but they are prolific writers of diaries and letters. Also the main character of *After* writes letters, but likewise, only privately. Only in *Pattern Recognition* is there no literature, no books, no writing except emails – this is the world of the digital age with electronic language, images and signs such as logos – on which Cayce Pollard is, however, an expert.

[40] The story of Daniel Pearl may be better known after it has been adapted into a film, *A Mighty Heart* (2007, dir. Michael Winterbottom), starring Angelina Jolie. The film is based on a memoir under the same title written by Pearl's widow, Mariane.

TV" – she is "a survivor," "a pillar," "an absolute pillar" (*A* 119), as one TV-viewer says, adding "We all lean on you" (ibid.).

Towards the first anniversary of her husband's death, the widow cannot endure the burden of her own grief and of the whole nation leaning on her, of the whole media-generated persona any longer. Curiously, to escape, she plans and enacts a ritualistic sexual fantasy styled on the video footage of her husband's execution, but with the roles reversed, which brings to mind the notorious images form Abu Ghraib. *After* is quite pornographic, but it is too much about trauma and psychodrama to be really obscene or even erotic. The important thing about the book may be that that novel points to the other, invisible, supposedly non-existent, or even taboo side to the Widows of the Heroes, who – especially in the case of firefighters' widows – were dubbed "perfect virgins of grief."[41] This other side to "perfect virgins" is less perfect and more human, strongly contrasted with the idealised statue of virtue yoked into the media-propelled propaganda machine.

Showing this other side is exactly the task and merit of literature according to Frédéric Beigbeder: "We must write what is forbidden. Nowadays, books must go where television does not. Show the invisible, speak the unspeakable" (295 [10:24]). It is interesting that Beigbeder expressed this very opinion immediately before the 9/11 terrorist attacks. At the very moment when the first plane hit the North WTC tower, Beigbeder – who "had just agreed to host a weekly literary TV show on cable network," because, as he later said "television was a way to make myself desired" (179 [9:26]) – was giving an interview for television and was talking about "cultural marketing. (…) Are television, marketing, and advertising the enemies of art? Is the word necessarily in opposition to the image?" To these questions Beigbeder responded: "The role of books is to record what cannot be seen on television… Literature is under threat, we have to fight for it, this is war…" (83 [8:56]). But soon he had to interrupt, because another plane hit the other tower and everyone went to watch television. As he put it, his "litero-military perorations suddenly seemed ridiculous" (84 [8:56]); the host and he "agreed that [his] prime-time-struggle-to-defend-the-epistolary-arts-against-media-repression could wait" (ibid.). But writing couldn't and, as Beigbeder said in an interview in 2003, he "started taking notes at once" (Géniès).

The final result, *Windows on the World*, published in 2003, is one of the earliest literary responses to 9/11 and it addresses the topic most directly, as it will be analysed in detail in Chapter II on Form. Here it can already be signalled that the novel is structurally complex, combining two modes of narrative: autobiographical and fictional. The two main narrators are the French author and his invention and *alter-ego*, Carthew Yorston, a divorced American realtor from Texas. While visiting New York, Carthew takes his two sons, David and Jerry, to the Windows on the World restaurant high in the North Tower – unfortunately on September 11, 2001. "You know how it ends: everybody dies" is the first sentence of the book (1 [8:30]).

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[41] By *The New York* magazine. See Faludi, 89.

Soon before Carthew and his sons die in chronological time within the world of the fictional narrative, he says "You never saw us on TV" (*WoW* 261 [10:01]), by "you" meaning the readers and TV viewers, by "us" meaning the victims from the towers. What this sentence is also telling us is that Carthew is already using past tense and that he involves us in a metatextual dialogue, establishing contact between "his world" and the "outside world," our world. Thus Carthew, who is very aware that he is a character in a novel,[42] exists on two temporal planes:

1. his lifetime in:
   a) the fictional narrative from our point of view,
   b) reality – from his point of view, i.e. the years 1958-2001 (*WoW* 25 [8:37]),
2. a timeless afterlife.

In the sentence quoted above, he is speaking from beyond the grave, expressing a collective complaint of those killed in the attacks: "Nobody took photos of us. All you know of us are disheveled figures scrambling down the walls, bodies hurled into the void" (*WoW* 261 [10:01]). He blames the media for reducing the victims to a distant abstraction and for editing, distorting the truth: "they didn't show the falling limbs, the fountains of blood, the melded sections of steel, flesh and plastic. (…) You didn't hear the animal cries, like pigs with their throats cut, like calves torn limb from limb" (*WoW* 261). Expecting a protest, he retorts mockingly, as his indictment intensifies:

> I'm sorry? Decency? Important not to upset children? Morally wrong to turn victim's suffering into tabloid television? Offensive to the families of the victims? It's not as if we use kid gloves when the carnage takes place overseas. Plane crashes are routinely photographed and the images sold everywhere but in New York. (…) What? This carnage of human flesh is disgusting? It's reality that is disgusting – and refusing to look at it, more so. (*WoW* 261–262)

Then the main question is repeated and the condemnation of the mass media completed – still in the victim's voice (albeit fictional), which lends it some legitimacy and makes it a little less controversial than its coming directly from the author would have: "Why did you see no pictures of our dislocated legs and arms, our severed torsos, our spilled entrails? Why did the dead go unseen? It was not some ethical code of practice; it was self-censorship, maybe just censorship, period" (*WoW* 262 [10:01]).

This last sentence is problematic in Beigbeder's book (which, it must be added, is full of contradictions and paradoxes), since the author himself openly admitted deleting certain scenes already in the original French version (e.g. section 10:10)[43] and later removed more fragments from the English translations released in Great Britain

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[42] E.g. on page 64 [8:49] he says, "I realize I've forgotten to describe myself. I used to be striking; later I was handsome; later still, not so bad; now I'm all right."

[43] Two sections earlier, Beigbeder says: "Please excuse our misuse of ellipsis. I have cut out the awful descriptions. I have not done so out of propriety, nor out of respect for the victims, because I believe that describing their slow agonies, their ordeal, is also a mark of respect. I cut them, because, in my opinion, it is more appalling still to allow you to imagine what became of them" (272 [10:08]). It is impossible to ascertain here whether the scenes that are said to have been "cut out" were actually written. In this fragment, we can see that the author trusts that imagination is stronger without words, which would, as if, present a ready-made image. The author intends to help us "see" better by not

and in America (the two editions being different, clearly prepared for two different readerships, although both translated into English by Frank Wynne). The American edition is even followed by "Author's Note," which proves to be a much more careful approach to the most affected and sensitive audience. Beigbeder says there about his original text: "There were, I felt, moments when it was starker and perhaps more likely to wound than I intended. Consequently, some scenes have been revised for this edition" (307). Perhaps there is a possibility, then, that a similar motivation led to the revisions made by the media. But in the American version of *Windows* Carthew still sees only one explanation for the media (self-)censorship:

> Five minutes after the first plane crashed into our tower, the tragedy was already a hostage to fortune in a media war. (…) I would have liked us to be shown for all the world to see. People should have the courage to look at us. (…) But already it was war; in time of war, you hush up the damage done by the enemy. It's important to put up a good show, it's part of the propaganda. (…) And it was thus that one of the greatest postwar campaigns of media misinformation was perpetrated. (…) When a building collapses, feel free to repeat the footage endlessly. But whatever you do, don't show what was inside: our bodies. (*WoW* 261–262 [10:01])[44]

It is impossible for us to know what the *real* victims would have preferred; it can be surmised that among almost three thousand people opinions would have varied, as on any subject. It is not unlikely, however, that in this large group a voice similar to Carthew's could have been heard.

A view similar to Carthew's can be found in another post-9/11 novel – however, it belongs not to a victim, but to a victim's son. In Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, the main character and first-person narrator is nine-year-old Oskar Schell, who does not want "respect for the family," he wants to know *exactly* how his father died on 9/11. Admittedly, Oskar is not an ordinary child, as we will see in the chapter on Motifs of Childhood. Among other things, Oskar is more mature than his nine years of age would suggest, which may explain his grit, know-how and cool:

> I found a bunch of videos on the Internet of bodies falling. They were on a Portuguese site, where there was all sorts of stuff they weren't showing here, even though it happened here. Whenever I want to try to learn about how Dad died, I have to go to a translator program and find out how to say things in different languages (…). Then I Google these words. It makes me incredibly angry that people all over the world can know things that I can't, because it happened here, and happened to me, so shouldn't it be mine? (*ELIC* 256)

This is not all. Oskar "printed out the frames from the Portuguese videos and examined them extremely closely" (*ELIC* 257). "There's one body that could be him,"

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covering the drastic truth with his own version of it. However, the possibility that the same mechanism could be at work in the case of mass media is not taken into consideration by Beigbeder.

[44] Without the accusatory tone, McEwan described it similarly in "Beyond belief": "No blood, no screams. The Greeks, in their tragedies, wisely kept these worst of moments off stage, out of the scene. Hence the word: obscene. This was an obscenity. We were watching death on an unbelievable scale, but we saw no one die. The nightmare was in this gulf of imagining. The horror was in the distance."

he said, meaning his father (ibid.). At the end of the book we can actually see for ourselves what he did next. He rearranged the pictures of the body falling: "I reversed the order, so the last one was first, and the first was last. When I flipped through them, it looked like that man was floating up through the sky" (*ELIC* 325). This fairy-tale-like flipbook resembles Carthew Yorston's description of the collapse of the North Tower: "In the smoke and the rubble, the TV antenna remains vertical as it falls before tilting slightly to the left" (*WoW* [10:27]).[45] Then he added, "It took ten seconds to completely collapse, straight as a rocket ready for taking off with the film running backward" (ibid.) This comparison, echoes also Baudrillard's description of demolition in *America*, as well as DeLillo's words from "In the Ruins of the Future": "and there was the huge antenna falling out of the sky, straight down, blunt end first, like an arrow moving backwards in time."

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

"The only way to know what took place in the restaurant on the 107th Floor of the North Tower, World Trade Center on September 11th 2001 is to invent it," said Beigbeder (307), who did exactly this in his book, thus carrying out Ballard's belief that "the writer's task is to invent the reality." Although initially striking, Beigbeder's claim loses its radicalism when viewed in the light of Lakoff's observations on "mirror neurons," which make it sound only psychologically true.

Invention requires imagination, which is always part of any form of reading. But the kind of invention which would produce a conviction of *knowing* what it is like in a different time and space calls for a special type of imagining, which can be referred to as mental simulation. This term can be useful for the phenomenology of reading and, in our discussion, of writing, too. What mental simulation consists in – as we read in Ryan's *Narrative as Virtual Reality* – is "placing oneself in a concrete imaginary situation, living its evolution moment by moment, trying to anticipate possible developments, experiencing the disappearance of possibilities that comes with the passing of time but remaining steadily focused on the hatching of the future" (113). So steadily, in fact, that the situation, if only temporarily, becomes the only reality. In other words, Beigbeder's "invention" requires immersion. And since, as we can expect, placing oneself (mentally) in the situation of a terrorist attack, very high in an enormous skyscraper, is a task which is difficult to sustain, if not even to initiate, the author of this idea first carried it out for us himself, recording it in his autobiographical novel. Through this book, the readers can benefit from the author's own mental simulation and, at the same time, empathise with the fictitious, but plausible, experiences of the victims.

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[45] Whose left? A TV viewer's left; for Carthew, whose body is smashed after he and his sons had jumped from this very tower six minutes earlier, there was no left or right. It appears that in his timeless afterlife, Carthew assumes the perspective of a TV viewer. Of course, it also appears that the author's *alter ego* has the author's point of view at this moment.

If, according to Stendhal's classical adage, a novel is a mirror that one carries along a road – in *Windows on the World*, the mirror provides multiple reflections: we see somebody suffer and we see how somebody sees somebody else suffer. In this second instance, we see the same mechanism of "mirror neurons" that probably works in us in the first instance, i.e. when we see another person's pain. In the second case we see it in somebody else, who in this way acts as our mirror reflection. However, for this perception to be possible immersion is needed, and this, in turn, "requires an active engagement with the text and a demanding act of imagining" (Ryan, 15).

As Whitmer notices, "the mode of response to television is (...) very different from the response to print" (213–214), the latter being far more demanding, and consequently more engaging. Emotional immersion which literature generates, that is to say "this capacity of the human mind to be emotionally affected by the contemplation of purely imaginary states of affairs" – can be regarded, as we read in Ryan – "as an evolutionary asset that works toward the preservation of the species" (ibid., 156). In this context, early post-9/11 novels can be said to assist the preservation of the species on two levels. First of all, they enable immersion with its possible therapeutic effects. Secondly, they often disrupt this immersion through self-reflexivity and metafictionality, i.e. by drawing attention to their own construction. Interrupting immersive, so to speak *transparent*, narrative by using more unconventional form – not habitually associated with the impression "this is real," but evoking the impression "this is form, this is something I'm not used to and so I have to do something with it" – literature provokes more critical, inquiring thinking. It reflects perceptual doubts about the reality/fiction division and simultaneously questions its own medium. By doing this, it also sensitises us to any means of representation, and thus to the media and technology in general. As a result, these novels teach us something about the very elements of the contemporary world, the media and technology, which increasingly become our environment. They teach us something about what we need to adapt to most.

What also accounts for the difference between the response to TV and print is the fact that the books which depict terror directly show more than merely glimpses of human lives (and deaths) – even if the glimpses are often tragic enough to be unforgettable. The novels make it all the more memorable, and – most of all – close, by involving the reader in individual lives and personal emotions, which, perhaps, constitutes the books' greatest value. This quality stems from the very structure of the work of literature, especially the novel. The task of the novel has always been to depict interior states – for which it is suited better than any other medium. A work of literature has *literally* more space for characters and *practically* requires more time (and effort) from readers, who in this way co-create these characters' existence through the process of concretisation. In Roman Ingarden's terms, the intentional nature of the literary text means that the reader's imagination, and such instances of it as references to one's own experience, self-identification and empathy, fill in the places of indeterminacy in the work, and are a prerequisite for its very functioning as an aesthetic object. Thus, through this inbuilt and medium-specific demand for our engagement, novels on terror have the capacity for channelling our attention from powerful but distant TV

images to singular and private experiences. In this way, as it has been signalled in the Introduction, they give a truly human dimension to an already historical tragedy which the mass media tend to reduce to, and reproduce as, a sensational abstraction.

I.4. "Bigger, brighter, life's so short" – inflammable art in the post-9/11 novel

According to Wolfgang Welsch, a German philosopher and art historian, abstracted, detached depiction and reception of reality has to do with "increasing aestheticization of the world," which he describes in "Aesthetics Beyond Aesthetics." Although, as Welsch points out, "[a]esthetic activity and orientation have always borne upon the real world," today the scope of these activities is unprecedented: they "ha[ve] become a global and primary strategy" (ibid.). This has manifold consequences, consisting mainly in another blurring of borderlines. If everything is fashioned as "beautiful," the quality of the beautiful becomes meaningless. It also breeds its own opposite: anaestheticization. Aesthetic indifference becomes "a survival strategy," "a sensible and almost unavoidable attitude in order to escape" the globalised aesthetic, which is "experienced as annoying and even as *terror*" (ibid., italics mine). Finally, Welsch says, the most serious consequence is "derealization of reality," an equivalent to the meaninglessness and indifference described above – in perceiving reality itself.

This "derealization of reality" arises from the fact that reality in the West today is mainly conveyed (or even "apprehended") by the media (ibid.). Due to the present "obvious predominance of images and aesthetic patterns," reality "has become more and more aesthetic" (ibid.). "In earlier times" – continues Welsch – "to count as being real, something had to be calculable; today it has to be aesthetically presentable. Aesthetics has become the new leading currency in the reality trade."

However, in this trade we are very liable to fraud: "Everything is an object for possible electronic manipulation, and within the media 'manipulation' is (...) practically just a descriptive term," says Welsch. Accordingly, "the importunity of media's presentation of reality" creates an impression of "simulation": "[i]f you see the same images (...) their impact is reduced: sensation plus repetition creates indifference" (ibid.).

Similar conclusions have been reached by Paul Virilio, who adds one more thing to characterise our times: speed (2002b). Later, in his Foreword to the exhibition *Unknown Quantity*, he adds that this element

> brings in its wake a second feature: the accident. (...) Daily life is becoming a kaleidoscope of incidents and accidents, catastrophes and cataclysms, in which we are endlessly running up against the unexpected (...). In a shattered mirror, we must then learn to discern what is impending more and more often – but above all more and more quickly.

A quote from Paul Valéry defines the human condition in these circumstances: "a general impression of powerlessness and incoherence predominates in our minds" (ibid.). Our responsibility for the future generations, says Virilio, requires that this

powerlessness be acknowledged. What he suggests we should do to overcome it is "to reverse the usual trend which exposes *us* to accidents and inaugurate a new kind of museology and museography: one which consists in exposing or exhibiting *the accident*" (ibid., italics mine).

How could this inversion be put into practice? In fact, no new steps need to be taken, since "this museum already exists, it's television" (Virilio qtd. in Wilson). It would be illogical to *create* a traditionally conceived museum, to provide specially allotted space and time for it, since its actual exhibits can happen anywhere and anytime. In fact, the very nature of "accident" demands that it is not arranged, as this would render it fake. The conclusion is that the only truly authentic space for this new museum is the space we live in. The museum becomes not a place, but a way of looking, a mode of perception – supplied by television, "our collective retina." If television, a technological invention, becomes a museum, if occurrences in reality become art-like exhibits, it may be concluded after Virilio, that (at least "to the electronics engineer who works on the technologies of virtual reality" – but not only) both reality and technology have "become the object of art" with the ability to "substitute the virtual with the real" (ibid.). The traditional notion of a museum, a space for art, has transgressed its boundaries not for the first time: but this time it has no walls any more – except the walls that surround us and sometimes fall on us. The result is complete immersion in unrecognisable art: as Ballard said, "we live inside an enormous novel."

Inside Beigbeder's novel, which in a Ballardian fashion invents reality, the author is forever captured experiencing his real visit to Virilio's real exhibition "Ce qui arrive," literally meaning "that which happens" (translated as "Unknown Quantity" into English), which took place in Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain in Paris, between November 29, 2002 and March 30, 2003. This is one of several exhibitions in art galleries depicted in the early post-9/11 novels discussed here.[46] In several more books, the protagonists/narrators may not go to galleries, but they still contemplate art (and not just *any* art), like e.g. Cayce Pollard, who downloaded art from the internet. Also, some of the protagonists/narrators are professionally connected with art or *are* artists themselves and create their own works. For instance, in John Updike's *Terrorist*, the eponymous (almost) terrorist's mother, Terry Mulloy, is a painter. When another character sees her paintings he says: "Wow!" and, somewhat at a loss, calls them "very striking" (*T* 81). Terry explains that she is "ex*peri*menting with straight out of the tube. The viewer, that way, mixes the colors with his eye"; and she also adds, "I'm trying to work bigger, brighter. Life's so short, I suddenly figured, why keep fussing at the details?" (ibid.).

Clearly, there is some pattern in the novels discussed here, and "[a]ccumulation puts an end to the impression of chance," as stated in the inscription above the entrance to Virilio's exhibition, which Beigbeder described in *Windows*:[47]

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[46] The first one mentioned was the one organised by Voytek Biroshak in *Pattern Recognition*.
[47] For a reporter's description see Riding 2002.

I move about like a sleepwalker, stunned by the exhibition… (…) [It] consists of a succession of dark, noisy rooms in which videos of disasters are being projected. Everywhere there is smoke and security guards communicating on walkie-talkies. Images of the diggers at Ground Zero appear on a giant screen (a looped ten-minute digital video by Tony Oursler): an immense column of white smoke overshadows a colossal heap of scrap iron; a few miniscule human beings wander around the cranes, which resemble helpless grasshoppers. In the background, a number of prefabricated concrete sections of the World Trade Center still stand, forming a pitiful rampart. (…) The smooth, glittering towers have been reduced to this hideous, chaotic mess. (123–124 [9:08])

What is even more striking than this image, with its reversal of scales and emotional weight, what is above all more problematic is the context in which the film is shown and the reaction it evokes. The context is that of an *art* gallery, an *arranged* museum of accidents. Sontag noticed that "[i]t seems exploitative to look at harrowing photographs of other people's pain in an art gallery" (2003, 119). Suffering, she said, "weigh[s] differently when seen in a photography museum (…); in a gallery of contemporary art; in a museum catalogue" (ibid., 120). Images of suffering in a gallery "partake of the fate of all wall-hung or floor-supported art displayed in public spaces. That is, they are stations along a – usually accompanied – stroll" (ibid., 121). In other words, they become a form of entertainment.

In the case of Virilio's exhibition it was not only the location that proved controversial.

Virilio's exhibition caused a scandal when it opened. Isn't it too early to make art of such misery? (…) "*Ce qui arrive*" collects disasters as one might collect trophies… (…) Virilio's perspective can be seen as shocking: merging industrial accidents with terrorist attacks. (…) To these he adds natural disasters (…). All underscored by a soundtrack of dramatic film music.[48] (*WoW* 124–125 [9:08])

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[48] It is interesting to compare this account and the following description of Ground Zero with Jay McInerney's memory of actually being there: "I remember looking up at one point, after passing a cup of coffee to a fireman, and admiring the filigreed beauty of the exoskeleton of the south tower, rising eight stories above the rubble, strangely lacy and delicate in the unnatural, movie-set light" (2001). The association of witnessing the 9/11 attacks with watching a film was, of course, very common if not inevitable. "After four decades of big-budget Hollywood disaster films," says Susan Sontag, "'It felt like a movie' seems to have displaced the way survivors of a catastrophe used to express the short-term unassimilability of what they had gone through: 'It felt like a dream'" (2003, 22). The association of September 11 and American film fantasy can be found also in Slavoj Žižek's "Welcome to the Desert of the Real," where he says: "the landscape and the shots we saw (…) could not but remind us of the most breathtaking scenes in the catastrophe big productions" (386). Also Wendy Doniger noticed that in their "reactions to the terrorist attacks on September 11 (…) Americans tended to view [them] as a disaster movie." Doniger quotes another critic, Anthony Lane, who entitled his piece for the special issue of *The New Yorker* "This is Not a Movie." Lane said there, "It was the television commentators as well as those on the ground who resorted to a phrase book culled from the cinema: 'It was like a movie.' 'It was like *Independence Day*.' 'It was like *Die Hard*.' 'No, *Die Hard 2*.' '*Armageddon*.' … What happened on September 11th was that imaginations that had been schooled in the comedy of apocalypse were forced to reconsider the same evidence as tragic. It was hard to make the switch." Max Page, in turn, points out that "popular culture has been in dress rehearsal for the city's destruction for decades: in books, at the movies, in computer games." "[I]n movie after

Faced with this accumulation, "Some of the spectators wipe their eyes, (…) turn away (…). I know how they feel" – says Beigbeder – "And yet this is our world and for the moment we cannot live anywhere else" (124). But as the author of *Windows*, which he is working on at the moment, he is experiencing additional unease: "I can't shake a feeling of disquiet, the very feeling I have writing this book: does one have the right? Is it normal to be quite so fascinated with destruction?" (ibid.). As the author of a book describing Virilio's exhibition and addressing its subject – in fact, as Beigbeder says at one point, "[using] tragedy as a literary crutch" (295 [10:24]) – the author is in a position much closer to Virilio's than to that of an average visitor, although he compares himself to one: "I stroll among these monstrosities. I would gladly wash my hands of them, I'd like to think that I am not complicit in such horrors. And yet, like every human being, at a microscopic level, I am complicit" (125 [9:08]). Of course, Beigbeder realises this, just as he sees that whatever moral judgments he passes on Virilio he must also pass on himself: "The exhibition left a nasty taste in my mouth. I left feeling even more guilty than before. (…) Will I be able to look myself in the eye after publishing this book?" (ibid.).

Paradoxically, the "nasty taste" comes from his realisation of a simultaneous contradictory attitude: "I'm forced to admit that my eye develops a taste for the horrific" (ibid.). This answers the question quoted earlier by Beigbeder from Milan Kundera's *The Joke*: "Do you think that destruction can be beautiful?" (123 [9:08]). Unavoidably, the problem of aesthetics turns out to be an ethical problem. On the one hand, Beigbeder says: "At the conclusion of the exhibition, Virilio unquestionably takes provocation too far, screening a TV broadcast of an astonishing fireworks display over Shanghai," thus establishing "a link between unadulterated horror and aesthetic beauty" (125). Yet, on the other hand, the author admits almost immediately afterwards:

> I love the vast column of smoke pouring from the towers on the giant screen, projected in real time, the white plume against the blue of the sky, like a silk scarf suspended between land and sea. I love it, *not only* because of its ethereal splendor, *but because I know* the apocalypse it portends, the violence and the horror it contains. (125–126, italics mine)

This is admitting more than what Baudrillard said in *America* in late 1980s: "Modern demolition is truly wonderful. (…) What a marvelous modern art form this is" (17). The words also admit more than seeing that "[t]here is beauty in ruins" (Sontag 2003, 76). Beigbeder dared say much more. In terms of a merely visual effect, Baudrillard, Beigbeder and other distant witnesses of 9/11 saw something that looked the same, but Beigbeder and we, the other witnesses, were also aware of the invisible, or hardly

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movie," he specifies, "Hollywood has found inspiration in destroying New York: through earthquake (*Deluge*), tsunami (*Deep Impact*), asteroid (*When Worlds Collide* and *Armageddon*), and monster (*Godzilla* and *King Kong*)." It is probably because "we continue to destroy New York in books, on canvas, on movie screens, and on computer monitors" (Page), that after the towers' collapse many people were "waiting for the end credits to roll" (Doniger). But they never did. An ironic proof that the Twin Towers' collapse was real may be the fact that, as Amis says, "no visionary cinematic genius could hope to re-create the majestic abjection of that double surrender" (4).

noticeable layer beneath this image, absent in controlled and safe demolition of an evacuated building. Beigbeder, and all of us, distant witnesses, were (and are) aware of the suffering and terror *inside*, behind the walls and windows, but only he dared admit that *this* was part of the reason why the image of destruction was so aesthetically pleasing to him.

Such "mingled terror and pleasure inspired by the ruins" (Macey, 370) is an unmistakeable sign of the sublime.[49] According to the distinction between "the sublime" and "the beautiful" made by Edmund Burke,

> [w]hatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*.

Moreover, importantly, the sublime can inspire "powerful emotions" and an almost "spiritual and religious awe" (Cuddon, 929) but only in a *viewer*, as "[w]hen danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are, delightful" (Burke). Perhaps there is something constructive in Beigbeder's admitting an uncomfortable truth on our behalf. The effect this may have on the readers may be similar to the effect Virilio had on the French author: "Virilio forces me to face that part of my humanity that is not humanist" (*WoW* 126 [9:08]).

DeLillo's *Falling Man* also confronts us with disturbing truths by showing one character, Lianne Neudecker, confronted with a performance artist, the eponymous Falling Man. Lianne sees him twice, ten and thirty-six days after the attacks. On both occasions at first she sees a crowd gathering, looking, indicating the direction in which one should be looking, too – just like birds of prey on a savannah hovering high above a distant carcass on the ground. However, Falling Man does not mind being preyed upon, in fact, he "was known to appear among crowds or at sites where crowds might quickly form" (*FM* 163–164). Clearly, and strikingly like 9/11 terrorists, he wanted the largest possible live audiences. Sometimes he even made sure that the audience would not see him attach the safety harness (*FM* 165). He used only "rudimentary equipment" (*FM* 222) and "[h]is falls were said to be painful and highly dangerous" (ibid.). It certainly looked even worse, *the worst*, as he appeared dangling above the street, "always upside down, wearing a suit, a tie and dress shoes" (*FM* 33), "suspended from one or another structure" (ibid.), "arms at his sides, one leg bent at the knee" (*FM* 168).[50]

"There was something awful about the stylized pose, body and limbs, his signature stroke," thought Lianne (ibid.). Of course, "[h]e brought it back," she thought, "those stark moments in the burning towers when people fell or were forced to jump" (*FM* 33). Seeing this, Lianne felt that his "body's last fleet breath (…) held the gaze of

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[49] A term most likely introduced by Longinus (1st or 2nd c. AD) in *On the Sublime*.

[50] Cf. a series of photographs *La Chute* (*The Fall*) by a French photographer Denis Darzacq (see Chrisafis) and the sculpture *Tumbling Woman* by Eric Fischl (see Holguin). Cf. also the sculptures by Antony Gormley: *Filter* (2001), *Filter* (2002), *Freefall* (2007), *Freefall II* (2008) and the photography of Kerry Skarbakka.

the world" (ibid.), "[t]here was the awful openness of it, something we'd not seen," something "disturbing enough to stop traffic" (ibid.). Some kids encouraged him to jump (ibid., 164), many people shouted up at him, "outraged at the spectacle, the puppetry of human desperation" (*FM* 33). For Lianne "[t]his was too near, too personal" (*FM* 163). It was taboo, as it clearly re-enacted the Associated Press photo[51] "that was largely pulled from circulation after 9/12" (Rich). Yet, when the performance happens, everyone there stands transfixed, waiting (*FM* 164). "[W]hy was [Lianne] standing there watching? (…) Because she felt compelled, or only helpless, gripping the strap of her shoulder bag" (*FM* 167), in her tiny instinctive mirror-gesture.

Three years after witnessing the performances, Lianne came across an obituary of Falling Man, who turned out to be a thirty-nine-year-old David Janiak. Janiak studied acting and dramaturgy, and "[s]uffered from a heart ailment and high blood pressure" (*FM* 220), as well as from "chronic depression due to a spinal condition" (*FM* 222). He died of natural causes (*FM* 220), before carrying out his "[p]lan for a final fall" without a safety harness (*FM* 221).

When Lianne Googled him, she was offered very many results. Although the artist always "seemed to be coming out of nowhere" (*FM* 159), appeared "unannounced, in various parts of the city (*FM* 33), and although "[t]he performance pieces were not designed to be recorded by a photographer" (*FM* 220), it seems that pictures of him were always taken. And in the internet they were shown together with the "original" falling man, whom Lianne remembered seeing in a newspaper the day after, when she thought of the image as "the composition" (*FM* 222). However, when she saw it again on a computer screen, "[s]he looked away, into the keyboard" (ibid.).

There were also many articles on Janiak, although he himself "[h]ad no comments to make to the media on any subject" (ibid.). There was a "panel discussion at the New School" on the subject "Falling Man as Heartless Exhibitionist or Brave New Chronicler of the Age of Terror" (*FM* 220).[52] There was information saying that "[e]arly in 2003 he began to reduce the number of performances and tended to appear only in remote parts of the city. Then the performances stopped" (*FM* 223). As one critic says, he "stag[ed] his performances further and further out from the centre of Manhattan, moving centrifugally out of the story" (Leith).

Yet by being always, and increasingly, at the margins, he is central to *Falling Man*, just as "the footage," also resulting from an explosion, is at the centre of *Pattern*

Recognition. It is exactly the fact that Falling Man remains distant, lonely, enigmatic, unknowable but instantly recognisable that makes him such a powerfully evocative figure. After her "advanced search," Lianne can only conclude that "[t]he man eluded her" (*FM* 224). But if he hadn't, she would not have started her search in the first place.

One central performative artist, and especially of the kind described above, seems enough for one novel. However, in DeLillo's book there is another artist who plays a significant role in remembering 9/11. The artist is the most renowned Italian 20th-century painter, Giorgio Morandi, whose two works hang on the wall in Lianne's mother's apartment. Lianne's mother, Nina Bartos, is an art historian, a retired university professor, who studied and wrote about Morandi (*FM* 12), and introduced Morandi to her lover (*FM* 145), who later gave her the two paintings. The long-time lover is the already mentioned Martin Ridnour a.k.a. Ernst Hechinger, "an art dealer, a collector, an investor perhaps" (*FM* 42), who probably in "early years" "sometimes dealt in stolen art" (*FM* 146). In still earlier years he "was a member of a collective in the late nineteen sixties. Kommune One," an organisation that "set off bombs" (*FM* 146). This detail from the past will eventually make Nina send the paintings back to Martin, who by then will have become her ex-lover. However, before this happens, the three characters: Lianne, Mother and Lover, as Lianne sees them, as if in a still-life composition (*FM*, 111), have a chance to contemplate the unnamed paintings together. They focus especially on one of them, *Still Life* (1956), as can be inferred from the description:[53]

> seven or eight objects, the taller ones set against a brushy slate background. The other items (...) huddled boxes and biscuit tins, grouped before a darker background. (...) Two of the taller items were dark and somber, with smoky marks and smudges, and one of them was partly concealed by a long-neck bottle. The bottle was a bottle, white. (*FM* 49)

Morandi called all his paintings, depicting predominantly still life, Still Life. In Italian, this was Natura morta, which "seemed stronger than it had to be, somewhat ominous, even" (*FM* 12). And very fitting, as the characters agree that the painting is "about mortality": "[b]eing human, being mortal" (*FM* 111). But before they reach this general conclusion they see something more particular in the painting. As Martin says, "I'm looking at these objects, kitchen objects but removed from the kitchen, free of the kitchen, the house (...) [and] I keep seeing the towers in this still life"[54] (*FM* 49). Lianne saw them too, although her mother saw "[a]rchitecture (...) coming out of another time entirely, another century" (*FM* 111).

When three years later Lianne goes to an art gallery to see a show of Morandi's works including "a variation on one of the paintings her mother had owned" (*FM* 210), she cannot stop looking at it: "[t]here [is] something hidden in the painting" (ibid.). Perhaps what is hidden is what a note on Morandi from Tate Modern tries to define: "Morandi once commented that 'there is nothing more surreal, nothing more

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[53] DeLillo does not provide the title of this work.

[54] Again, as in *Saturday*, the kitchen, the most domestic place in the house, seems to be most strongly associated with terror.

abstract than reality.'"[55] Accordingly, he engaged himself in "a lifelong attempt to seize reality through the familiar," to investigate "the relationship between the real and the illusory." Interestingly, he approached this subject using only "rudimentary equipment," like Falling Man: he used "the same simple elements, including bottles, boxes, and the view from his window, staging a seemingly endless array of variations." This demonstrates "Morandi's capacity for discovering immense complexity within the self-imposed limitations of his practice." Thus "Morandi's works can be read as arrangements of pure form," they "appear to transcend time and place," which was "an effect he achieved by removing labels from his bottles, faces from his clocks, and people from his landscapes." His work is indeed of an "architectonic nature," "described by a critic as the impression of 'cathedrals rather than bottles.'" In his "most abstracted paintings," "objects seem to be on the brink of dissolving without ever quite relinquishing their recognisably solid origins."

It would be difficult to imagine a more fitting artistic reflection for the surreal, illusory- and abstract-looking reality of familiar architecture that is on the brink of dissolving and then relinquishes its solid origins to create immense complexity, with people removed from the landscape – than Morandi's paintings. DeLillo was, of course, very right in choosing this artist.

A comparably apt and equally meaningful selection of works of art to be included in an early post-9/11 novel was made by McEwan in *Saturday*. At one point, the protagonist, Henry Perowne, remembers attending the opening party at Tate Modern in London in 2000. He and his wife were invited alongside "four thousand guests – celebrities, politicians, the great and good" (*S* 142), which gives us a good idea about their professional and social status. Among all the contemporary art, there was one work that Henry actually liked, Cornelia Parker's "Exploding Shed," as he called it. This is what he naturally would have remembered after reading a note on the wall, since the look of the work, or the pieces of the piece, would have been difficult to identify as any single concrete object they once were. Henry described the work, fittingly, as "a humorous construction, like a brilliant idea bursting out of a mind" (ibid.).

In fact, the real title of the work is *Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View* (1991). And, indeed, it consists of what used to be a shed, "an ordinary garden shed"[56] which was "filled (…) with junk, bought from car-boot sales," "odds and ends, the kind of everyday flotsam accrued in a life." Then Parker asked the British army to blow it up. Later, she "collected the wreckage and reassembled it as this constellation of suspended fragments, frozen as if at the moment of detonation." It could be said that Parker arranged "her own sculptural Big Bang" with "[a] single 200-watt light bulb" – like a sun – "in the middle of the orbiting debris," "throw[ing] shadows onto the surrounding walls."

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[55] All the following quotes referring to Morandi come from the Tate Modern website: http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/exhibitions/morandi.htm.

[56] The following description of *Cold Dark Matter* comes from the Tate Modern website: http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/exhibitions/cinema/parker.htm.

Thus again, as in "the footage" in *Pattern Recognition*, what we have here is an explosion at the centre and fragments radiating from it, suspended. Similarly to Morandi, "Parker rearranges the physical world on her own singular terms, finding poetry in the most prosaic of objects." As in Virilio's "Unknown Quantity," there is something unknown to her work: "Cold dark matter is the material within the universe that we cannot see and we cannot quantify. We know it exists but we can't measure it. It's immeasurable, unfathomable," as Parker said herself. Finally, as in the events of September 11, and afterwards, as it seems, "nothing is stable. Solid objects fall apart, collide, combust and are crushed, only to re-emerge from these acts of violence in new and surprising forms." In form of art and literature, for example.

What is also interesting about this installation, eternalising a detonation carried out with the help of the British army, is the fact that it appears in McEwan's narrative right next to a brief and surprising encounter between the Perownes and Tony Blair. After seeing the "Exploding Shed," the Perownes walked through a calm "room of Rhotkos" (*S* 142), only to come across "what at first seemed like another installation" (*S* 143). The "composition" consisted of "a low pile of bricks" and the British Prime Minister standing next to it with the gallery director at his side; further in the distance were their respective staff as well as "the press corps" (ibid.). The Perownes saw the assembly in "an oddly silent moment," with smiles, poses and photographs being taken. Suddenly the gallery director greeted Henry's wife and guided the Prime Minister to introduce him to the couple. To Henry's surprise, Tony Blair looked at him "with recognition and interest," and even said "I really admire the work you're doing" (ibid.). Perowne answered "Thank you," quite mechanically, supposing it was not inconceivable that the Prime Minister might have heard about "the hospital's excellent report last month" (ibid.). The absurdity of this explanation occurred to him soon afterwards. Blair clearly took him for someone else, for an artist, as he added "In fact, we've got two of your paintings in Downing Street. Cherie and I adore them" (*S* 144). A comical dialogue ensued: "'No, no,' Perowne said. / 'Yes, yes,' the Prime Minister insisted (…) 'No, I think you – ' / 'Honestly. They're in the dining room.' / 'You're making a mistake,' Perowne said." (ibid.). This statement – in front of the cameras – produced "for the briefest instant a look of sudden alarm, of fleeting self-doubt" in Blair (ibid.). However, he instantly contained it, calculating the truth against the gaffe, which, as any other, big or small gaffe, he could not afford. And so he concluded, "Anyway. They truly are marvellous. Congratulations" (ibid.), before swiftly walking away.[57]

Perowne remembers this incident when he sees the Prime Minister's face on numerous TV screens in a window display of a television shop (*S* 141). He is looking for that memorable facial expression he alone glimpsed in the art gallery. The now historical and political context to this moment is the build-up to the war in Iraq and the global anti-war demonstration in early 2003, when the question of Saddam Hussein's possession of weapons of mass destruction had still not been resolved yet, when not

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[57] Apparently, this scene is based on McEwan's own encounter with the PM (Lawson), which is another curious example of reality being mixed with fiction.

just the whole British population was asking itself: "is this politician telling the truth?" (ibid.). It was also the time when the counterarguments could be heard: "Saddam could be overthrown at too high a cost" (*S* 145), "[t]he UN is predicting hundreds of thousands of Iraqi deaths" (ibid.), "[t]here could be revenge attacks on London" (ibid.). Of course, we know today that there were no WMD in Iraq at that time, there have been countless numbers of Iraqi deaths, this politician did lie, and there have been revenge attacks on London.

McEwan wrote *Saturday* before the July 7, 2005 bombings in London but after the 2003 invasion of Iraq. He already presented the British Prime Minister there close to a structure made of bits and pieces of everyday life blown up by the British army, next to an "[installation] using materials that had (…) been subjected to violent acts of transformation."[58] More directly, McEwan presents Blair next to a pile of bricks, or, to be more precise, "The Bricks," as the work is usually called. This work, "one of the best known works of modern art in the Collection"[59] of Tate Modern – in fact, one of the best known, or notorious, works of modern art, is Carl Andre's *Equivalent VIII* (1972). This particular work "was the last in his series of Equivalent sculptures, each consisting of a rectangular configuration of 120 firebricks."[60] Although "the shape of each arrangement is different, they all have the same height, mass and volume, and are therefore 'equivalent' to each other."

Equivalent VIII was very controversial and attracted a lot of publicity, as it was seen by many not as an example of conceptual art, but as the quintessential scam of contemporary art – merely as what it, if fact, was: a pile of bricks anyone could have brought to a gallery, and what is worse, sold to a gallery and for a substantial sum, too. Many members of the public considered the purchase as a waste of taxpayers' money;[61] they felt, simply, that they had been cheated and made fools of.

Thus, Tony Blair posing in front of the public, next to what the public regarded as "hoax," may quite naturally form, or appear as an extension of, just "another installation." The inherent "*arti*-ficiality," or "fakeness" of a politician, especially in the "war on terror" era, and the public's distrust towards him come to mind. The makeshift structure, the unstable and loosely arranged pile of bricks is itself ambiguous and can be interpreted (among many other, perhaps infinite ways) as the beginning of building something, perhaps abandoned, or as the remains of a destruction, something finished and finished badly, or as ruins. The association with disorder, destruction, and (inevitably from our vantage point) war is intensified by the presence of "the press corps" in this scene in the gallery – the military-sounding term "corps" makes one imagine their cameras and flashes directed at their target, which any senior politician,

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[58] On the basis of http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/exhibitions/cinema/parker.htm.

[59] On the basis of http://www.tate.org.uk/archivejourneys/historyhtml/people_public.htm.

[60] The following description of *Equivalent VIII* comes from the Tate Modern website: http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=508.

[61] On the basis of http://www.tate.org.uk/archivejourneys/historyhtml/people_public.htm.

public figure, or celebrity certainly is. It may also make us imagine guns[62] pointed at *other* people elsewhere – but because of, among others, the British Prime Minister.

Also in Sharon Lynne Schwartz's *The Writing on the Wall*, the protagonist goes to an art exhibition, adequately called "Sensation." Like very many New Yorkers, Renata was intrigued by the scandal around the show featuring Young British Artists, organised in the Brooklyn Museum of Art between October 2, 1999 and January 9, 2000. The works she sees, as well as their authors, are never named in the book, but the descriptions make identification easy, as the works are mainly highly controversial and thus very well known.

The first and the most notorious one is *The Holy Virgin Mary* by Chris Ofili, offensive to many on account of depicting a black Madonna "decorated with a resin-covered lump of elephant dung."[63] The figure is also surrounded by "small collaged images of female genitalia from pornographic magazines," which "seemed from a distance to be the traditional cherubim."[64]

The second work is Damien Hirst's *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1992), showing, in fact, "a [tiger] shark in formaldehyde" (*WR* 7). On other occasions, Hirst treated a sheep and a cow in a similar manner.[65] Apparently, this time, in tackling the central theme to his art – death – Hirst "wanted something 'big enough to eat you' – something that, alive, would have been terrifying" (qtd. in Barber).

The third exhibit is Richard Billingham's *Ray's a Laugh*, "a series of small photographs of the artist's family, to all appearances a sorry lot" (*WR* 8). Indeed, the father is an alcoholic, the mother "shakes her fist in anger," "[t]he apartment is filled with clutter and filth" (ibid.).

The fourth work is by Rachel Whiteread[66] and shows "a plaster cast of a child's bedroom turned inside out like a photographic negative" (ibid.), only in three-dimensional sculpture, a sculpture of empty space made solid. The card next to the exhibit says "The resemblance to a tomb is inescapable" (ibid.).

The last, and also very controversial work, but more so in Britain, is *Myra* (1995) by Marcus Harvey. The painting represents "the notorious British child murderer, Myra Hindley" (*WR* 9). The portrait is "made up of hundreds of copies of a child's handprint" that "remind us of her victims, yet they almost seem to be stroking her face" (ibid.). Renata, who generally speaking is not very impressed by "Sensation," copied this comment from the note accompanying the work "carefully and with repugnance"

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[62] Note the use of the verb "to shoot" meaning both to photograph and to wound or kill with a bullet fired from a gun (Sontag 2003, 66).

[63] On the basis of: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sensation_(exhibition).

[64] On the basis of ibid.

[65] The cow, however, was sliced in half – rather in the style of Professor Gunther von Hagens' *Bodyworlds*.

[66] Certainly a work made in the same technique as *Ghost* (1990) and *Nothing Is More Real Than Nothing* (1996).

(ibid.), as she rewrote others in order to later transfer them to her folders: "Absurdities, Banalities, or Meaningless Words" (*WR* 7), to name just a few folders in her collection.

In fact, Renata "was hardly looking at the exhibits at all; she was mesmerized instead by the writing on the wall, those informative little cards that make going to a museum like heavy-duty research – so much reading and cross-checking is involved" (ibid.). She decided that the language of these museum cards was a "combination of stupidity (…) and the need to fill space" (ibid.). The point of this "writing on the wall" is that "[y]ou're not supposed to think"; if there are any questions, "[t]he answer is right here on the wall" (*WR* 8).

This writing on the wall is one of the meanings of the title of the novel, another one being a reference to the biblical book of Daniel, where mysterious handwriting foretells the fall of the Babylonian Empire; but the phrase has also come to mean any "portent of doom," "an occurrence or sign foretelling downfall or disaster."[67] As it has been mentioned, after 9/11 Renata analysed the language of US politicians in the same scrupulous way as the museum cards. However, she found their speech incomparably more harmful.

The interesting thing about the "Sensation" exhibition and its presence in a post-9/11 novel is that on its opening day in London it caused "a public furore and a media frenzy" bigger than "the Bricks" and "Unknown Quantity" – it attracted unprecedented crowds queuing up to see for themselves "what all the fuss was about."[68] The exhibition included works addressing the most controversial, even taboo, subjects such as religion, violence, death – handled in a very provocative manner, often by mixing *sacrum* with *profanum*. "Sensation" was *like* an explosion, since it featured highly inflammatory art. Harvey's *Myra* provoked protests from the victims' families and from the murderess herself. Since the work was not withdrawn, windows in the building where the exhibition was held in London "were smashed and two demonstrators hurled ink and eggs at the picture." Consequently, "it had to be removed and restored. It was put back on display behind Perspex and guarded by security men."[69] More like a dangerous and armed criminal than a painting, it was treated like its subject could have been, if the public had had access to her – or worse.

Similarly, in New York, Ofili's *The Holy Virgin Mary* "was met with instant protest," in particular from Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, who said it was "insulting to Catholics" and "threatened to cut off the museum's funds" (*WR* 6). Paradoxically, "elephant dung, in African tradition, [is] a semi-sacred object with spiritual overtones" (ibid.), thus its use was not meant to convey disrespect. However, insulted Catholics did not know this and outside the building "said the rosary, handed out vomit bags and threw manure in protest." A 72-year-old man "smeared white paint on this painting" and "was arrested

[67] On the basis of *Chambers 21st Century Dictionary*, ed. Mairi Robinson, Edinburgh: Chambers, 1996.

[68] On the basis of: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sensation_(exhibition).

[69] On the basis of ibid.

for 'criminal mischief.'" The graffiti was soon removed. Again, the museum placed the painting behind protective glass.[70]

Having discussed "Unknown Quantity," "Cold Dark Matter," "the Bricks" and pieces of "Sensation" behind protective glass, it may be interesting to compare them with two other exhibitions Frédéric Beigbeder went to and described in *Windows on the World*. Both were held in New York and were devoted to the September 11 terrorist attacks. The first one was in St. Paul's Church:

> An exhibition pays tribute to the rescue services: photos of the missing, objects found in the rubble are lined up in glass cases, tubes of toothpaste, diapers, bandages, candy, a crucifix, sheets of paper and hundreds, thousands of children's drawings. (*WoW* 170 [9:24])

The other exhibition was in the *Intrepid* Sea-Air-Space Museum, "the center of military-patriotic propaganda," as Beigbeder described it (194 [9:32]):

> The reason I've come: a piece of the fuselage of American Airlines Flight 11 is displayed in a glass case in the belly of the aircraft carrier. I approach the relic shyly. The display is very solemn. In a Plexiglas cube, a number of ruined objects have been carefully placed on a layer of gray powder collected from Ground Zero: a crushed laptop, sheets of photocopied paper stained with dried blood.[71] And in the center of the case, a scorched steel plate measuring about three feet square: I stand before the remains of the Boeing that crashed below Windows on the World. It's a scratched, blackened, twisted piece of metal. At the center you can make out on oval-shaped hole in the melted aluminium: the window. (…) If the glass were not there, I could touch the first plane of September 11. / I have never been closer to carnage. (ibid.)

The art shows discussed earlier and these two exhibitions are very different in their origin, context, nature, aim, and reception, but what is noticeable is the fact that – just as in the case of what was seen on TV screens and on the screens of Staehle's installation in Postmasters Gallery on September 11 – the exhibits look the same, in the sense that art objects or ordinary everyday objects are invested with extraordinary meaning, and are displayed in a similar way: lined up, carefully arranged, sometimes behind glass.

In *Collectors and Curiosities*, Krzysztof Pomian speaks about a collection as the result of "an attempt to create a link between the visible and the invisible"[72] (5) – "the two worlds into which the universe is cleft" (24). The invisible is both the past and the

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[70] On the basis of ibid.

[71] A similar (already mentioned) exhibition was organised on September 11, 2007 in New York; it was called *Here is New York*. Alongside photographs capturing the events of 9/11 taken by both professionals and amateurs, there were artifacts on display there: "a landing-gear fragment from one of the planes," "a rusted fragment of a Trade Center I-beam," "even a crushed and broken desk clock, with its hands stopped at 9:04 that morning" (Rothstein). They were collected and exhibited there "because they are relics of an event, offering a direct *link* to the past" (ibid., italics mine).

[72] This need is shown as a universal one. There is an uneasiness about invisibility (as there is about uncertainty, the unknown, not to mention the downright unknowable), which people try to assuage in various ways. As I have noted in the Foreword, after 9/11 New Yorkers felt the need to see the invisibility, "the painful new emptiness," described and depicted by Spiegelman.

future, the distant and "the exotic," as well as the realm of the dead, in other words, the inaccessible in time and space: the unknown. It can also be added that the invisible is the abstract realm of values and beliefs, worldviews and ideologies.

Pomian treats a collection as "an anthropological event" (ibid., 6) with a certain universality to it. He shows how "enormous care" is "lavished" on collection pieces, how "[d]amaged objects are always restored" (ibid., 8), how – because they are "precious in our eyes" (ibid., 10), "valuable in the eyes of the collectors" – they are "a major security problem" (ibid., 8), in need of a complex surveillance system. However, it can be noticed above that certain "collection pieces" are valuable, *because* they are damaged and thus they are *not* restored: their damage is revered and, consequently, it is preserved.

Also, certain pieces are a security problem and need to be protected – not because they are seen as precious, but, on the contrary, because they are seen by many as more than worthless – as hateful and harmful, deserving only to be damaged, and preferably destroyed. Such *damage* would be valuable in the eyes of the offended audience. This is why such works need to be protected not from theft but from vandalism.[73]

Pomian distinguished also a special category of collection pieces: relics and sacred objects. A "relic [is] any object said to have been in contact with a character from scared history, and whenever possible [is] an actual part of his body" (16). This curiously corresponds with Beigbeder's description of the piece of the fuselage of American Airlines Flight 11 that he saw. It also applies to how Kurt Soller described the photographs of the remains of the Twin Towers in his photo-reportage for the *Newsweek* entitled "Sacred Steel." The reportage documented how steel extracted from the ruins of the WTC travelled across the USA and the world (Italy), where small memorials (flagpoles, crosses) were erected, people *touched* the *original* steel beams and other pieces of the skyscrapers, lit candles and prayed. One steel beam was transported covered in a black cloth and the American flag[74] like a coffin with a body (which brings to mind Spiegelman's cover for *110 Stories*). Another beam was shown travelling across the US for people to sign. This "peregrination" precedes its repurposing: alongside two other beams which melded together in the shape of a cross found among the rubble and subsequently mounted onto a pedestal at Ground Zero, this beam is meant to become part of the museum beneath the plaza of the National September 11 Memorial called *Reflecting Absence*.

In "Too many memories?" Jonathan Jones notices that "the world is now studded with memorials to human suffering," and suggests that today "a monument is a society's deathly self-reflection." In this context it is interesting to notice how Ann E. Kaplan described the architecture of several finalists in the design contest for the rebuilding of the WTC site: it showed "misshapen forms" (144). For example, Daniel Libeskind's project consisted of "destabilized, jagged, and sharp forms," where "[t]he glass was

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[73] Or – in the eyes of the vandals – justice and decency.

[74] The flag itself, as Susan Willis notices, "as a physical object," is "a fetish" which "offers itself as a relic" (377). I will say more about the flag, as a motif related to magical thinking, in Chapter III.

to be crinkly and torn; there were no smooth, easy lines; all was awry" (142). The THINK design by the United group was "again giving a sense of things awry": "in this case, the buildings bulged out in places" (144). There is unmistakable correspondence between this architecture, this mirror-reflection of us – and another architecture: the literary architecture or narratives of some early post-9/11 novels, which were created as if already "broken."

CHAPTER II: FORM

The American architect Lebbeus Woods said: "In the fall, (...) not only the forms of designed space are changed, but also the nature of how, even why, we design"; moreover "[i]n the process we find that we, too, have been transformed, and will never see the world again in the same way" (qtd. in Virilio 2003, 155–156). This effect was also noted by Don DeLillo (2001): "For many people, the event has changed the grain of the most routine moment. We may find that the ruin of the towers is implicit in other things" for example in "the midtown skyscraper under construction, carrying the name of a major investment bank" – now "haunted in a way by what has happened, less assured in [its] authority, in the prerogatives [it] offer[s]" – of course, even more so after the credit crunch of 2007–2008.

Thus the fall causes not only literal, material disorder, but also a metaphorical and abstract mess in perception. *Both* have to be somehow dealt with. This dual need has been best expressed by Ulrich Baer in his introduction to *110 Stories: New York Writers After September 11*. "A symbolic echo" to the "[d]evelopers, city planners, and construction crews wielding torches and cranes" and "continu[ing] to physically repair lower Manhattan," was, as he pointed out, found in poems "postered on walls and fences" (2). This spontaneous poetry "responded to a need (...) for words (...). Sheets went up around the city like huge bandages soaking up grief, disbelief and rage" (ibid.). The "bandages" interwoven with poetry provided the first aid in dressing "the wound" of the patient-city (ibid., 3). At a later stage of the healing process, it would be fiction, which took longer to emerge, that rather than "provid[e] solace," still "cauterises the wound with uncomfortable questions and unflinching reflection" (ibid.). It also "ma[de] a first wager on how to remember the destruction of the towers (...) without relegating the deed to the realm of the incomprehensible" (ibid., 2), which remaining silent could lead to.

What can be noticed above is that post-9/11 literature is seen also as a kind of memorial, independent from the state authorities, but equally devoted to public service. It "guides us" towards how to "shape the way in which one's experience is written into history" (ibid., 2). In addition, by analogy to the exhibitions discussed earlier, which took everyday objects and turned them into exhibits, literature "turns the event into a story" (ibid.). However, as Baer emphasises, all the stories in the collection edited by him "recognize that there will be no single story to contain the event" (3), for "[i]n opposition to the aim of political explanations, literature resists the call for closure" (ibid.). But the book's title, *110 Stories*, has also additional, iconic meaning.

The events of 9/11, says Baer, "produced a flood of writing from commentators and journalists," but in 2002 there was "no single collection" recording how New York writers responded to the tragedy. In this situation, *110 Stories* "attempt[ed] to fill this

void" (1). In doing so, the book participated in filling a wider void: the stories "explore the possibilities of language in the face of gaping loss," as "words might be all that's left for the task of finding meaning in – and beyond – the silent, howling void" after the tragedy (ibid.). This echoes DeLillo's words: "There is something empty in the sky. The writer tries to give memory, tenderness and meaning to all that howling space" (2001).

In Baer's text, responding to the reality around the author and putting literature and disaster relief side by side, meaning becomes an almost tangible necessity like nourishment and solid ground under feet; sharing it through words strengthens the community spirit, which is vital in regaining a sense of stability and safety. In *110 Stories*, writers provide this help for the city's morale by "offer[ing] a model for New York's perpetual self-reconstitution through metaphor and language that will prove as significant as the construction in concrete and steal" (ibid., 1). The "model," as the term suggests, resembles its original, its subject – consequently, "[l]ike the two towers, this book[75] contains 110 stories brought to life and spelled out by New Yorkers in New York" (ibid.). With collections such as *110 Stories* – Baer suggests – a therapeutic, constructive transformation replaces the destructive one.

Since, as many New Yorkers emphasise, New York is "[a] community built on a delicate mix of people and buildings" (Page), the architectural metaphor includes also the authors of *110 Stories*. The writers invited to take part in the project "had participated in *building* the city" (Baer, 8, italics mine). Their stories "unfold in varied and complex idioms and genres and across a staggering range of accents and inflections" (ibid., 5), creating a hybrid structure or system reminiscent of New York itself.

Baer's introduction to the first collection of short prose and poetry written in response to September 11, foreshadows the detailed analysis of form in arly post-9/11 novels to follow. In *The Spirit of Terrorism*, Baudrillard wrote: "The whole play of history and power is disrupted (…), but so, too, are the conditions of analysis" (4). This general observation applies also to works of fiction. What is literature supposed to do if reality becomes equated in perception with a "Manhattan disaster movie" (ibid., 29), if reality and fiction become one thing? It is likely that in this situation literature will need new tools. And so will its analysis.

Of course, this need for new tools in literature, especially in reaction to the increasing role of alternative media, is not new itself. Let me mention just two writers who commented on the influence of other media on literature in the 20th century. In his 1963 essay "Le livre comme objet," Michel Butor pointed out that the development of competition for literature (i.e. audio-visual media) calls for a revision of literature's potential (108–109). For this purpose, what should be made more use of is the physicality of the book seen as a material object, as the very title of the essay indicates. In the same vein, in 1973 the English writer B.S. Johnson pointed to the "crucial significance in the history of the novel" of the fact that "James Joyce opened the first cinema in Dublin in 1909" and "saw very early on that film must usurp some

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[75] Which physically has a tall, narrow format, as if echoing the shrouded Twin Towers on its cover.

of the prerogatives which until then had belonged almost exclusively to the novelist" (11). B.S. Johnson, also a film-maker, added in the same text that after World War II "the storytelling function pass[ed] on yet again" – to television (13). Therefore "[t]he novelist cannot legitimately or successfully embody present-day reality in exhausted forms" (ibid., 16). As Joyce's disciple, he believed that "[n]ovelists must evolve (by inventing, borrowing, stealing or cobbling from other media) forms which will more or less satisfactorily contain an ever-changing reality, their own reality and not Dickens' reality (…) or even James Joyce's reality" (ibid., 16–17). "Our reality" – said Johnson in 1973 – is "markedly different" because it is characterised by "the probability that chaos is the most likely explanation" (17). This unreassuring conviction probably appears to us to be much more suitable today, when, additionally, reality itself seems to be "borrowing, stealing or cobbling from other media." Johnson's belief was shared by Samuel Beckett:

> What I am saying [is] that there will be new form, and that this form will be of such a type that it admits the chaos, and does not try to say that the chaos is really something else. (…) to find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now. (qtd. in Johnson, 17)

To see what form some contemporary artists find to accommodate the very concrete contemporary mess that is the (post-)9/11 terror will be the aim of this chapter. Formulating this task on the basis of Beckett's words is no accident. It is Beckett who is quoted in the pivotal scene in Art Spiegelman's autobiographical graphic novel *Maus*, which is later very tellingly echoed in *In the Shadow*. In *Maus*, on pages 44–45, the author is most visibly overwhelmed by the task of trying to depict his father's experiences in Auschwitz. Faced with the inexpressible, struggling to complete his book, Art talks to his psychoanalyst, Pavel, who – like his father – survived the concentration camps. In the course of the session, some resolution emerges. Art, aggravating his self-doubt, quotes Samuel Beckett's pronouncement: "Every word is like an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness." Silence follows. But then Art notices the paradox: "On the other hand, he SAID it." And Spiegelman includes this in his unconventional metatextual, nervous and shaky, but in this way all the more compelling, book.

Similarly, Beckett is a crucial point of reference in DeLillo's 1991 novel *Mao II*, as Morandi is in *Falling Man*. In *Mao II*, the main character, Bill Gray, a writer who disappears while on his way to meet fundamentalist Islamic terrorists in Beirut, says: "Beckett was the last writer to shape the way we think and see. After him, the major work involves midair explosions and crumbled buildings" (157). Obviously, "midair explosions and crumbled buildings" are to a great extent what the post-9/11 novel is about.

How, then, do the authors of the early post-9/11 novel accommodate this post-9/11 mess? The short answer to this question would be: "mainly by being messy themselves." But this is not a very neat answer. A more orderly answer is that this novel is very varied, heterogenic as a group. The works are often hybrid – as the 9/11 event, the fall, was itself. They often transgress borderlines and disciplines, collapse and mix them,

since this is what terrorism does. Explosions collapse organised divisions. Books about them often mimic their subject.

The word "to accommodate" in the above question is very appropriate here, as it has several useful meanings. We can understand "accommodation" in physiological terms as in "accommodation of the eye." To accommodate means also "to adapt" in a wider sense, as well as "to contain," "to house," "to have room for." In this sense, early post-9/11 books provide space for and ways of looking at the terrorists' attacks, while locating themselves at various distances from the events – also in time.

As it has been signalled in the Foreword, individual works can be located on a scale between two points: the conventional novel on one end and, broadly speaking, an unconventional work on the other. What is the point of reference for this scale is the event itself. The greater the proximity to the subject, to explosion, danger and death – the greater the level of formal unconventionality, including one very particular way of exploding the traditional rules of the genre: metatextuality. What also contributes to greater self-reflexivity of the works is the awareness of the increasingly marginalised status of literature in the present audio-visual media-dominated culture. But, above all, what makes these books consider and question their own form and status is the already mentioned Baudrillardian reality/fiction confusion (2002, 27–28). In effect, some of these novels incorporate the problem (*Windows*, *Córeńka*, *In the Shadow*), while all of them collectively create one of the few modes of expression to critically discuss it.

A related aspect of the analysed works is the use of frequent references to or even material inclusion of other media, such as television, photography or painting. This "interdisciplinarity" opens literature onto other modes of representation and encourages wider reading or a dialogue of interpretations, an intersemiotic intertextuality, as well as a further alternative language of description. As it will be shown below, the literally architectural form of early post-9/11 literature sometimes attempts to create a small-scale symbolic or iconic copy of the original, the subject, which it tries to "approach" by mimicking it.

This is most clearly noticeable in the unconventional works, which range from Wojciech Tochman's cross between fiction and reportage *Córeńka*, through Frédéric Beigbeder's *Windows on the World* to Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud And Incredibly Close* and Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *In the Shadow of No Towers*. These last three works can be described as books belonging to Liberature. This new term was coined[76] to denote a project of total reading whose main proposition is that reading involves much more than just interpreting the so-called content encoded in printed words. In Liberature, every element of the book, such as the way the words are printed, the books' visual, material side, is treated as its legitimate and literarily significant part.[77] The concept of Liberature, the architecture of the word, can be useful

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[76] In 1999 by a young Polish experimental artist Zenon Fajfer. See Katarzyna Bazarnik and/or Zenon Fajfer.

[77] Clearly, this project follows and consolidates under one name the theoretical ideas expressed earlier by M. Butor and B.S. Johnson (among others) and realised in practice by e.g. L. Sterne, J. Joyce, J. Cortázar or B.S. Johnson.

in an analysis of early post-9/11 novels, because, as it has been shown above, it is most natural and almost inevitable for writers (but most likely, not only writers) to refer to architecture not just literally but also figuratively when addressing the subject of the 9/11 terrorists attacks and their aftermath. It was just as natural for Baer to speak about building, stories and the city in both material and abstract sense, as it was for DeLillo's characters to see the towers in Morandi's *Natura morta*. In fact, some critics, such as William H. Gass believe that all "[n]ovels are books and books are buildings, and therefore they exist like other built objects – they are a space in space" (153). A similar attitude will be seen, not only read, at least in some literature analysed below.

I will start my detailed discussion of how early post-9/11 novels accommodate the post-9/11 mess with Beigbeder's *Windows on the World*. The form of this book will be analysed in greater detail than others as it is the most complex and unconventional novel on my list and contains almost all of the elements present in various combinations and to various degrees in the other works examined here.

In a 2003 interview Beigbeder said, very fittingly for my purposes, "[t]he novel is a very accommodating genre – you can do anything with it – so I mixed elements of the newspaper article, the pamphlet, the novel, and the essay. The rest is simply a question of construction, of structure…" (qtd. in Géniès). He also explained his motive for writing, referring to the already existing books on 9/11: "Almost all of them have tried to answer the question: Why? Very few wondered: How? And so I wanted to invent what might have gone on, to imagine it" (ibid.), "in the face of American self-censorship I wanted to give form to this tragedy" (qtd. in Riding 2003). I have already mentioned that, in a Ballardian fashion, Beigbeder's book "invents reality," because, as the author puts forward, this is the only way to *know* what took place on 9/11. It is clear, then, why *Windows* was created. What needs to be examined presently is *how*.

After its publication in 2003 *Windows on the World* was praised[78] for its courage and condemned[79] for its audacity, perhaps in equal measure; it was called compassionate and moving on the one hand and cynical and distasteful on the other. However, what both the enthusiasts and the opponents in the early reviews had in common was speaking little about the books' structure. Granted, in 2003, the sensitive subject of the tragedy still overshadowed any question of form; even the enthusiasts were likely to say that in the face of human suffering artistic devices should wait, as, for many, one year and a half after the tragedy was too early to create them. This opinion could still be encountered today.

The fame or infamy which the novel has earned stems from the fact that it comes closest to the tragic events of 9/11: it is set in the restaurant at the top of the North Tower on the fateful morning. DeLillo said, speaking about any writer addressing the subject of 9/11 that "[t]he writer begins in the towers, trying to imagine the moment,

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[78] E.g. by L. Miller (2005a) and A. Mars-Jones. In 2003, the book was nominated for the Prix Goncourt and received another annual French literary award, the Prix Interallie. In 2005 Beigbeder and his translator received the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize.

[79] E.g. by K. Rodzaj.

desperately" (2001). In Beigbeder's case this description is literal: the book looks *inside* the towers, while being written by an *outsider*, a Frenchman, at a time when the American-French relations became frosty due to France's opposition to the war in Iraq. As it has been mentioned, the book is written in two alternating modes of narrative, both first-person. One belongs to the author, who records his reaction to the tragedy and also writes his own autobiography,[80] and the other one is shared by Carthew Yorston (who has a lot in common with the author[81] and serves as his delegate inside the tower, a useful insider for the outsider[82]) and his two sons, David and Jerry.

The narratives of these fictional characters trapped in the North Tower, as well as all references to the tragedy are based on the author's own research and closely follow, in fact, sometimes quote from, actual telephone conversations, interviews and witnesses' accounts derived from at least two documented sources, the *New York Times* article by Jim Dwyer et al., "102 minutes: Last Words at the Trade Center,"[83] and Dean E. Murphy's book *September 11: An Oral History* – both of which have been listed in the acknowledgements at the end of the novel. Despite this paradocumentary aspect, which is further strengthened by the presence of three photographs taken by the author, the fact remains that in a fictionalised form, the novel gives voice to the dead, who could not, and never will be able to, tell their own stories.

This is the crucial paradox of the book: while writing about September 11, Beigbeder says: "It's impossible to write about this subject, and yet impossible to write about anything else" (8 [8:32]), and he calls his book "an attempt – doomed, perhaps – to describe the indescribable" (55 [8:46]). The indescribability results first and foremost from the scale of the event, and two more obvious hindrances in trying to "access" it: the distance in time and space. Beigbeder tries to solve this difficulty by balancing the novel's narrative structure. In *Windows on the World* – a novel called like the place it describes and resembling it in the sense that the narrative is doomed, as if deliberately ruined, already built as debris[84] – the fragmentary spatial structure is simultaneously a temporal framework. The time in the novel is at the same time its space. The novel lasts "an hour and three-quarters" (6 [8:32]) – the author says – as long as the tragedy of September 11, as long as an average Hollywood film (61 [8:48]), as long as hell (6 [8:32]). In fact, the text is divided into exactly 120 minutes: between

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[80] The book has a subtitle: "A novel." However, it does fulfil the most important condition that a text needs to meet to qualify as an autobiography according to Philippe Lejeune: "an autobiographical pact." This means that the name of the author-narrator-character in the text is confirmed to be identical with the author's name on the cover (Lejeune, 35), thus "the character's name = the author's name" (ibid., 39). The "pact" is "certified" as if with the author's signature, i.e. the dual use of the name referring to a real person (ibid., 43).

[81] Carthew Yorstoun was Beigbeder's American grandmother's family name (*WoW* 299 [10:26]).

[82] However, on a few occasions we are allowed insight into the building without Carthew's mediation. These may be slight structural inconsistencies on the part of the author.

[83] In the Bibliography this text has a different title: "102 Minutes: Fighting to Live as the Towers Died."

[84] In fact, one critic, Lawrence R. Schehr, has used the term "basophobia" (fear of standing erect) to analyse the novel.

8:30 and 10:29. Such a structural decision on the part of the author may have naturally followed from the repeated presentation of the timeline of the events on September 11 provided by various media (TV, press) – the timeline being a conventional format for reporting major (especially tragic) events. However, as is becoming increasingly clear, Beigbeder's is a timeline with a difference. The book's 120 minutes contain, chronologically speaking: 16 minutes preceding the first attack (which happens to mirror the 16 minutes between the attacks), then the duration of the tragedy, the 102 minutes between 8:46 and 10:28 plus one additional minute which the author gives himself when everything is over – to start again at 10:29, and come back to life, albeit flying onboard a deadly supersonic airplane.

In the last but one minute of the novel, 10:28, the text is shaped into two towers, with the hour extended vertically to represent the TV antenna on the North Tower. This graphic design, and a conscious authorial decision concerning the physical appearance of the text, is a clear signal of Liberature. It is significant, as well as paradoxical, that the towers appear – physically, in the text – exactly at the moment when they disappear in reality, when the second one collapsed at 10:28. And they remain, still exist, on the page, unlike the real buildings.

This literally and visually corresponds with the author's view that "when buildings vanish, only books can remember them. (…) books are more permanent than buildings"[85] (132 [9:10]). This particular observation is made during the author's pilgrimage, as he calls it himself, through Montparnasse, where he is retracing the steps of Ernest Hemingway, described in *A Movable Feast* (*WoW* 131 [9:10]). The author's peregrinations demonstrate the contrast between his "movable" perspective and Carthew's – "immovable," fixed position. However, the sad irony in what we might call a play on words "movable"/"immovable" is that Carthew is a real estate agent, dealing in immovable property, who dies because a specimen of it is suddenly made movable – like Hemingway's lost home: "All that remains of it is a book: *A Movable Edifice*" (*WoW* 132 [9:10]). "This is one of the lessons of the World Trade Center" – says Beigbeder – "that the immovable is movable. What we thought was fixed is shifting" (8 [8:32]).

The fact that this book is "a movable edifice" should shift any fixed ideas on how to read this novel. An engaged reading of *Windows* may require putting ourselves in a position resembling that in which the author put himself when writing – because analysing the structure of this book is like entering an attacked building, if only in the imagination. As we have seen above, the architecture described in the novel and the architecture *of* the novel are inseparable. The text is a tower is the author. The author compares himself to the towers, saying that they are peers.[86] What is more, he also compares himself to a plane that tended to crash, Concorde: he is both the building and the airplane. Therefore it is no wonder that he says about himself: "It's

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[85] Cf. Horace's ode *Exegi monumentum aere perennius*.
[86] Beigbeder was born in 1965; the project of the WTC was completed in 1964, works on it started in 1966, the ribbon cutting ceremony took place in 1973.

a rare thing, a writer afraid of the book he's writing" (229 [9:46]). The book is an autobiography[87] – thus he is afraid of himself, being a hazard to himself. He calls his life a catastrophe – many times;[88] his life is fragmented, and so is the narrative. The book resembles the threatened collapsing/collapsed building.

The visual design described above, the two towers at 10:28, is the most literal realisation of what the novel is meant to display as a whole: the inside of the tower and, concurrently, the inside of the author. The two blocks of text are literally filled almost entirely with the author, with his personal problems, including the one of writing this book. Thus *Windows* is based on an extreme juxtaposition: on the one hand, the book attempts to address a globally symbolic event with worldwide repercussions; on the other hand, it is also a story of one individual and his personal, often intimate life.[89] In a sense, proportionately to his smaller scale, the author subjects himself to a similar "coverage" the terrorist attacks were given. However, the paradox is that, in spite of it, the author is extremely elusive: as he says, he is "writing an autobiographical novel not to reveal [him]self, but to melt away" (235–236 [9:50]).

Looking at the textual towers, it is worth recalling the striking scene when the above words are uttered, when the author sees his reflection in "the tinted windows of the glass towers" (235 [9:50]) in New York. "A novel is a two-way mirror behind which I hide so I can see and not be seen," he says; "The mirror, in which I see myself, in the end I give to others" (236 [9:50]). Clearly, the author is both on the silvered and the transparent side of the glass; we could imagine him both in the street and inside the building, catching a glimpse of "the tall, stooped silhouette in a black coat, (…) walking with enormous strides. Fleeing the image [he walks] faster, but it follows [him] like a bird of prey" (ibid.), since he himself is like a vulture feeding on the tragedy (*WoW* 235 [9:50]). Having the mirror passed onto our hands, we also reflect the author, become involuntary voyeurs before we know it, see *him* without being seen. And then we see *ourselves* (because the book reflects a lot about human nature). We prey on him and fall prey to his double exposure: of himself and of us.

It is striking that the next thing we encounter in *Windows*, after the title page, the two epigraphs (by Walt Whitman and Kurt Cobain) and the dedication (to the

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[87] Or, as the author implies, an "autosatire" (214 [9:40]).

[88] "My life is a disaster" – 28 [8:38], 166 [9:22], 176 [9:26], 215 [9:40].

[89] A similar juxtaposition of the "life" of the Twin Towers and the life of an individual appears in the already mentioned documentary film *Man on Wire*. We can see there the gradual progress in the construction of the Twin Towers and in the preparations for the high-wire walk between them performed in 1974 by the French tightrope artist Philippe Petit. At one point in the film the screen is divided into two halves showing, side by side, the "growth" of the WTC and the childhood of the future "man on wire." The destinies of the two (or rather three) of them are tied, it seems, from the beginning. A rather moving effect is achieved in this way, one could even think of the "childhood" of the buildings, when seeing the real tenderness, pride and joy clearly felt by their creators, from the architects to the construction crew. Of course, such an emotional response comes from knowing what happened later, which, however, is not even hinted at in the film. In the film, the Towers are preserved at the happy moment of their completion, when the marvel at their creation is still very fresh and strong.

author's daughter and the 2,792 victims of the terrorist attacks[90]), are two "lightning rods" – usually to be found on top of buildings which they are meant to protect from thunderstorms. Here, they are verbal amulets, against the words that follow, the author's own – and the words of criticism and condemnation they will no doubt provoke. Soon enough, it becomes clear that the novel courts disaster like a very tall building. The text *is* a dangerous place: what is more, it has no way out, as the author says, it is a "dead-end novel" (244 [9:54]). The second charm, or rather gargoyle, meant to scare away daemons, is by Marilyn Manson, and says: "The function of the artist is to plunge into the depths of hell." Beigbeder does it voluntarily throughout the book, and the paradox is that, for roughly half of the book, he does it in Ciel de Paris, the place closest to the heavens in the whole capital of France.

The fifty-sixth floor of Tour Montparnasse, the tallest tower in Paris, where the twin place of the restaurant Windows on the World is located, is where Beigbeder – as a conscious parody of a French thinker[91] – is writing *Windows on the World* (*WoW* 6 [8:32]). Significantly, he is writing it in the morning, at the twin time of the tragedy. The place and the time of the action, which is the process of writing, mirror, as much as they can, the place and the time of the parallel second action embedded in the first one (i.e. in Beigbeder's writing) and resulting from it. This symbolic attempt at affinity between the author and the subject of his book can be seen as iconicity of experience.

The events carried out by the writer in the process of writing an autobiography and documented there are as much part of the book as their transliteration. Conversely, anything that the writer could not experience could not become part of his autobiography, could only be fictional. "For me to be able to describe what took place on the far side of the Atlantic" – says Beigbeder – "a plane would have to crash into the black tower beneath my feet" (8 [8:32]). As it is, he says: "I will never know if what took place is as I imagined, nor will you" (301 [10:28]), and "even if I go deep, deep into the horror, my book will always remain 1,350 feet [410 metres] below the truth" (119 [9:06]). This, of course, is true. Nonetheless, in a kind of performance "staged" during the period of writing, approximately from September 2002[92] till March 2003, the author did all that was within his power to get close to the unreachable original.

The concept of limit in mathematics could serve as an analogy here. The author knows that he will never reach this limit; he knows that we know it. All he can do are small gestures, with the future accusations of theatricality encoded in them. Still, he does not refrain from carrying them out. Walking fifty-six floors downstairs, in a building which has *not* been hit by an airplane, in order to imagine what people

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[90] This was the official number in 2003.

[91] In a typically self-deprecating tone Beigbeder says about himself, e.g.: "What they don't know but I know now (…) Signed: Mr. Know-it-all" (67 [8:50]) and "The advantage of writing this much later, a Parisian tourist writing from the comfort of my armchair, is that I can answer without panicking, without risking my neck" (250 [9:56]); perhaps worst of all, he can contemplate the tragedy, as he says, "as I dip my toast into my coffee" (27 [8:38]).

[92] In fact, in an interview referred to earlier, Beigbeder said that he "started taking notes at once," on September 11, 2001 (Géniès).

might have felt like that morning (*WoW* 112 [9:04]), does not make him a superhero. However, just as going to the roof of Tour Montparnasse, timing himself in the lift, going to three exhibitions devoted to the tragedy (*WoW* 123 [9:08], 170 [9:24], 194 [9:32]), flying to New York, and, finally, as the symbolic gesture of closing his eyes in the last scene of the book – this gesture gives deeper meaning to the novel. It indicates an attitude, an intention, an attempt. It holds the key to understanding the simple truth: until we make at least a minimum effort and try to individually *imagine* what it might have felt like on the planes and inside the towers, even the most detailed and reliable information alone will not help us know more.

Four days after the attacks McEwan wrote in "Only love and then oblivion": "we fantasize ourselves into the events. What if it was me?" But we never did or will fantasise for long, because "if it was me" is too horrible to really contemplate. Beigbeder fantasised (with some help from witnesses' accounts and reports) a little longer, even if it was not him, but fictitious Carthew that suffered and died. In the same text, McEwan said also that "[i]magining what it is like to be someone other than yourself is at the core of our humanity. It is the essence of compassion," and "the beginning of morality." "[T]o think oneself into the minds of others" – he said – "[t]his is the nature of empathy" (ibid.). Because of the need for concretisation, literature helps practise empathy more actively than other media. In turn, because of different mechanisms of identification and a risk that is absent in fiction, the reader of an autobiography is more – and differently – active than any other reader (Lejeune, 15). In reading an autobiography there is "a frisson of transgression" (ibid.) which sounds strikingly similar to how Baudrillard described reacting to the September 11 terrorist attacks: "In this case then, the real is superadded to the image like a bonus of terror, like an additional *frisson*: not only is it terrifying, but, what is more, it is real" (2002, 29).

In this sense, *Windows on the World* is a doubly transgressive book: it is partly an autobiography and partly fiction about a highly controversial subject – contained in a literary form transgressing divisions into genres and modes of expression, transgressing its own boundaries, as the work is highly metatextual. It has already been mentioned that Carthew Yorston is aware of being a voice speaking to an audience, a literary character. Roughly in the middle of the book, between 9:16 and 9:18, he is even engaged in a dialogue with his author, and influences his actions.[93] Carthew is a "hyperrealist" character in – as the author calls it – a "hyperrealist novel" (8 [8:32]).

If the subject of *Windows*, the catastrophe, evades boundaries, then to at least *attempt* to provide literary time-space for it, to accommodate it, the book must do the same and evade the book-cover, its border, as well. One critic has called *Windows* "a bad book," but "a book that in its very messiness gets closer than its rivals to the sense of horror and mystery that surrounds 9/11 even now" (Douthat). It is true that no other post-9/11 book so far has gone *as far*: the furthest in "accommodating" the genre

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[93] To the author's observations on people jumping from the towers to, as he thinks, manifest their dignity – Carthew retorts: "Bullshit, my dear Beigbeder," to which the latter answers: "OK, Carthew, if you're going to be like that, I'll go to New York" (148–150 [9:16–9:18]).

of the novel, the closest to crossing the limit of decency, the deepest into the tragedy and the deepest into the author's own *self*.

Yet, paradoxically, as I have already suggested, the book is an escapist autobiography, which is one of many contradictions so consistently appearing in the novel, that, in fact, is also a strange memoir without memories.[94] The crucial thing about *Windows* is that it is built on a series of reversals, a collection of opposites and the relations between them, which could be defined as blurring of borderlines. They include such basic pairs of binary oppositions as: reality/fiction, inside/outside, up/down, immovable/movable, father/child, human/inhuman, masculinity/femininity.

This can be illustrated by a section starting with the sentence "I remember fragments of America" (*WoW* 241 [9:52]). This record is very telling, because it refers to a very early memory, and the notions of childhood and infantilism are crucial in the novel. At the age of ten, Beigbeder recorded his first childhood impression of the World Trade Center on a Super-8 camera, and, as he says in the book, twenty-seven years later, "[t]he crushing size of these colossuses was my first contact with the metaphysical" (241–242 [9:52]).

> It was the first time I realized that being on the ground looking **up** was as frightening as being high up looking **down**. (…) I not only felt stunned, I felt **physically dominated** by these concrete **monsters**. Something existed that was more **powerful** than us. The energy that had inspired these constructs was **not human**. Even so, the space between the pillars had been calculated by the architect to precisely equal the span of my father's shoulders. (…) This something that was more powerful than us, was **us all the same**. The warm summer wind whirled about on the plaza (…) I whirled too; I filmed the tourists (…), a couple of **kids** roller-skating, a **dancer** moving like a **robot**. But I kept coming back to the two towers; my **camera** was literally drawn toward these two pillars of the firmament. Above our heads, the two towers seemed to merge, welded together like a **triumphal arch**, an **upturned V**. Only a timid band of sky regretfully separated them. To build such a **monstrosity** you had to be **mad** or have the soul of a **child**, or both. I was astonished at the passersby who went about their business without realizing that they were weaving beneath **a giant's legs**. Above their heads they had balanced a dangerous whim. (ibid., emphasis mine)

This description, clearly superimposing on a childhood memory a perception that was available only with hindsight to an adult many years later, still contains a child's point of view: the sense of being on summer holidays in an "exotic" place (*WoW* 242 [9:52]), resembling Jardin d'Acclimatation, a children's amusement park in Paris ("The buildings were like a corridor. (…) Buildings reflected the buildings opposite. I was miniscule but multiplied like in the maze of mirrors," *WoW* 241 [9:52]) and a sense of play. What also contributes to this atmosphere is the physical disproportion between the child's body and the surroundings creating the impression of being in two different, contrasting, places at once ("I wasn't in a city, I was at the bottom of a chasm," "at the bottom of a canyon," ibid.). But the scale of the buildings was so huge that they certainly did not feel smaller to someone taller than a ten-year-old. It was

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[94] The author keeps repeating that he has forgotten his past, e.g. "I don't remember my childhood" (41 [8:42]), "I've forgotten my childhood" (176 [9:26]).

bound to cause a confusion of perspective, between the vertical and the horizontal, and consequently dizziness (ibid.) in anyone: "[s]een from below, the tower looked like a highway to heaven" (ibid.).

The description shows that, despite reason and objective facts, up is down and down is up when the unit of measurement is a subjective emotion: fear. This tells us something about the author's vantage point: being distant does not mean that closeness is impossible. The perspective is relative, but in their extreme forms, the two opposites (up/down, close/distant) arouse the same reaction in terms of intensity.

Standing at the feet of the Twin Towers, in a memory, the author as a child is a reader of giant writing, writing on the walls of the buildings. Architecture forms an upturned V, a letter spelling a prophecy whose meaning will not be made clear until years later. The prophecy is that victory in reverse is defeat. The greatness of the towers, of the triumph of technology, is measured by the horror of their collapse, which is also part of the design, as Virilio would have it. But already in 1975, the year of the summer trip to New York, the design's ultimate realisation is just a matter of time: the "timid band of sky" can resemble, or rather prefigure, the timid white band that a passing airplane leaves behind in the sky. This is exactly the image that appeared on the cover of the first French edition of *Windows*.

What is also part of the interpretation of the architectural sign is that the towers are a result of madness or childishness, which makes them an oxymoronic colossal – a whim. The paradox is that this "something" that was "more powerful than us" and yet which "was us all the same," even in the sense that it was calculated by "us" ("the architect") to resemble us ("the space between the pillars" = "the span of my father's shoulders") – this "something" is short-lived and abstract, despite its "crushing size" which, in fact, will crush it.

In this way this "triumphal arch" is a sign hanging above people's heads, like the sword of Damocles.[95] Already in 1975, a "camera was literally drawn toward these two pillars" – as if prefiguring "the pull, like gravity, of the approaching TV news" that will be felt because of the towers, a quarter of a century later, by distant TV viewers, such as Henry Perowne.

"The energy that had inspired these constructs was not human," wrote Beigbeder. Humans are often not human in his novel. They are reduced to "a hunted animal," "a brute beast" (*WoW* 149 [9:17]), "lambs being led to the slaughter" (*WoW* 70 [8:51]), "pigs with their throats cut" (*WoW* 261 [10:01]), or even meat (*WoW* 271 [10:08]) – because this is what the tragedy, the inhuman attack did to them. Or perhaps, because sarcasm comes from the Greek "to tear the flesh," but Beigbeder keeps it solely for himself. "I circle the building like a vulture in search of corpses. (…) A writer is a jackal, a coyote, a hyena" – he says (235 [9:50]). "Birds of a feather flock together," that is why he accuses himself of being "infatuated with ruins": he is ruins himself (*WoW* 206 [9:36]). His heart is "shattered like a window" (*WoW* 284 [10:18]). He is the carcass, and the predatory bird with a sharp beak; the collapsing tower, and the plane that

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[95] "Terrorism is a permanent sword of Damocles," says Beigbeder (166 [9:22]).

crashes into buildings. Comparing it and himself to a bird, he says, "its beak is even more hooked than mine" (151 [9:18]). This correlates with his pointed self-irony as well as chin. The plane is echoed in the image of the dragon defeated by St George in the sculpture in the New York UN headquarters, entitled "Good Defeats Evil" (*WoW* 245 [9:54]). The chin of the Genius of Evil, "a strange monument erected in Baudelaire's honor" in the Montparnasse cemetery, surveying the Tour Montparnasse, is also said to be pointed (*WoW* 113 [9:04]). Consequently, as can be seen, the author, the living man, is one with his creation. He is both the material and the hands that shape it.

In *Windows*, humans, often reduced to objects, become artificial constructs of humans, while on the other hand, human constructs become anthropomorphised, or at least animated. The borderline between humans and machines becomes fluid, when they are turned into alloys in the fire of destruction (*WoW* 2004, 141 [9:17][96]) – which makes them acquire hybrid, grotesque, macabre forms. Human bodies are compared in the novel to Rodin bronze sculptures – crashed art (*WoW* 271 [10:08]). The plane that crashes is "a Paleolithic bird" (*WoW* 106 [9:02]), "a white gull" (*WoW* 48 [8:44]), and a shark (*WoW* 303 [10:29]). The two towers are uprooted trees (*WoW* 272 [10:08]), "a giant's legs" (*WoW* 242 [9:52]), and "the legs which supported the American dream" (*WoW* 233 [9:48]); they "roar like a wounded dinosaur, like King Kong" (*WoW* 267 [10:05]), which is a particularly original reversal,[97] and one of very numerous references to film imagery. New York is (again, as in Baer) an ill body, and the night is the "barometer" with which the author measures its temperature (*WoW* 209 [9:38]). The night "blushes with embarrassment," looking at Ground Zero, because now it can be visited with a tourist guide (*WoW* 297 [10:25]). Doubt can be seen everywhere, the author says (268 [10:06]): "Cars doubt. Supermarkets doubt. Parking lots aren't sure of anything anymore. Deconsecrated churches (...) doubt themselves. (...) Billboard ads feel ashamed. Airplanes are frightened of frightening people. Buildings put the past behind them" (*WoW* 268–269 [10:06]). Buildings are "colossuses," "monsters," "monstrosities" (*WoW* 241–242 [9:52]). But as can be seen, the term "monstrous" in the sense "abnormal," "deviating from the norm," could be referred to the whole world depicted in *Windows*. This quality of general upside-down-ness, not only architectural in both literal and figurative sense, is best summed up in the following anecdote from the book (reminding us also of the title of the interview with the author of *Pattern Recognition*). On September 11, Beigbeder informs us, one of the colossal billboards on Pier A in New York, urged its readers "Think Different" (271 [10:08]). I think there could be no better slogan to be applied to this truly carnivalesque novel, to use Mikhail Bakhtin's term.

A book which has a lot in common with *Windows* is Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*, the second and last autobiographical work among the selected

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[96] This fragment (included in the Polish translation) is omitted in the English translations for the British and American editions along with several other politically incorrect (racist, religious, sexual) comments which an English-speaking – and especially American – reader might find offensive.

[97] In a 1976 remake of the film *King Kong* (dir. John Guillermin), the giant ape climbs the WTC (originally: the Empire State Building) where he is shot and killed – by aircraft.

post-9/11 literature analysed here. Both books speak about the authors, who are also first-person narrators,[98] and their lives – which include also the process of writing their books, or rather the struggle to write. Most importantly, in terms of form, Spiegelman's graphic novel also displays "liberary" qualities.

As in Beigbeder's novel, the form of Spiegelman's graphic novel is also architectural. "Comic pages are architectural structures – the narrative rows of panels are like stories of a building," says the author in "The Comic Supplement" (*ISNT*). Similarly to the two textual towers at 10:28 in *Windows*, two towers appear once inside *In the Shadow* framing the words and images in the comix[99] panels (10). But, in fact, the Twin Towers are present on every page of this graphic novel and their images range from a pixellated photograph to a series of grainy digital depictions of their disintegration starting with a glowing skeleton and ending with the framework atomised into black ashes surrounded by flames. As it was mentioned in the Foreword to this study, the cover of Spiegelman's book shows "phantom towers," black on black, visible only as shadows reflecting light when the book is balanced in the hand – which reflects the title very well. The back cover shows silhouettes, also black on black, of the characters from comic books and cartoons appearing in the graphic novel – their colourful figures can be seen first on the front cover, in a narrow panel above the title and across the shadow towers. On both covers, the figures are kicked in the air by an angry Osama-bin-Laden-like goat. This brings to mind the photographs of people falling from the Twin Towers. In this depiction, however, we see a "comic" version of the tragic images.

The image of the towers is repeated not only inside the graphic novel. Also the size and shape of the volume iconically mirror the towers: combined with the literal weight of the solid cardboard pages, the book is a tall heavy block – a fit form for accommodating the mess of September 11 and the author's experiences of that day and since: "The giant scale of the color newsprint pages seemed perfect for oversized skyscrapers and outsized events," said the author in his Foreword (*ISNT*).

Inside this block, however, the form loses its solemn stability and solidity – it becomes fragmentary, hybrid, chaotic, just like memory. As the author says again, "the collagelike nature of a newspaper page encouraged my impulse to juxtapose my fragmentary thoughts in different styles" (ibid.). The result is a dizzying mixture of techniques: Spiegelman's account of that day is permutated through numerous visual quotations from old comic strips. These "vital unpretentious ephemera" – incidentally "never intended to last past the day they appeared in the newspaper" (*ISNT* "The Comic Supplement") – are strongly contrasted with the sturdy material the book is made of. Thus, because Spiegelman's story is often translated into the characteristic format of each of the classic comic strips he is intertextually referring to, the narrator and main character has many faces.

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[98] Spiegelman is also the main character of his narrative conducted in two modes: the 1st and the 3rd person.

[99] The author's term for his work.

This can be illustrated by the masks the author literally wears in the book. For example, on page 2 he is wearing the mouse mask from *Maus*. Right above him is a poster announcing that his brain is missing and right next to him is an image of himself looking in the mirror and looking like a mouse, the character from his earlier work on the Holocaust, with the caption below saying "issues of self-representation have left me slack-jawed." Such direct references to *Maus* – and thus to the Shoah – are made several more times, in particular on page 3, in greyish, almost black-and-white panels nearly identical with those in *Maus*.

As signalled by this intertextual reference, a general atmosphere of fear and a sense of powerlessness pervade *In the Shadow*. The author often speaks directly about feeling alienated from reality, especially from his own country – ruled, indeed, *hijacked* by politicians whose decisions and actions are completely at odds with his own convictions (*ISNT* Foreword). He also frequently speaks about his trauma. But the tone of the book is never really "sombre" and "tragic." It is, as in *Windows*, in a carnivalesque fashion, ambivalent. The colourful, playful format and very ironic spirit that govern the book lend it a "lighter" aura – often ascribed to comic books indiscriminately because of their very name and the association with entertainment for young readers. However, the fact is that *In the Shadow*, as many other graphic novels,[100] handles a very grave topic and addresses and challenges serious political problems. It does exactly this by means of black humour, irony and satire.

In general, if there is humour in early post-9/11 novels, it is humour reflected in distorted or broken mirrors. And a kind of carnivalesque "festivity" can be seen in the hybridity of this literature's form, its unconventionality, its way of reflecting norms and divisions into genres and separate media and modes of expression also as if in a hall of mirrors.

Such a formal quality is also very clearly visible in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. The entirely fictional first-person narrative tells the story of a nine-year-old New York boy called Oskar Schell, who suffers from trauma after his father's death in the WTC on September 11. Like *Windows* and *In the Shadow*, this novel also has "liberary" qualities. In fact, it has more of them than the two books combined, and if Beigbeder's and Spiegelman's works have been called carnivalesque on account of their formal unconventionality, Foer's work must be called "pyrotechnic" – to use Salman Rushdie's word from the book's blurb. By "pyrotechnic" Rushdie meant "brilliant" – and it is no wonder that the master of magical realism gave his blessings to *Extremely Loud*, which he also called "extremely moving," since the book is itself a kind of magical tale: an urban fairy tale.

It is easy to see why Rushdie opted for a word referring to a fireworks display in his praise: from the first to the last page *ELIC* is a series of formal devises "set off to generate coloured lights, smoke and noise for amusement," as the dictionary

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[100] E.g. the recent *Dougie's War*, the first graphic novel to address the fate of British soldiers returning from the ongoing war in Afghanistan, by Rodge Glass and Dave Turbitt (2010).

definition of "fireworks" has it.[101] Foer's novel, just like reality according to Baudrillard is "everywhere infiltrated by images." There are very many photographs, with one disturbing set creating a flipbook at the end, showing a falling man "in reverse." As it turns out, all the pictures were taken or downloaded from the web by Oskar or made by his grandfather. This means that the book we are reading is actually a collage of Oskar's diary "Stuff That Happened To Me" and his grandparents' letters. A certain impression of metafictionality is created in this way, because at the end of *ELIC* the boy says about his "Stuff...": "It was completely full" (325). Then he sums up what he sees in it: "maps and drawings, pictures from magazines and newspapers and the Internet, pictures I'd taken with Grandpa's camera" – which sounds very much like what we could say we see in *ELIC*. In a characteristically Foerian style, always opting for the "grandest" scale possible, the boy concludes about his (and thus *our* book): "The whole world was in there" (ibid.). Referring these words to the structure of the book, it must be said that the claim is a little extravagant, but what *is* there in the novel is a whole range of devices yet to be enumerated.

Like in *Windows*, but to a greater degree, the typography of *Extremely Loud* is unusual, in fact, it is loud: with blank or gradually blackening pages, or pages entirely filled with numbers. There is colourful handwriting and there are recurrent motifs of doors, keys and especially hands. In fact, the first image we encounter when taking the book in the hand is a hand. The front as well as the back cover of the book depict a large hand, in red and white, in alternate arrangement of colours, with words inscribed on them. Locating a hand in such a prominent place indicates that there is a symbolic value to it that needs to be identified. The first association may be with a welcoming gesture. Some critics might, with hindsight, interpret the gesture as saying "stop" already at the onset. Another association may be with chiromancy, palm reading. And this is true, hands in this book are a text to be read, an alternative to spoken language which fails to express the inexpressible.

The inexpressible that is signalled by means of this specific "body language" is the bombing of Dresden in 1945 experienced by the German grandfather (and grandmother) of the narrator, Oskar Schell, but, of course, the main *unspeakable* is September 11, 2001. The book contains a photograph taken by Oskar (*ELIC* 258) of the grandfather's hands, with the words YES and NO tattooed on them (*ELIC* 260–261). As the grandfather says in one of his countless letters to his son, Oskar's father Thomas (whom the grandfather never met because he left his mother, and now Thomas is dead, killed on 9/11): "every book, for me, is the balance of YES and NO, even this one, my last one, especially this one" (*ELIC* 17).

Indeed, *this* book, *ELIC*, is a balance of YES and NO in the eyes of critics and readers. On its publication in 2005, it received even more publicity than Beigbeder's book and opinions on it were expressed more intensely, even if they were equally divided. On the one hand, "a great number of critics and readers hailed *ELIC* as a masterpiece": "true fans view *ELIC* as more than a novel. It is an act of heroism" (Almond). On the

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[101] On the basis of http://www.thefreedictionary.com/fireworks.

other hand, some reviews bore such telling titles as "Extremely Melodramatic and Incredibly Sad: Why Jonathan Safran Foer's ballyhooed new novel is cause for despair" (ibid.) and "Extremely Cloying & Incredibly False: Why the author of *Everything Is Illuminated* is a fraud and a hack" (Siegel). Usefully for my purposes, a far greater number of much more easily available reviews than in the case of *Windows* focused on the form of this book, perhaps because it is too conspicuous to be ignored. Also, many of these reviews have already drawn the conclusions I would like to include here, therefore I will quote other critics below (in this and in the next chapter), while the analysis of the two previous books was largely limited to my own opinion.

One critic, who compares the book to a "Hollywood's latest weepy," says that "*ELIC* is, in essence, a melodrama, one that seeks to dazzle and sooth its readers": it is "bathos draped in the self-ennobling finery of art" (Almond). "[R]eading *ELIC*" – Almond adds – "is the chance to re-experience the melodrama of 9/11" – "the vicarious thrill of a genuine televised catastrophe" (ibid.). This is the uncomfortable truth that McEwan directly addressed in *Saturday*; Beigbeder, Spiegelman and Schwartz undertake the issue of manipulation and propaganda by the media in their books; also Tristram suggests it. Foer does no such thing. He makes little effort to critically consider that time. As Almond puts it, "*ELIC* isn't a response to 9/11 (...) but a reflection *of* the event" (italics mine).

Another critic, Siegel, in a particularly harsh review, calls "this cut-and-paste assemblage of words, pictures, blank pages and pages where the text runs together and becomes illegible" "an Oprah-etic paean to innocence and verbosity." Speaking more about form, Siegel quotes an interview with Foer, in which he said: "Jay-Z samples from *Annie* – one of the least likely combinations imaginable – and it changes music. What if novelists were as willing to borrow?" (Siegel). This gives me an opportunity to return to B.S. Johnson's insistence that "[n]ovelists must evolve [forms] (by inventing, borrowing, stealing or cobbling from other media)." We clearly see that Foer does that. As Siegel puts it, "Foer is indeed a sampler, throwing in (...) damn near every other author, technique, reference and symbol he can lay his hands on, as though referencing were the same as meaning." Now an important question paraphrasing the rest of Johnson's words could be posed: does this create a form that more than less satisfactorily contains our own reality? In short, does this work?

My answer to this question is: to a little degree YES but mainly NO. The form used by Foer succeeds in one thing: showing that "our own reality" is particularly complex and difficult to "contain" in just one medium, since it is *shaped* by so many. The form of *ELIC* conveys this as if inadvertently, because as it seems the author does not care whether the readers consider his and all modes of representations critically – he cares whether the readers are moved. The hands covered with writing on the covers and inside the book are a useful symbol here: they illustrate the characters' desperate need and inability to communicate, but they also illustrate the author's desperate need and struggle to communicate something meaningful on the subject of September 11.

The effect of this struggle, however, resembles rummaging through a vast toolbox, grabbing and putting into the work anything that the author lies his hands on – without

any self-reflection on the process, which redeems any clumsiness on Beigbeder's part and gives *his* book a universal dimension. Like *ELIC*, "Beigbeder's novel is a grab-bag of allusions (…) but" – unlike Foer – "he doesn't make the mistake of pretending that they add up to something deeply significant" (Douthat). Beigbeder's – and Spiegelman's – books are metatextual, openly self-conscious. They contain ambivalent laughter and a political ambition and potential that is completely absent in Foer's work. My impression is that the plethora of devices in *ELIC* do not bring the novel *incredibly close* to its subject – despite the title and despite the fact that in terms of time-space the characters *are* close to the New York tragedy (the boy's father was killed that day, and on one occasion we can even "hear" his voice from *inside* the tower). Thus, what can be noticed about the whole group of early post-9/11 books: that the closer the story is to the event the more unconventional the form of the book – is true here. But, paradoxically (or maybe not), such extremely unconventional form seems to me to distance from the sheer shock of the event. It does it just as much as using conventional devices without addressing the matter directly would. In other words, ordinary form in circumventing the subject on the one hand, and excessively extraordinary form in addressing the subject on the other, may produce a similar result. They both evade.

Further reasons why the book functions mainly on an emotional level will be discussed in the next chapter. Here let me just mention after Almond that "Foer isn't interested in *understanding* why terrorists attacked America" (italics mine). This is one of many aspects which differ *ELIC* from the next book on my list, *Córeńka*,[102] by a Polish journalist Wojciech Tochman. The book is also unconventional in the sense that it is impossible to ascribe it to just one category. It is structurally heterogeneous, and consists of four parts: "Trzeci zeszyt" ("The third notebook"), "Zamach" ("The attack"), "Tamto" ("That") and "Aniołek, potem Imam" ("Aniołek,[103] then Imam"). Only the first part is fiction and can be called a novella. The other parts are reportage. Therefore the whole book is a hybrid, a mix of fact and fiction.[104] And this is what makes it formally more complex than the other books yet to be discussed, although, like them (and unlike the three previous works), it contains no "liberary" elements.

Córeńka tells the story of the author's friend, another Polish journalist, Beata Pawlak, who was killed in the October 12, 2005 Bali bombings. It is a tribute to her and her work, but mainly it is a documentary account of Tochman's search for Beata when her fate was still not certain. In the previous chapter in the discussion of the media in McEwan's *Saturday*, I said that TV news measured time like a clock in the novel. In this book, after the first fictitious part, time is measured with a body count. While no body has yet been identified as Beata's, and no object with traces of her DNA has been found, there is still hope that she was not among the victims. Tochman even contemplates the possibility that his friend, an imaginative adventurer that she was,

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[102] The title means literally "little daughter," a term of endearment used by a parent.
[103] This is the title (meaning "little angel") of a novel written by the book's main character.
[104] Similarly to Martin Amis's *The Second Plane*.

may have simulated her own death (*C* 112) to start a new life in the exotic setting of Bali, but this is nothing more than a fantastical wish.

Thus the real life author went to the site of the terrorist attack shortly after it killed the real life "main character" of his book, who also gives it its title (the "little daughter" is Beata Pawlak, called this way by her mother). In this sense, from among all the narrators and characters in all the works discussed here, Wojciech Tochman and Beata Pawlak were *in reality* the closest to the event of a terrorist attack – in fact, in the case of the tragically killed journalist we can speak about the greatest proximity that is physically possible (which, in turn, renders physical existence impossible). Yet it could be suggested that *within the text*, she is fairly distant from the attack and so is the author. For Beata this distance is, perforce, silence: because of the actual real-life proximity now she cannot tell her own story – silence is the only available and true version of it left to her. Her friend tries to reconstruct the story for us – and for himself, and for her, but he never does what Beigbeder did: give a voice to the dead. Of course, there is a profound difference between giving a voice to *fictitious* dead characters and giving it to an actual dead person. Tochman lets us "hear" Beata's voice only by quoting her writing from the past. The rest is his voice, which in the three reportage parts of the book always comes from the position of a journalist. And this is what distances the author from the events: carefully balanced and reliable professional journalistic language.

This simultaneous closeness in reality and distance from the explosion within the text translates itself into form. No new tools and "borrowing, stealing or cobbling from other media" can be seen here. The only hybridity occurs in the combination of the reportage parts with the novella part. It is in this element that the author, finding himself on the edge of real danger, makes his book balance on the edge of two genres – as well as on the border between reality and fiction.

The first chapter of *Córeńka* is, as I have said, fiction. But, in a way, it is double fiction or fiction squared. "The third notebook" is fiction about fiction which most probably existed in the recent past but disappeared and today all that is left of it is the alleged fact of its existence. This is why the author tries to recreate it, or create it anew. The explanation of what "The third notebook" is can be found in the next part of the book, "The attack." In fact, part of the explanation *is* the terrorist attack.

Having arrived in Bali, the author looks through his friend's possessions left behind in a hotel, searching for some clues about her whereabouts. He finds two green notebooks filled with writing that looks like a novel. The main characters are two women: Czajka and Matylda. They are Polish reporters who worked together. Czajka travelled in Asia and went missing, Matylda follows her to Asia to look for her (*C* 108). Tochman adds that the writing in the second notebook ends a month before the bombing. He suspects that there must be a third notebook which Beata most certainly always carries with her (*C* 109).

What is striking here is the translation of fiction into reality. When the author comes to Asia to look for Beata who is missing like Czajka, her character (and, as it seems, her *alter ego*), Tochman as if takes on the role of Matylda – looking for her missing friend. He also takes over the role of Beata as the author of her unfinished novel,

because realising that the third notebook must have been destroyed with its owner in the terrorist attack, he sets out to reconstruct or "copy" the inaccessible original in the only way possible (which was also employed by Beigbeder): he invents it. He writes "The third notebook" and tells the story of Czajka and Matylda. What is more, in a way, he also actually acts out his vision of this story about a journalist searching for a missing journalist and friend in Asia. And he records this enactment in the three non-fictitious parts of the book.

Perhaps again there is a certain similarity here to Beigbeder's "performance" inseparable from his writing. But although Tochman's writing, being mainly reportage, has some implicit autobiographical dimension, it is not an autobiography. The Polish author is a journalist, he never puts himself in the centre of his work, he is a transparent mediator; the parallel between life and writing in which life reflects writing and not just the other way round, as is the journalistic norm, is striking but accidental in his case.

But then it may be difficult to distinguish between the two: life and writing. The two spheres, writing and life, are intertwined in *Córeńka* also in another sense. Beata Pawlak was "attracted"[105] to terrorism as a subject (*C* 118) – she wanted to be *close* to it, she "followed everything that appeared in the Polish press about terrorism" (*C* 117). If Czajka is her *alter ego* it is very telling that "she was excited by death the way terrorists are excited about it. And she was excited by them!" (*C* 19). Tochman tells us that Beata "would have certainly wanted to find out who and why in one second turned pubs full of laughter into a bloody slaughterhouse"[106] (*C* 141), she "would have certainly wanted to talk to her murderer" (*C* 141), because "she always believed that one should talk seriously with everyone. Especially with terrorists. In order to understand them" (*C* 142).

In Nick McDonell's *The Third Brother*, certain similarities to *Córeńka* can be noticed. The novel is entirely fictitious, but in a third-person present tense narrative it tells the story of a young journalist, Mike, also travelling in Asia. He is a summer intern at a magazine in Hong Kong who goes to Bangkok to write a story on backpackers and drugs. Certain surreal and dangerous, even to some extent traumatic situations take place there (Mike witnesses a murder). But this is only half of the story.

Analogously to Tochman's work, *The Third Brother* is split into two sections. Part I takes place in Thailand, but then in Part II and III the story shifts to America, to New York and Cambridge, Massachusetts, respectively. In *Córeńka*, the transition from the first fictitious chapter to the reportage part of the book is also quite sudden. Here the change is not about genre, it is not even formal – at first. In Part II the text remains a third-person present tense narrative fiction, only in a different location. In

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[105] All English translations from *Córeńka* are mine.

[106] This image, a bomb in a discotheque, must be a black carnival image if there ever was one. As a terrorist target, the night clubs in Bali were as deliberately chosen for their symbolic value as the WTC was. An emblem of the Western lifestyle, the discotheque – dancing and drinking foreigners, male and female bodies commingling, loud music and voices, colours in movement, pulsating light – was transformed into its deathly negative: motionless, lifeless, silent, male and female body parts and blood and rubble. The carnival of the West became the carnival (i.e. carnage) of the fundamentalist Islamists.

Part III, however, it turns into Mike's first-person narrative and ends on a somewhat metafictional note.

As in *Córeńka*, in McDonell's case, it could be said that the two sections that I have just distinguished could exist separately, and that putting them together is perhaps a forced and artificial act of gluing them together which creates an uneven incoherent whole. But I believe that separately these parts would be reduced to much less than they mean together, should they survive the operation at all. "The third notebook" would become just bad prose. It is the story behind it, contained in the reportage section, that gives it meaning and a matafictional character, as well as unites the hybrid whole. In turn, McDonell's Part I would become a half-baked quasi-reportage. But preceding what is to follow, it prepares ground for Mike's isolation and final quiet psychological unravelling. The unevenness is true and perhaps unavoidable in such form. But this fragmentariness and the resultant *apparent* incoherence make the books match their subjects better.

Whether fragmentariness and mixed form fail or succeed, they are a quality of most early post-9/11 novels. As one critic has said (about people, but this can be interpreted more generally as referring to other relations, too), "In the ruins of 9/11, relationships are a non sequitur. Disconnectedness is the new currency. Language is fragmented. Vision is distorted" (Rich). This disunity and *roughness* create a certain obstacle in reading analogous to defamiliarisation proposed by Russian formalism. As I suggest here, this obstacle occurs predominantly, but to various degrees, in all the novels discussed here, and, as we advance in this analysis, gradually moving away from the explosion central to the genre, this degree is diminishing.

In *The Third Brother* the explosion at the heart of our whole collection of post-9/11 books is literally central, it happens in the middle of the book. This is exactly the moment where the book splits in half. Suddenly Mike is not in Bangkok any more, but in a completely different world, in New York, and "American Airlines Flight 11 crashes into the north tower of the World Trade Center" in the first sentence (*TB* 161). The abruptness of this shift mimics or iconically reflects the unannounced suddenness of the events. The events justify it: a new chapter literally starts with them (also in *our* world). However, for Mike, a new chapter started a little earlier; in fact, the whole Part II is an opening of a new chapter, a transition to a new, worse, phase of his life in Part III.

Part II focuses on one day, September 11 2001; it begins with an airplane hitting a tall building and ends with Mike's elder brother, Lyle, jumping from a tall building. In between, we learn in telegraphic style that "Mike and Lyle are orphans. A little over a year ago, their parents died in a house fire and Lyle lost his mind. Mike was in Hong Kong at that time, just returned from Bangkok" (*TB* 162). Since the tragedy, Lyle has been having hallucinations about "a third brother" whom he accuses of burning down their family home. Mike is taking care of Lyle and on 9/11 he is particularly concerned about his brother's state. He sets off to find him, which provides an opportunity to depict the city under attack. It is chaotic. These scenes are intertwined with flashbacks, as in Part I, showing just how dysfunctional Mike's wealthy family really was. All this

is delivered in short, chopped numbered sections. When Mike finds Lyle and they get home, Lyle tells his brother that, in reality, it was he who set the house on fire. He did this to cover up the fact that their mother killed their father and later killed herself. Mike does not believe Lyle, he leaves the room for a moment; when he comes back Lyle has committed suicide.

How is this related to 9/11? It could be said that the attack provides a fittingly catastrophic backdrop and climax for the complete collapse of Mike's family. Or that the disintegration of Mike's family reflects what happens that day to New York and America. Fire, destruction, death (suicide and murder): "All that remained was an ash-filled concrete foundation, a hole in the ground" (*TB* 215). This is what Mike sees when he visits what used to be his home. The same description, on a bigger scale, could just as well refer to Ground Zero:

> The ash was still thick on the ground and in drifts from the wind. (…) Behind him he saw his own footprints. I hope there's none of Mom and Dad in this stuff, he thought, and then was sickened by his own morbid joke. (ibid.)

In Part III Mike tells us in the first-person that he "[has] been away from normal life for a while" (*TB* 227). In fact, he seems to have taken over from Lyle in terms of his psychological condition, only in a more conscious, controlled way. Or perhaps his grief, trauma, depression, maybe even madness, appear more conscious because we have access to his consciousness? He functions, or just goes through the motions, usually without arousing excessive suspicion. He has moved back to Harvard to study anthropology. Somewhat unhealthily, he spends his free time walking around storage rooms in his department looking at skulls and bones wearing his "kamikaze jacket" which he bought in a small army-navy store "full of people looking to buy gas masks" (*TB* 234). "I like to look at the fossil casts in the storage rooms," he says, "I often go there and handle the bones while I'm thinking" (*TB* 230), he adds, Hamlet-style. It could be said that in this gloomy post-9/11 atmosphere Mike has found his own memorial to his family, and to his previous self – he has found his own *Reflecting Absence*.

The ending of *The Third Brother* acquires a metafictional character, similarly to the ending of *Extremely Loud*. Mike mentions there that he had been assigned a final paper for a course on "an examination of belief in literature" (*TB* 232). Then, at one moment, he suddenly comments on his own first-person narrative which we are reading: "I could have left this [instead of the paper], whatever it is I am writing now, but of course I am not finished with it" (*TB* 262). Indeed, there are five more pages left. In the last section of the book, on the last but one page, Mike says "I hope I can pull something out of this for the essay on faith. I keep getting distracted as I sit here trying to write it on Christmas Eve" (*TB* 266). Failing to write about faith on this very symbolic, faith-wise, day, Mike is still writing something. Something that makes us wonder about the previous two parts, as this one turns out to be a kind of a letter, with a surprising addressee:

> Lyle told me he burned down the house because of what he saw. So I wouldn't have to see. I'm telling you so we won't forget. And who else could I tell? Anyway, you should know, he blamed the fire on you, *Brother*. (*TB* 267)

This proves just to what extent Mike has taken over from Lyle. However, the figure of the third brother is even more problematic than it already seems.[107] In the last sentence of the book Mike says: "I just can't believe, of all the people in the world, I'm telling this story to you" (ibid.). And, of course, the "you" refers to the third brother, but also to the reader, who has just been told this story.

In his article on the history of the terrorist novel, Kunkel says: "No matter how realistic, the terrorist novel was also a kind of metafiction, or fiction about fiction" (Kunkel). With McDonell's final touch, this turns out to be also true in *The Third Brother*, because with the narrator's pondering on his own text, on its own making, on the third invisible element in this dialogue: the recipient – the text itself becomes self-reflexive. This aspect of self-reflexivity is the strongest in Beigbeder's and Spiegelman's autobiographical novels. It is also strong in *Córeńka* and can be sensed in the form of *Extremely Loud*. In *The Third Brother*, the touch seems slight, but it is present. And it is the last time we see a clear trace of metatextuality in the selected post-9/11 novels discussed here. What we will continue to notice in the remaining works is still fragmentariness and carnivalesque reversals.

The juxtaposition of scales (big and small, global and personal) in Philip Beard's *Dear Zoe* has already been discussed in the previous chapter. More will be said about the main characters and the story in the next chapter on motifs of childhood. What can be added here, in the context of form and in relation to other post-9/11 works, is that *Dear Zoe* is the only entirely epistolary novel in this group, although letters appear in some of the already examined books: very frequently in *ELIC* and at the end of *The Third Brother*. Electronic mail appears, unsurprisingly, in *Pattern Recognition* (a conventional third-person narrative, by some classified as a thriller) as well as, marginally, in *Córeńka* and *Windows*. In *Dear Zoe*, as the title suggests, Tess's (the narrator's) letters are all addressed to her younger sister killed in a car accident on September 11. They are written as a kind of private therapy, alternative to, and more successful than the one with "the doctor we all go to see together" (Beard, 13), as Tess euphemistically calls their psychotherapist.

In Claire Tristram's *After*, it is the therapist who advises the main character, a widow whose husband was murdered by terrorists, to write: the writing takes the form of letters to him. "My grief counsellor said I must write you all down" (*A* 10), the unnamed widow writes in her first letter at the beginning of the novel. The second letter is also the last. In a cathartic gesture that makes her feel "lighter in spirit" (*A* 193) the widow tears them both into pieces at the end of the novel. In between, approximately a day and a night elapse (not counting flashbacks) during which the main story of *After* takes place. And it takes place mainly in one hotel room where the widow meets her lover.

On the surface, the novel shows a very private and intimate, enclosed world. The third person narrative is presented from alternating points of view of the widow, the

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[107] In fact, it turns out that Mike and Lyle really did have a stepbrother – their father was responsible for his friend's sister's pregnancy (*TB* 113). The mother died in childbirth and the boy was given up for adoption (*TB* 149) – Mike and Lyle and their father never met him.

lover and (once) the man's wife (*A* 168, section 25). The novel is thus very much like the space and time of its action: a hotel room in a drowsy seaside town off season – with two strangers on a double bed. The anonymity of the main character in this room is matched by the anonymity of the setting – its timelessness gives it a certain universality. But the fact is that outside the room, in the media-dominated world, the woman is a very public figure known as "the pillar" of society (*A* 119) because of her husband's very public death caused by a very public global conflict. As the title indicates, the time is "after," and although the phrase "September 11" is never mentioned, and no clear references are made to the time and place, the perpetrators and the political circumstances of the husband's murder (as if they were suppressed, which is very likely in the widow's psychological state), it is unmistakable what this "after" refers to. The atmosphere permeating the whole narrative is obvious, although it is vague – vagueness, haziness are its main qualities. The same must be said about the word "after" – open like a yawning maw, having only a beginning but no end, splitting the world in two.

The woman at the centre of the narrative finds herself in the middle of this split. It started with her husband's death, nearly a year earlier, after which she naturally assumed the role of a traumatised widow. However, with time this role became more and more of an obligation imposed on her by people around her, a fixed expectation she now realises she does not want to meet any more. Hence the desire to escape, to transform herself, if only temporarily, into someone completely different, and above all free and in control. This willed breakthrough (as opposed to the tragedy that changed her life forcefully and without a warning) happens in a planned and arranged ritualistic sexual scene – an obscene scene in two senses of the word: it is indecent and it happens off-stage, away from everybody's eyes – but ours.

The meeting with the lover[108] was carefully planned well in advance. The widow told her "grief counsellor": "I'm thinking about taking a Muslim lover" (*A* 28), to which the concerned therapist answered: "Do you think that's a healthy course?" (ibid.). But health is not the widow's objective – as I have mentioned, she wants to liberate herself: "[t]o do something so unexpected, so clearly outside the role that she had been forced into by her circumstances!" (*A* 29).

Everything is outside the ordinary during the time in the hotel for both participants. It is a carnival-like time: acting out a fantasy, all carnality and risk. However, to use the term in a more Bakhtinian sense, this occasion – already outside ordinary everyday life – is additionally carnivalised because even the rules expected from this event (which itself breaks rules: the man is married) become suspended or rather reversed. For the Muslim man the adventure turns out to be far more than what he had bargained for. The attractive white woman who seduced him uses him in her own private ritual, a "ritualistic duet" (*A* 158) that *actually* involves her late husband. In the re-enactment (involving the same clothes, position, gestures) of her last night with her husband who left only to be killed the next day, the woman makes up for her having feigned

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[108] His name is revealed once towards the end of the book: Changiz (*A* 181).

sleep, supplants the missing sex to the original scene and gives her "husband" a proper goodbye. But this sexual encounter is about much more than regret and grief and the closure has not been achieved yet.

In the next scenes the widow becomes sadistically violent. She blindfolds the man, ties his hands with a wire made from a clothes hanger, slaps him in the face while interrogating him, then whips and sodomises him, which makes him feel "like a woman" (*A* 160). Finally she says "Tell them to fear us" (*A* 163). This brings to mind the indelible memory connected with this woman whose face the "lover" knew from newspapers:

> The words rattled in his mind, familiar, the rhythm of them. Of her husband's last moments. He had seen it, over and over again, on the evening news, on the morning news, on the Internet, inescapable for three weeks solid and even after all this time played now and then for various anniversaries and made-for-television documentaries. Without being able to help himself he had grown familiar with the voice of the blindfolded man, the husband, the man with his hands tied behind his back, saying his last words to his wife in that grainy loop of film. (*A* 163)

The film is a clear reference to one of the video footages showing Islamist extremists beheading Americans (tied down and passive, "womanised" in their powerlessness, because objectified like women in the murderers' extreme beliefs). Such a video showing the murder of Daniel Pearl appeared already in 2002 and certainly influenced the book. As it can be seen in the scene above, the widow incorporated her husband's last moments, captured on film and broadcast all over he world, into the sexual fantasy about the last meeting with her husband acted out with a stranger in the privacy of a hotel room. Thus the scene – and the essence of the novel – is built on contrasts and juxtapositions, whose borderlines, however, are blurred.

To liberate herself, to become her *own* self, the woman is *not herself* in the hotel. The narrative shows her playing several roles fusing into one another. But it is not clear which is real. Nothing seems real in the oneiric atmosphere – not only in the hotel, but generally "after." The woman is, simultaneously, a grieving widow, a reluctant "widow on TV," her husband's wife in the last memory and in the fantasy, a lover, a whore, finally, a terrorist. What additionally proves that the woman is playing this last role, perhaps committing a symbolic suicide, is the fact that before torturing her "lover," she shaved all the hair on her body and performed a "ritualistic cleansing," thinking of terrorists preparing for suicide attacks (*A* 147). Later, she made the man say his last words to his wife the way her husband said them to her on the grainy video: she forced him to call home and leave a message on the answering machine, which – alongside the scars on the man's body – will be difficult to explain to his wife. This is an extra psychologically sadistic touch to the scene, the final one being "paying" the man.

Again, this gesture is also ambiguous: the man takes nearly all the cash from the sleeping woman's purse because he had lost his wallet and needs money to get back home. Practically stealing from her, he deliberately disregards her needs, as if "paying her back" (by stealing) for what she did to him (*A* 183). However, the widow watches him all along; she says nothing – as if agreeing that he has certainly earned the money.

He satisfied her. As she said to him earlier, "I have terrible thoughts. For the longest time I've wanted to hurt a man of your sort" (*A* 134). By "his sort" she means a Muslim; in fact, the reason why she selected him, after specifically looking for him, was that she took him for an Arab, and thus the "enemy" (*A* 89): someone like the terrorists who killed her husband. As it turns out, however, he is not an Arab, he is Persian and an American citizen, and, of course, has nothing to do with terrorism. Still, he has "the skin of a martyr" (*A* 8) – his skin is both a taboo and a fetish for the widow. He becomes her ambivalent "saviour" (*A* 47), "the instrument of her destruction, of her salvation" (*A* 156). As well as her victim.

In the quote below we can see that (like Beata Pawlak from *Córeńka*), paradoxically, the widow is attracted to violence (*A* 58), and to terrorists and terrorism:

> Sometimes I envy them. (…) To be that sure of something. I think they are alive in the most pure sense of the word. (…) I try to understand it sometimes. What extraordinary depth of feeling they must have. I would like to feel things so deeply. (*A* 52)

And she does, thanks to the "lover." Torturing him, she is "terrified at the depth of her capacity to be cruel" (*A* 145), yet:

> She had long suspected herself of being capable of such real cruelty. Here was a man she would never see again, never touch again, what difference did it make if she were to harm him? So it must be with suicides, she thought. The depth of their understanding is very great. To know they will never be held responsible for their final acts. To know they will be beyond the reach of any censure. (*A* 145)

This is ultimate liberation for the widow and she achieves it. However, this too, as everything in *After*, is ambivalent. Such freedom is obviously morally questionable, in fact, the evasion of responsibility is condemnable. But it is characteristic of those she envies, who have absolute certainty and are beyond censure, because, due to their religious beliefs, they ask no questions and forbid anyone else to ask them. "Her words had the wild, true clarity of a religious fanatic," the man thought (*A* 133). She wanted to do something "unexpected," "clearly outside the role that she had been forced into by her circumstances" – and perhaps taking a Muslim lover, a real lover and not a hostage, or even more: marrying a Muslim man after converting to Islam, would have been unexpected. But it is doubtful whether beating up and humiliating (while giving him sexual pleasure, nonetheless) – clearly punishing – the man who stands for "his sort" is so unexpected. In fact, it could be said that in this activity, the widow, the powerless victim – who could symbolically represent *America* (see Faludi) – does exactly what is "within her role" and "expected" meaning "understandable" and "desired." It can be said that the "revenge" she carries out is what very many Americans, put in the position of victims as a nation, still fantasise about.

Cassandra Van Buren gives ample evidence for the existence of such a desire in her "Critical analysis of racist post-9/11 web animations." She shows the internet as a very representative kind of cultural space: a public wall (as e.g. in a bathroom stall) that can be covered with graffiti-like expressions of a folkloric nature, reflecting common

sentiments such as "the immediate confusion and rage many U.S. citizens felt in response to the 9/11 attacks" (Van Buren). Many of these emotions are unrepresentable in dominant mass media, which are not anonymous and, consequently, are responsible for any content they broadcast. However, such unrepresentable sentiments find an outlet in the internet, where they can be expressed all the more freely, and thus frankly, thanks to the ease and anonymity, safety and assumed impunity associated with the web. Even if racist animations, depicting "shooting, bombing, torturing, and humiliating the Arab characters" (ibid.), represent the view of a minority, the stereotypes they propagate, as Van Buren says, can be damaging. They are also very revealing: "The animators and supportive audience members expose their desire for mastery and control over both their anxiety about that which is uncontrolled as well as over the constructs of vulnerability, dependence, trust, and terrorism" (ibid.) – they "expose the powerlessness [they] feel in the face of terrorism" (ibid.).

Of course, a more well-known, because more notorious, depiction of the post-9/11 anti-Arab, and broadly speaking anti-Muslim rage, can be found in the infamous photographs from Abu Ghraib, documenting a real-life enactment of the fantasies only "innocently" pictured in racist web animations. These photographs are also "folkloric in nature"; as Van Buren says, "the favorite topic of folklore is that which is taboo in the culture." The Abu Ghraib photographs do show a taboo. This set of images is equally well-known and equally notorious as the videos showing Islamist extremists decapitating Americans, because they operate according to the same mechanism. Despite coming from two opposite sides of "war on terror," *both* the Islamist extremists beheading Americans and the American soldiers torturing Iraqi prisoners *terrorise* their victims and thus *are* terrorists. This is an obvious and shameful taboo for the Western side of the conflict.

The Abu Ghraib photographs are folkloric also because – seen purely as images – they function like the racist web cartoons. "Unlike prior [World War II, also racist and propaganda] theatrical animations, which were viewed by general audiences," today's web cartoons and animations "are seen only by those who actively pursue them" (ibid.). The Abu Ghraib photographs were originally and intentionally out of mass media circulation, yet shared by the perpetrators who clearly – and self-incriminatingly – eternalised their actions. It is likely that the images were also shared by a trusted "community" having the same convictions. This makes them similar to the folkloric web animations:

> On the whole, the meta-narrative of these animations is post-9/11 rage; (…) the exercise of a myriad of *revenge and humiliation fantasies* currently at play in the minds of the animators and their viewers; and *the spirit of camaraderie* between animator and sympathetic viewer, and animators with one another, as they create and share their work. (ibid., italics mine)

After was published in April 2004, exactly when the torture and abuse scandal in Abu Ghraib only reached the news for the first time. However, even if these images did not inform the writing of the book, now they inevitably inform its interpretation. The book captures a variety of sentiments that inspired these notorious images as

well as the anti-Muslim web animations, and provides comparable images of its own. However, the space of the novel (even if, in terms of the story, most of it is an anonymous hotel room behind closed doors) differs greatly from the anonymous space of the internet and a prison in an occupied country during war-time. A novel, like established mass media, is not anonymous (although the main character of *After* is to us) and is responsible for its content. As it has been repeated several times, everything about *After* is consciously ambiguous and ambivalent, but this cannot be said about the notorious pictures. Bearing in mind all the obvious differences between the Abu Ghraib case (actual Iraqi prison) and the story in the book (fictitious "romance"), let us compare them below.

What seems to be *structurally* crucial about the Abu Ghraib pictures is that they show a clear-cut asymmetrical arrangement of power: very clearly defined roles of victim and oppressor. This division is deeply unclear in *After*. An additional aspect of the notoriety of the Abu Ghraib images is the sexual abuse as a particularly vicious form of humiliation of the Iraqi men, deliberately exacerbated by the reversal of traditional gender roles central to Muslim culture. One of the offenders is a woman – a female *soldier*. It is very telling that from among all the perpetrators, it is Lynndie England's face that became "the face of this war" (Streck and Wiechmann), which indicates that the role this *woman* played in the case is striking also in Western culture. A similar reversal of gender roles takes place in *After*; however, the violent woman there always remains the widow, a victim – and *her* "victim" is a conscious and willing (at least at the beginning) partner, and an adulterer – thus, according to widely accepted moral values, a discredited figure who may well "deserve" to be punished. Also, what is very clear and, in fact, shocking in the Abu Ghraib photographs is the sense of enjoyment and fun evident on the smiling faces of the offenders. There is an undeniable element of "play" visible in the "costumes" and imaginative – and thus all the more grotesque or macabre – gymnastic formations or circus-like arrangements of human bodies reified and treated like building blocks (e.g. in the "human pyramid"). What is more, the merriment is combined with pride and a sense of superiority connected with absolute power seen in self-congratulatory gestures, such as thumbs up (on one picture next to a corpse). In *After*, in the context of torture and interrogation, there is an element of pleasure: sexual pleasure – which, however, is connected with physical and psychological pain for both partners. "Terror and lust, together. The same," thinks the man in Tristram's novel (163), who, like the woman, "felt a confluence of selves rise up in him, where he was woman, man, victim, aggressor, Muslim, Jew, husband, wife all at once" (*A* 166). "What difference could be made between the two, after all? What difference between suffering and ecstasy, civilisation and savagery, brutality and tenderness?," thinks the woman (*A* 156), who earlier asked herself, "what difference did it make if she were to harm him?" (*A* 145). The novel generates many such questions about difference. What is its answer?

In the last chapter, after the "lover" has left, the woman feels "a buoyant sense of release" (*A* 190). She wants to "cleanse herself" (*A* 191). "In the shower she wondered

dully about flowing things. Water. Time. Blood. Flow"[109] (ibid.). After "she scrubbed until her skin was no longer hers" (ibid.), cloaked again in "the precious feeling of civilisation and cleanliness" (ibid.), she decides "Really, she could be anyone today. Slut. Librarian" (ibid.). The images of fluidity, liquidity continue. In the second and last letter to her husband the widow says, "My intentions have become a mystery to me. Too much thinking on the subject leads me into treacherous waters. (…) I find myself drowning in the moment of our last sorrow together" (ibid.). Then she leaves the hotel and stands on a cliff overlooking the sea. "What had she come for? (…) She knew that she would never find it. So she stopped looking inside herself, and looked out at the waves instead, and thought of all the possibilities open to her in the future" (*A* 193) – perhaps after "after." Thus there is no clear answer in the novel, there is fluidity[110] and openness, blurring of borderlines, above all ambivalence without consequence. The oneiric atmosphere of "after" diagnosed by Faludi in *The Terror Dream* predominates: "[l]ast night feels like a dream" (*A* 183).

J.G. Ballard said that "[i]n a sense, pornography is the most political form of fiction, dealing with how we use and exploit each other, in the most urgent and ruthless way" (6). It could be said that *After* is political in this sense, reflecting very common post-9/11 sentiments in a very private relation, in the shape of almost subconscious urges. Or it could be said rather that *After* is about business. There even is a financial transaction at the end. Its pornography is only half-sexual; the other half is purely a settling of accounts, calculated, methodical; a means of planned self-liberation for a price.

The same cannot be said about pornography in Beigbeder's *Windows on the World*, where it appears more for its own sake; there is no reckoning with ghosts from the past behind it. However, the scene at 10:15, although it is not literal business, has something to do with business. It takes place between two adulterous stockbrokers who are about to become ghosts, because they find themselves in a conference room in the North Tower of the WTC on the morning of 9/11. In a sense, the couple involved may be ghosts already; they are identified only by brand names of the clothes they are wearing: the good-looking "blonde in Ralph Lauren" and the "guy in Kenneth Cole" are little more than "salon tanned" (*WoW* 281) mannequins in a fashion magazine or on television – two marketing devices well-known from the variety of ads and commercials showing wealthy successful people (thanks to the advertised product); they even speak an ad-like formulaic language that is a parody of the corporate jargon.[111] Accordingly, of

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[109] She is menstruating at the time. This, making her "unclean," additionally aggravates her humiliation of the Muslim man.

[110] E. Ann Kaplan describes "fluidity" as an alternative response to the terror inaugurated on September 11 and contrasts it with "the male leaders on television present[ing] a stiff, rigid, controlling, and increasingly vengeful response" which was "actually about humiliation" (13). "While a 'disciplining' and homogenizing of United States response was at work through the media," Kaplan continues, "on the streets something fluid, personal, and varied was taking place" (13, 15).

[111] Here is a typical exchange: "It's more volatile but the volumes are down," "The margins are killing us," "I'm going long on the NASDAQ," "The squiggly lines aren't looking good," "We got whacked on the yen," "Well, my position on the Nikkei is covered" (*WoW* 52–52 [8:45]).

course, there is little psychological depth to their intercourse. But psychological depth is not its purpose. The scene is shorter but more to the point than the scenes in *After*. Admittedly, there is little time left, the circumstances are very extreme ("purple corpses around them, those of suffocated colleagues and bosses," ibid.). Yet, apparently, they are favourable at least in one sense: the guy in Kenneth Cole affirms, as if in a mock-ad, that "Death is better than Viagra" (ibid.). The blonde in Ralph Lauren has her own one-liner: "I'm dying of happiness. (…) I'm dying loving you" (ibid.), which may be read as an assertion of freedom and a defiant celebration of life in the face of imminent death: a choice of one's own "way to go." Or as a kitschy cliché.

The scene is improbable, but draws attention to itself. With typical irony, Beigbeder says, "despite the stench of death and the unbearable heat, it's really hot to watch them" (ibid.). The readers of the British and American editions must trust these words, because the two-page scene available in the French original and in the Polish translation has been cut to half a page in the English translations.[112] The Eros and Thanatos theme was deemed too offensive for English-speaking audiences, indeed it was condemned by many critics, therefore it was censored by the author (and the publisher?). In this sense, it is not the pornography but the decision to delete it that is political. One could ask whether it was really so offensive, whether its absence affects the book, whether it was meaningful enough to be included in it in the first place.

It is by no means a central scene – the characters are marginal. Also, it is not a well-written scene. It is vulgar (in its original version) – deliberately and provocatively so. The fact that so much attention was paid to it on the book's publication shows what audiences focus on. The author, who knew he would be accused of exploiting the tragedy (in fact, he accused himself of this, as I have signalled), may have provided only what he knew the readers were eager to see. The meaningfulness of the scene consists in adding to the extreme, chaotic upside-down situation of the terrorist attack, the carnivalesque[113] apocalyptic atmosphere in which all rules and propriety are suspended. Also, it turns the readers (who, while reading about the event, are like TV viewers watching it live, but this time with access to the inside) into voyeurs of a spectacle that is clearly "really hot to watch" since nobody can stop watching. In this grotesque way the novel exposes the position of all TV viewers of the media spectacle of terror, equalling it with pornography. "It seems," says Susan Sontag, "that the appetite for pictures showing bodies in pain is as keen, almost, as the desire for ones that show bodies naked" (2003, 41). Finally, the sexual licentiousness corresponds with the

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[112] As a Polish reader, I am expected to be more distant, less sensitive, and so – I am allowed to read it. Unlike the author's upfront self-censorship in other places (marked by a note in parentheses), this censorship is not indicated in any way in the British edition – apart from the statement "This English language edition differs in parts from the original French," lost on the page with publication data. The sexual union in the British and American edition may benefit from the brevity of its description – e.g. in the case of the "I'm dying of happiness…" declaration mentioned above, it makes the first, lofty, interpretation more likely.

[113] Sexual licentiousness is one of the most characteristic features of carnival, whose very name has to do with "flesh" (also "meat").

hedonism of the consumerist society described throughout the book, encompassing the author's whole life, and blamed for creating the "ruins of materialism" (*WoW* 279) – the bankruptcy of a faulty model of economy and society that has been made undeniable and unavoidable with the resultant ongoing economic crisis.

This model of society has been described also in Jay McInerney's *The Good Life*. The conventional third-person narrative depicts the lives of two well-off New York families shortly before and immediately after the September 11 attacks. The focus of the book is not on the historical event itself but on the love lives of two middle-aged couples depicted against this tragic backdrop. The love life in the exiting arrangements is not satisfactory and this results in a romance between the wife from one couple and the husband from the other.

The romance rises from the ashes of the tragedy. Corrine Calloway and Luke McGavock meet when helping as volunteers for a soup kitchen feeding rescue workers at Ground Zero. Corrine at first "imagined that if nothing else, this thing [9/11] would draw [her and her husband] together as a couple, as a family; that had seemed the only possible good that could come out of it" (*GL* 148). However, another kind of good "came out of it": she met Luke and "[h]er conversations with Luke were more engaging than any she'd had with Russell in years. Of course, she realized it was a kind of wartime intimacy, the camaraderie of strangers in a lifeboat" (ibid.) – but soon enough this trip evolved into a voyage for the rest of their lives (as far as we can judge by the ending of the novel).

Corrine's reasoning demonstrates a typical conflation of two contrasting scales in the minds of the characters of *The Good Life*: the global event, ca. three thousand deaths, imminent war vs. my family, my relationship, me. As one critic says, "McInerney is sometimes thought of as a satirist, because he writes about a social scene that is a frequent subject of satire, the Manhattan Wasp haute bourgeoisie. But he is not a true satirist" (Menand). In fact, as another critic notices, "in the main he relates his story with po-faced earnestness" ("Comings..."). This is unfortunate, as his subject could use (and certainly deserves) some satire. What McInerney describes can be defined with one of Bakhtin's depictions of carnival: "feasts were [always] linked to moments of crisis, of breaking points" (1984, 9) – and *vice versa*, moments of crisis, of breaking points are linked with feasts: "Moments of death and revival, of change and renewal, always led to a festive perception of the world" (ibid., 9). McInerney, who himself worked as a volunteer at Ground Zero and is thus a well-informed source on the subject, shows the aftermath of 9/11 in New York as such a festive time, a celebration of indomitable spirit, hope and unity, solidarity, empathy and charity – as well as a celebration of one's own altruism, virtue and gratifying usefulness;[114] what is more, as the cause of future celebrations because of the usefulness of the event itself: seen as an opportunity to revaluate and change one's life, to wipe the slate clean, to start

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[114] Baer mentions a writer who worried about "the tempting and dangerous tendency for downtowners to take misguided *pride* in being more affected than others" (8, italics mine).

afresh. Yet McInerney depicts this disparity as if he was not really dealing with a great contrast and ambivalence at all.

Among all the writers discussed here McInerney is the only author portraying such natural human traits as selflessness combined with self-interest, vanity leading to competition and snobbery among volunteers: the everydayness of the crisis, the non-heroic down-to-earth, even banal and unpretty, but nonetheless true, side to it. He shows, albeit unblinkingly, that just as a lot of good came out of *people* in the aftermath of 9/11, it could be said that a lot of good came *out of it* for some people (not only terrorists). This may sound suspect, but it is a fact that hardly anyone writes about, perhaps because it seems tactless, even shameful: many people involved in the communal work at Ground Zero enjoyed it, derived satisfaction and great pleasure from this intense time of "acute wakefulness and connectedness that had followed the initial confrontation with mortality in September" (*GL* 353). When it was over, the "crisis modulated to routine, as the delis and shops in the neighborhood had begun to reopen, as the fires had cooled and (…) the sky began to clear above the office towers," the "sense of mission had slowly evaporated" and "the volunteers had fallen away one by one, and those that remained felt increasingly redundant" (*GL* 291–292). What started then was a "nostalgia for the urgent, vivid days of September and the predawn intimacies of October" (*GL* 291). The intimacies often had to do with the fact that the time was also a great opportunity for meeting like-minded people, sharing strong emotions with them at a difficult moment, which, incidentally, increased the chances of these like-minded people to become more than just friends. Hence the romance between Corrine and Luke.[115] In a similar vein, Spiegelman, in the Foreword to his *In the Shadow of No Towers*, mentions "terror sex," about which he planned to make a special sequence. There were "rumours of women patriotically rushing into the wreckage to give comfort to rescue workers at night," he says. He also "noted one Tribeca bachelor friend's wistful observation that those first days were 'a really great time for picking up girls'" (ibid.). No wonder many felt nostalgic when November came. This also proves that Beigbeder's little pornographic scene in the context of a terrorist attack was not off the mark after all.

The question of "good" and "goodness" appears to be central to *The Good Life*. The phrase in the title is an ambiguous term. If we put the idiomatic meaning aside, what is a "good life"? Was it the one the Calloways and the McGavocks had before 9/11? Or can the middle-aged characters with children, but without love in their marriages, start it now, again, after the disaster, which made them think about the *true* quality of their financially comfortable lives more than anything else before? Is it good to focus on oneself, one's own comfort, in all this? "Luke began to wonder if whatever good he

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[115] In fact, what happened between them and was happening between other people around them (as well as between Keith Neudecker and Florence Givens in *Falling Man*) is psychologically plausible, even very likely. Apparently the traumatic events led to many affairs. In an article by Ramirez, the family counselor, rabbi and best-selling author of *The Truth About Cheating*, Gary Neuman, mentions "9/11 firefighters who had helped the wives of their fallen comrades and ended up having affairs with them."

was doing downtown was morally canceled out by the pleasure he derived from being there" (*GL* 162). It is good that this novel, a small-scale discourse on some important aspects of the post-9/11 world, asks such an uncomfortable question – which, with a little bit of initiative on the reader's part, could be extended to a larger scale, e.g. "Luke began to wonder if whatever (if any) good the US was doing in Iraq (or anywhere else) was morally canceled out by the benefits they derived from being there," etc.

But perhaps this is too much to hope for. The book is "middle-brow romantic fiction"[116] ("Comings..."). The only possible good that could come out of it seems to be the fact that the novel shows how really ordinary, self-centred and not saint most people are even in extraordinary circumstances, how these circumstances suspend usual rules but not usual needs, how these needs and ways of satisfying them acquire different names, e.g. "patriotic comfort." The novel may draw our attention to the ambiguity of the post-9/11 situation, to the ambivalent ways in which it can be seen and used. This is not something that the powers that be and the media broadcasting their views would be willing to do.

A question of goodness appears also in Lynne Sharon Schwartz's *The Writing on the Wall*, where the main character's decisions and actions indicate a suspension of accepted moral rules. However, since these choices concern children, they will be discussed in the next chapter. Structurally, *The Writing* is again a conventional, if stylistically more refined, third-person-narrative novel. Since at this point of my analysis we are at the formally conventional end of my list, the remaining three works by three renowned authors are also more regular representatives of the novelistic genre. Perhaps an exception to this, to some degree, is Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, which should have been discussed after McDonell's *The Third Brother* due to the closeness to explosion and the effect it has on the form of the novel. However, the book is analysed here because of the presence of a terrorist in the story, a feature shared by the other two novels yet to be examined.

As it has been mentioned, *Falling Man*, again a third-person-narrative fiction, contains sections presented from the point of view of a terrorist, Hammad. In the sections entitled "On Marienstrassse," "In Nokomis" and "In the Hudson Corridor," we see Hammad preparing for the 9/11 attack and, finally, onboard the first plane crashing into the North Tower. In fact, we can see the terrorist, a marginal, shady character, crashing *into the main story* – three times in the course of the novel and literally on page 239 where the two stories *physically* meet, or rather collide.

With his typical attention to detail, DeLillo shows Hammad on the plane, fastening his seatbelt (in a rather redundant, even grotesque, gesture, considering what is about to happen), then watching an empty water bottle on the plane's floor

> roll this way and back (...) and then skitter across the floor an instant before the aircraft struck the tower, heat, then fuel, then fire, and a blast wave passed through the structure that sent Keith Neudecker out of his chair and into a wall. (*FM* 239)

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[116] By some accused of embarrassingly exploiting the subject of 9/11 ("Comings...").

What has just – almost imperceptibly – happened is a transformation of Hammad into a blast, an explosion: he becomes part of the energy that thrust Keith, one of the two main characters, against the wall in his office in one of the Twin Towers. A similar transformation took place in the narrative: a fusion of two stories within the syntax of one sentence. This quiet, almost stealthy, transition iconically represents the suddenness and surprise of the attack. The quietness only proves the great closeness to the impact, because at a great proximity the noise may be deafening.[117] However, at the same time, the quietness of this scene, the blurry quality of the shift, makes it inconspicuous in the narrative and the subtly achieved closeness may be partially lost on the readers, who are likely to be confused at first, not realising that a transition took place and now the story is being told from a different point of view, since the one that started "In the Hudson Corridor" no longer exists. This confusion caused by the transition in the text again reflects the (albeit greater) confusion experienced by Keith, the character in the text. Witnessing Keith – at the end of the novel – immediately after the attack and before he left the tower, and then immediately after he went out to the street, brings us back to the scene at the very beginning of the novel.

The novel starts *in medias res*: "It was not a street any more but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night" (*FM* 3). The phrase "not a street *any more*" implies a *before* and some drastic cause of the change, of the "rubble and mud" and "people running past holding towels to their faces or jackets over their heads" in the next sentence (ibid.). The cause is not explained here, but it is known to every reader. It is depicted at the very end of the book, written in the same style. The text captures only the immediate sensations of the then "here and now," the details and aberrations recorded in repetitive short sentences, as if formulated by a mind desperately trying to order, catalogue, make sense of all it sees and hears:

> They had handkerchiefs pressed to their mouths. They had shoes in their hands (…). They ran and fell, some of them (…). (…) They ran and then they stopped, some of them (…). (…) He kept on walking. (…) He saw two women sobbing in their reverse march, (…) faces in collapse. He saw members of the tai chi group from the park nearby, standing with hands extended at roughly chest level, elbows bent, as if all this, themselves included, might be placed in a state of abeyance. (*FM* 3–4)

As in the scene of the crash of the plane into the building and the terrorist's narrative into Keith's, here DeLillo's syntax also iconically reflects what it describes: chaos, incoherence, anomaly, suspension of ordinary rules of the ways people behave and things work. Orderly story-telling is also held in abeyance. The result is a carnivalesque, alien world that is a blurred and ambivalent time-space: "falling ash and near night" on a beautiful sunny Indian summer morning, with a euphemistic image of a "shirt" aloft in the sky – like a shadow of a falling man, in the opening scene of the book and then reappearing as its last ghostly image.

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[117] John Tulloch, a survivor of the 7/7 (2005) bombings in London, writes in his memoir *One day in July*: "I heard no sound. (I read three days later that experienced soldiers tell you if you don't hear the sound of an explosion you are probably about to die.)" (15).

As one critic has noticed, the time scheme of the book (just as reality) is violated, because of the inclusion of the terrorist narrative, interrupting the main story three times, and because of the "arbitrary, formal decision, to transplant a huge piece of drama on to the end of so studiously anti-climactic a book" (Mars-Jones). In this way, the story comes full circle – does not really begin on the first page and does not really end on the last one.

Apart from the terrorist's and Keith's points of view there is also the one belonging to Keith's estranged wife, Lianne. All of them alternate thus adding to the reader's potential confusion. It is to Lianne and their son Justin that Keith walks[118] once he is safe in the street, away from the disaster. It can be said after Mars-Jones that "the novel is skewed in [Lianne's] favour" (ibid.), because it includes her mother and her mother's lover as characters as well as memories of her father who suffered from dementia and committed suicide. Now Lianne fears she could start suffering from the same disease.[119] As Mars-Jones says, although "Lianne wasn't in the towers that fell, (…) she is the one who comes closer to breaking down."

What apparently helps her is helping others: she organises a workshop for elderly patients afflicted by Alzheimer's disease, where they can write down their memories while they still have them. Their stories are increasingly fragmentary as their memory disintegrates and this fragmentariness, disrupted linearity, abandoned threads picked up later or not (e.g. Florence Givens) characterise also this story, *Falling Man*, which records memories of a disintegrating world. As another critic says, "the highly private story about a national cataclysm breaks apart and goes astray, renders reading difficult," "spills out and ramifies without any clear conclusion" (Jarniewicz 2008). The possibility of reaching a clear conclusion is suspended in the state of emergency, called off till further notice.

A carnivalesque suspension is seen in the new life that Keith drifts into after the tragedy. He becomes a professional poker player, making taking chances his main occupation. His time is the tournament schedule (*FM* 230) and it is spent mainly in casinos: "He was fitting into something that was made to his shape. He was never more himself than in these rooms" (*FM* 225). Yet, he also "wondered if he was becoming a self-operating mechanism, like a humanoid robot" (ibid.), because of the automatic and emotionless way he functioned as "[d]ays fade[d], nights drag[ged] on, check-and-rise, wake-and-sleep" (*FM* 226). It appears to be a form of escapism: "[t]hese were the times when there was nothing outside, no flash of history or memory that he

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[118] As in *The Good Life*, in *Falling Man* the attack is an opportunity to revalue one's life. It also leads to an extra-marital relationship. Despite this, it is family that counts most for Keith and Lianne – after the tragedy they start to live together again, although it is a togetherness with a difference: Keith becomes a poker player and travels frequently.

[119] In fact, practically all the main and a few marginal characters suffer from some mental or psychological disorders or even illnesses in early post-9/11 novels. The most common ones are, unsurprisingly, trauma and depression (*ISNT, ELIC, DZ, TB, A, WR* – Renata and her mother) or just depression (*WoW, T, GL*, also in Arthur Nersesian's *Unlubricated*, not discussed here). In *Saturday*, Baxter suffers from Huntington's disease, Henry's mother from Alzheimer's disease.

might unknowingly summon in the routine run of cards" (*FM* 225). This routine in the highly regulated and ritualised context of a casino clearly gives him a kind of order: "the game had structure, guiding principles" (*FM* 211). And despite the risk, it also offers him predictability and certainty – not of winning, but of playing, of knowing what to expect: "ever repeated hand after hand, the choice of yes or no. Call or raise, call or fold" (*FM* 212). This minimalist freedom may not be much, but it is reliable, constant. All it takes is staying in the game, which may indicate an addiction more than a profession: "He wasn't playing for the money. He was playing for the chips" (*FM* 228), which makes the game sound almost like a purely abstract child's play. But pursuing goals, building something material and stable now seem a distant and extinct option. A career, an investment into one's future is no longer part of Keith's philosophy, which now, after the fall, could be called "life is a game" for the game's sake: "He wasn't making enough money to justify this life on a practical basis. But there was no such need. There should have been but wasn't and that was the point. The point was one of invalidation. Nothing else pertained" (*FM* 230).

However, after this example of the instinctive living-in-the-moment role-play of being in control, the next paragraph enigmatically speaks about what cannot be controlled: "a thousand heaving dreams, the trapped man, the fixed limbs, the dream of paralysis, the gasping man, the dream of asphyxiation, the dream of helplessness" (ibid.). Thus, it seems that in the story that comes full circle, with no beginning and no end, the characters are trapped. Keith (fear, escapism), Lianne (fear of illness, madness, death), Hammad (*jihad*, death) are all, in their own ways, trapped.

This can also, or above all, be said about Falling Man. It is only Lianne who sees him, but it is Keith as a card player that is most comparable to the performance artist. The artist evokes an association with cards, albeit used in fortunetelling, but again linking cards with life: Lianne "thought it could be the name of a trump card in a tarot deck, Falling Man, name in gothic type, the figure twisting down in a stormy night sky" (*FM* 221). David Janiak also plays a role in a regular, ritualistic manner, he is also a gambler not playing to win, in fact, he risks losing his life. He also lives in suspension – figuratively and literally speaking; as Falling Man he is always suspended, and, what is more, he always keeps his audiences in suspense. Keith escapes from his memory, but cannot escape it; David either cannot escape from it or escapes *into* a memory. He certainly forces others, who would prefer to escape from it, to confront it.

There is a great complexity to this figure, as DeLillo aptly puts it: "the figure twisting down," forcing a spiral of relationships. To mention just a few "structural" implications, Falling Man captures what the famous photograph captured – a man falling, desperately escaping from a building where people were captured (imprisoned) because of a captured (hijacked) plane that crashed into it. Falling Man is himself captured and trapped in his seemingly free fall – yanked by his harness, which damages his spine. He is frequently captured by photographers while holding his audiences captive – literally: stopped in traffic and figuratively: transfixed. All this is captured by DeLillo.

Of course, there is also the implicit reference to the biblical Fall[120] in *Falling Man* (Jarniewicz 2008). And there are the mirror neurons that Lakoff has been quoted speaking about in the first chapter. A body falling is a body falling, in this case: from a building about to fall itself, which is like a body falling. Falling from the tower or *in* and *with* the tower… *Falling Man* is such a card in a tarot deck: an upside-down trump card that is not "held in reserve for winning a trick," not a "key resource to be used at an opportune moment."[121]

A certain kind of game takes place also in Ian McEwan's *Saturday* and in John Updike's *Terrorist*. Both novels contain terrorists or at least terrorist-like figures who are like ticking bombs ready to explode in the stories. A London gangster called Baxter in *Saturday* is at first a more marginal figure, while the American high-school student, Ahmad, is the eponymous terrorist in Updike's novel. They both can be seen as outsiders: Baxter is a criminal starting to suffer from Huntington's disease, Ahmad is a misfit, a child of an Egyptian father and an Irish-American mother, and a devout Muslim appalled by the corruption of the world he lives in. In fact, they can both be seen as non-Western men: Baxter because of his exclusion from participating in the benefits of the West (education, wealth, health service) and Ahmad because of his religious faith and values. Due to this contrast they become dangerous to this Western world, albeit on a symbolic scale: Baxter takes a family hostage, Ahmad drives a truck filled with explosives.

This dangerous potential is recognised in them by two main and senior characters in the novels, Henry Perowne and Jack Levy, respectively. The neurosurgeon and the high-school guidance counsellor (both, in their own ways, professionally dealing with the brain and the mind) display special attention to and personal involvement in the young men – it could be said that they both, to some extent, become father-figures lacking in Baxter's and Ahmad's lives,[122] and they both attempt to cure and guide them. This happens differently in the two cases and requires individual treatment.

Henry meets Baxter when they are involved in a car accident on a closed-off street during a peaceful anti-war demonstration. Despite the peaceful circumstances, a conflict ensues and later Baxter invades Henry's home with another gangster: they threaten the Perowne family with knives, almost rape Henry's daughter. Due to Baxter's sudden change of mood[123] – partially related to his burgeoning illness – the attackers lose control over the situation, the other gangster flees, while Baxter is overcome by Henry and his son. This offensive results in Baxter's head injury and Henry is called in to hospital to operate on him. Thus tables are turned: Baxter invaded the inside of Henry's home with a sharp knife, now Henry, with surgical tools, is inside his head "as known to him as his own house" (*S* 254). Baxter's volatile violence nearly killed Henry

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[120] In "Metaphor, Morality, and Politics," Lakoff tells us that metaphorically speaking "[d]oing Evil is Falling," of which "[t]he most famous example, of course, is the *fall* from grace."

[121] On the basis of: http://www.thefreedictionary.com/trump + Card.

[122] However, in Ahmad's case there already is another and more important father figure: "The narrator indicates without much subtlety that Allah just might be the father figure Ahmad lacks" (Mack).

[123] Which will be explained in the next chapter.

or someone from his family, now Henry is "cradling [Baxter's] head in his hands," feeling that "he could almost mistake [it] for tenderness" (*S* 256). It is not unlikely that, if the novel lasted longer, he would assist in his later treatment. It is quite certain that he is going to drop all charges against Baxter (*S* 278). "By saving his life in the operating theatre, Henry also committed Baxter to his torture. Revenge enough. And here is one area where Henry can exercise authority and shape events" (*S* 278). His being in control makes him almost ecstatically happy (*S* 258).

Just like Keith Neudecker outside his casino, Henry Perowne outside his hospital (another strictly regulated environment) is exposed to the uncertainty and unpredictability of fearsome reality. "London" – he thinks – "lies wide open, impossible to defend, waiting for its bomb, like a hundred other cities" (*S* 276). His home could be compared to the country – all the "accretions" on the front door:

> three stout Benham locks, two black iron bolts (...), two tempered steel security chains, a spyhole with a brass cover, the box of electronics that works the Entryphone system, the red panic button, the alarm pad with its softly gleaming digits. Such defences, such mundane embattlement (*S* 36–37)

won't help. Baxter came in through an opened door. But in McEwan's novel, Henry, this embodiment of a Western man with "his overgenerous share of the world's goods" (*S* 75), in the end keeps it all. He is reassuringly allowed to find comfort in the thought that is the last to appear in his mind when falling asleep next to his wife, after this eventful Saturday: "[t]here's always this. (...) There's only this" (*S* 279). Love and family. Here and now. However, if this is a happy ending, it is a "happily ever after?" – with a question mark, with the shadow of the coming Sunday, and especially the uncertain new Monday…

Thus, structurally speaking, even though there is no real terrorist in *Saturday*, Baxter – a more common criminal – is a substitute for or an equivalent to a terrorist; he is the source of direct danger and terror in the story. His attack is a small-scale reflection of a wider threat permeating the post-9/11 atmosphere of McEwan's novel.

In Updike's *Terrorist*,[124] as the very title suggests, the matter is more straightforward. The main character, eighteen-year-old Ahmad Ashmawy Mulloy turned to Islam at the age of eleven and is now wholeheartedly devoted to Allah. "Devils (...) *These devils seek to take away my God*" is his first thought and the first sentence of the novel (3). The immediate reason for this abhorrence at this moment is the most usual one for Islamists, as it seems: "All day long, at Central High School, girls sway and sneer and expose their soft bodies and alluring hair" (ibid.) – they are the embodiment of all that is wrong with the Western world. This includes Ahmad's "embarrassing mother he tries to hide" (*T* 94), "a mistake that his father made but that he never would" (*T* 170). "Women are animals easily led, Ahmad has been warned by Shaikh Rashid" – his teacher and the imam at the mosque he attends – "and he can see for himself that

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[124] Which many critics call a thriller, e.g. Grossman, Klausner, McGrath. One critic includes it in the noir genre (Strong).

the high school and the world beyond it are full of nuzzling – blind animals in a herd bumping against one another, looking for a scent that will comfort them" (*T* 10).

However, something similar could be said about Ahmad himself – so easily led by his imam, a leader in a terrorist network, who sees what a promising material Ahmad is and almost turns him into a suicide-bomber by subjecting him to comforting discipline and instruction. It is he who advised Ahmad, a good student, to switch to a vocational path a year before his graduation. The guidance counsellor Ahmad talks to about this, Jack Levy, recognised earlier that Ahmad was under someone's strong influence: "[t]he boy speaks with a pained stateliness; he is imitating (…) some adult he knows, a smooth and formal talker" (*T* 34). Also Ahmad's mother, Teresa (Terry), realises that "[s]omebody's putting pressure on Ahmad" (*T* 83), and suspects "this terrible teacher at the mosque" (*T* 88). But in the ensuing game or battle for, so to speak, the possession of the boy's soul it will not be the mother who will take on the role of Shaikh Rashid's opponent. To him she "was a piece of meat – un*clean* meat" (*T* 166) and this attitude has infected the son – she has no authority. It will be the depressed and insomniac Jewish guidance counsellor who will be the imam's rival. Talking to Jack, Ahmad says: "the American way is the way of infidels. It is headed for a terrible doom"(*T* 39). What he really thinks is: "*America tries to take away my God*" (ibid.), which echoes the beginning of the novel (and hints at the believer's weakness). It also foreshadows its ending, the book's last sentence: "*These devils*, (…) *have taken away my God*" (*T* 310).

In his 2006 book *One Day in July*, John Tulloch, who survived the July 7 terrorist attack in London in 2005 and whose iconic image appeared in newspapers all over the world, said, after commenting on McEwan's *Saturday*: "We need another novel like *Saturday*, but placed elsewhere – maybe in Beeston – where not Henry, but Mohammad and Shehzad are the subjects. I wonder whether we have a novelist so bold?" (212). There has been no such novelist in Great Britain yet, but the same year the American writer John Updike published a novel placed in an American equivalent of Beeston – northern New Jersey – "that familiar landscape (…) supporting the decaying remnants of once prospering immigrant-energized towns" (Stone). Ironically, the slumping factory town is called New Prospect.[125] Stone writes also that Updike captures "[t]he *invisible* but somehow immanent presence of Sept. 11's inferno over New Jersey," and, in general America (ibid., italics mine). It is Updike's intention to examine "contemporary America exposed to the passions in the non-American world" (ibid.), and it is fulfilled, as "Updike can clearly imagine his way into the moralizing resentments this country brings forth in the hearts of those who are at once underprivileged and confidently traditional" (ibid.).

This, as can be surmised, realises the need recognised by Tulloch, although not in the British context. However, the British context can be, to a large degree, compared to the American one, as they both represent the Western world – exposed to the passions in – and of – the non-Western world. Still, does Updike's novel realise the need postulated by Tulloch fully? Is Updike bold?

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[125] Based on Paterson, New Jersey (McGrath).

Updike would have been bold if he had made his terrorist more politically aware, driven by his own convictions and not merely imitating "some adult he knows." In other words, *Terrorist* would have been bolder if its terrorist was. Instead, despite his rhetoric, Ahmad is an essentially innocent, sensitive, easily manipulable teenager and basically a puppet. But this probably is usually the case: exactly such impressionable youngsters are the target in the ongoing process of recruitment of new members by terrorist organisations. And it is Ahmad's "grooming" that is the focus of the book, whose "didactic purposes" seem to be "its primary concern" (Stone).

To demonstrate this, let us now devote some time to the primary image and motif recurrent in the novel and involved in a series of juxtapositions and reversals. The image is that of an insect, a bug, or a beetle. Several longer quotation will have to be used to illustrate this.

On the second page of the book, Ahmad thinks that "to the insects unseen in the grass he would be, if they had a consciousness like his, God" (*T* 4–5). Of course, this relation implies also the relation between Ahmad's actual God and himself, which reduces *him* to a mere insect:

> The deaths of insects and worms, their bodies so quickly absorbed by earth and weeds and road tar, devilishly strive to tell Ahmad that his own death will be just as small and final. Walking to school, he has noticed a sign, a spiral traced on the pavement in luminous ichor, angelic slime from the body of some low creature, a worm or snail of which only this trail remains. Where was the creature going, its path spiralling inward to no purpose? If it was seeking to remove itself from the hot sidewalk (...), it failed and moved in fatal circles. But no little worm-body was left at the spiral's center. / So where did that body fly to? Perhaps it was snatched up by God and taken straight to Heaven? (*T* 5)

The existential questions, "where was the creature going?" and "where did that body fly to?" reflect the general human condition, but the specifications: "path spiralling inward to no purpose," "moving in fatal circles," and the suggested answer which is itself a question: "taken straight to Heaven?" are more fitting for the human condition of a terrorist – a terrorist with some doubts which he does not want to admit to himself. A certain degree of irony or reservation in the tone here echoes Ahmad's earlier blasphemous hesitation: contemplating his height Ahmad thinks (the thought is given in free indirect style), "He will not get any taller, (...) in this life or the next. *If there is a next*, an inner devil murmurs" (*T* 5).

The association of who Ahmad is about to become – a terrorist – with a worm, "some low creature" "spiralling inward to no purpose" is confirmed in another scene in which Ahmad sees a beetle. This happens symbolically on September 11, on the fourth anniversary of the attacks, two days before Ahmad's own planned mission, in the place from which he is due to set off in his truck loaded with explosives:

> he sits on a step of the loading platform, observing a black beetle struggling on its back on the concrete of the parking lot. (...) The beetle's tiny black legs wave in the air, groping for a purchase with which to right itself (...). The legs of the small creature wiggle and writhe in a kind of fury, then subside into a semblance of thought, as if the beetle seeks to reason a way out of its predicament. Ahmad wonders, Where did this bug come from? How did

it fall here, seeming unable to use its wings? The struggle resumes. (…) Ahmad rises from his seat (…) and stands over the insect in lordly fashion, feeling huge. Yet he shies from touching this mysterious fallen bit of life. Perhaps it has a poisonous bite, or, like some miniature emissary from Hell, it will fasten onto his finger and never let go. Many a boy (…) would simply crush this irritating presence, but for Ahmad this option does not exist. It would produce a broadened corpse, a squashed tangle of tiny parts and spilled vital fluid, and he does not wish to contemplate any such organic horror. He looks around him briefly for a tool, for something stiff with which to flip the insect over (…). (…) on sudden inspiration [he] remembers the driver's license in his wallet (…). (…) With this, he manages, after a few tentative, squeamish attempts, to flip the tiny creature at his mercy over onto its legs. (…) But the bug, right side up, (…) merely creeps a fraction of its length and then remains still. Its antennae searchingly wave, then they too stop. For five minutes that partake of the eternal, Ahmad watches. (…) The beetle, paired with its microscopically shrinking shadow, remains still. / It had been on its back in its death throes and now is dead, leaving behind a largeness that belongs not to this world. The experience, so strangely magnified, has been, Ahmad feels certain, supernatural. (*T* 252–254)

Similarly to the image of a "spiral traced on the pavement," this scene involves a "beetle struggling on its back" on the concrete of a parking lot (where Ahmad is also sitting and struggling with his thoughts): moving while lying on the back is just as futile and purposeless and moving in circles. Just as the first image was "a sign," this experience is "supernatural" and "strangely magnified" in Ahmad's eyes: five minutes are compared to eternity, a tiny corpse to "largeness" belonging "not to this world." Before, humans were compared to worms in the smallness and finality of their deaths – here, the creature is anthropomorphised: fury and reason are ascribed to it; significantly, the latter is inauthentic, it is only "a semblance of thought." Again, similar existential questions are repeated: "where did this bug come from? How did it fall here?" Also once more, contrasted with the bug and assuming its point of view, Ahmad seems to himself godlike.

This contrast in scale and asymmetrical power relation appears also in two permutations of the relation between Ahmad and his imam:

When the murmuring of the devils gnawing within him tinges the imam's voice, Ahmad feels in his own self a desire to rise up and crush him, as God roasted that poor worm at the center of the spiral. The student's faith exceeds the master's. (*T* 7)

The imam is clearly posited here as the "worm at the center of the spiral" – indeed, he is central to and influential in the terrorist cell that recruited Ahmad, yet he is "poor" and his student feels presumptuously superior to him (perhaps he needs to think of this important figure's weakness to himself feel stronger). However, the day before Ahmad's mission, the relation is reversed:

The curious way in which the imam looked down upon him reminded Ahmad of how he himself stood above the worm and the beetle. Shaikh Rashid was fascinated by him, as if by something repellent and yet sacred. / 'Dear boy, I have not coerced you, have I? (…) You do not feel manipulated by your elders?' (*T* 270)

Here, it is Ahmad who is clearly compared to a worm, a low unclean creature, not only in his own perception. Significantly, his status is thus ambiguous: he is both "repellent" and "sacred." Repellent perhaps because Shaikh feels he has complete power over him, whom he may have coerced and manipulated, whom he could destroy like a bug. Sacred because the teacher must feel himself that "the student's faith exceeds the master's," as it is the student who is prepared to make the greatest sacrifice, surrender himself to superior will in his superior humility. "With this glorious act, you will become my superior," says the imam (*T* 269), who was shown above having less clear-cut feelings towards the boy. It is difficult not to read these words as doubletalk; the effusiveness and flattery seem too much like an anaesthetic or numbing poison to really express something rather than conceal (the "poisonous bite" of a bug or its ability to fasten itself to its victim and "never let go" come to mind). Such insincerely sycophantic language is employed also by other, less senior members of the terrorist organisation:

> 'You are very brave' (...) 'He is a faithful son of Islam (...) We all envy him, right?' (...) [Charlie] rests a paternal hand on Ahmad's shoulder, soiling the boy's white shirt with oily fingerprints, and explains to the others, 'His way is good. To be hero for Allah.' / Back in the cheerfully orange truck, Charlie confides in Ahmad, 'Interesting to see their minds at work. Tools, hero: no shades in between.' (...) 'Tools, (...) We're all tools. God bless brainless tools – right Madman?' (*T* 250–251)

"Madman" is a telling nickname given to Ahmad by Charlie (the boy's employer's son) – it corresponds well with "brainless tools," a term Charlie overly honestly uses when comparing heroes to tools. As I mentioned, such lack of clear distinctions is typical for the discourse on "war on terror." The dubiousness of the discourse and the situation is visible also in the soiling of the boy's pristine "white shirt," which could symbolise his innocence, with oily fingers belonging to a supposedly "paternal hand." The "paternal hand" is a collective hand guiding Ahmad first to give up higher education, then to drive a truck delivering furniture. Following his imam's instructions, Ahmad received a driver's licence after his graduation in order to work in a delivery firm, in order to drive one of its unlabelled trucks into the Lincoln Tunnel and detonate explosives there during a morning rush-hour. Now it can be seen how symbolically in the scene with the black beetle the driver's license was a tool that Ahmad used to "flip the insect over." In the terrorist plan supervised by Shaikh Rashid, but certainly secretly by others above him, Ahmad's driver's license is also a tool; Ahmad, in turn, is just a bug to be "flipped over."

However, in the truck on September 13, a busy Monday morning, on his way to New York, Ahmad is accompanied by Jack, who – thanks to rather stretched and too-neatly-bound coincidences, figures out the whole plot. He spots, stops and hops into the truck where he negotiates with the would-be-terrorist, although, as he says, "You can't argue with an explosion" (*T* 305). This one has not happened yet and so the depressed man, who has nothing to lose, takes his chances:

> 'I'm betting you won't set it off. You're too good a kid. Your mother used to tell me how you couldn't bear to step on a bug. You'd try to get in onto a piece of paper and throw it out

the window.' (…) 'I didn't like to step on bugs, but I don't like touching them either. I was afraid they'd bite, or defecate on my hand.' / Mr. Levy laughs offensively; Ahmad insists, 'Insects can defecate – we learned that in biology. They have digestive tracts and anuses and everything, just like we do.' (*T* 297)

This reminds us of the squeamishness with which Ahmad handled the black beetle a few days earlier, on September 11. Perhaps, this is above all why he will not set off the bomb he is transporting: it would certainly produce "organic horror," even if he would not be there to see it (he does not even want to imagine it). Another thing that proves him to be just a helpless little bug is the gesture he makes in the truck: waving to children in the car ahead – "Reassuringly he lifts the fingers of his right hand from the steering wheel and waves them, like the legs of a beetle on its back" (*T* 307). He is like the beetle, "this mysterious fallen bit of life," also in Jack Levy's eyes: "You're a victim, Ahmad – a fall guy" (*T* 309).

But this in not the end of the insect metaphor in *Terrorist*. It appears once more in the final image of the book and encompasses entire New York, perhaps even the whole West, or (with necessary adjustments in the architecture) the world in general:

the great city crawls with people, (…) all reduced by the towering structures around them to the size of insects, but scuttling, hurrying, intent in the milky morning sun upon some plan or scheme or hope they are hugging to themselves, their reason for living another day, each one of them impaled live upon the pin of consciousness, fixed upon self-advancement and self-preservation. That, and only that. (*T* 310)

In DeLillo's novel, everyone is trapped. In McEwan's novel, everyone is exposed to attack. In Updike's novel, everyone is but a bug. Humans, insects – it's all the same. After all, "[t]hey have digestive tracts and anuses and everything, just like we do." It would be difficult not to hear an echo of ironic laughter in Updike's vision of humanity.

CHAPTER III: MOTIFS OF CHILDHOOD AND MAGICAL THINKING IN THE POST-9/11 NOVEL

III.1. The "proto-child"

In *The Spirit of Terrorism* Jean Baudrillard described the 9/11 attacks not only as an "image-event," but also, and consequently, as "the absolute event, the '*mother*' of all events, the pure event uniting within itself all the events that have never taken place" (3–4, italics mine). Accordingly, all post-9/11 events can be seen as the "offspring" of this "'mother' of all events" and (developing the idea even further) it can be said that these numerous, uncontrollable "progeny" must include works of fiction – in fact, any creative works in every kind of artistic field devoted or reacting to the subject, as well.[126]

Before discussing these particular "children of collapse" we are concerned with here, however, let us have a look at a work which can be seen as a "proto-child" or a literary ancestor to the post-9/11 novel. "The first suicide-bomber novel of the English language," as we read in Terry Eagleton's *Holy Terror*, is Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, published in 1907. Apparently, the book "has acquired a kind of cult status as the classic novel for the post-9/11 age" (Reiss), "remains the most brilliant novelistic study of terrorism as viewed from the blood-spattered outside" (ibid.), and was "one of the three works of literature most cited in the American media" in the aftermath of September 11, 2001 (Shulevitz). A lot has been written about the classic book, and I will mention only a few things, particularly relevant to my study.

First of all, there exists an interesting relation between the novel's darkest character and reality. The inventor of the bomb for the terrorist plot, the nameless Professor, as Eagleton puts it, "wants to blow up not just this or that piece of reality, but reality as such" (124), which may remind us of what Baudrillard saw as the consequence of 9/11. However, for the Professor this is *the aim*. It is for this reason that the Greenwich Observatory in London as the target for the anarchist outrage is such a suitable choice made by Mr. Vladimir, the mastermind of the plot, who decides on this second best, since he regretfully cannot "throw a bomb into pure mathematics" (*SA*[127] 40). The observatory is a symbol of the modernist "sacrosanct fetish" and a guarantor of reality: learning and science (ibid.). This "marker of the prime meridian" is also a "still point of the turning world" (Eagleton, 123), even if only an imaginary one, devised by reason, which puts the planet in a neat net of meridians and parallels. Blowing up the first thread of this net would blow up the order which this net stands for, it would blow up

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[126] And with them several times as many reviews, articles and books produced about them.
[127] *SA* is an abbreviation for *The Secret Agent* used in citations.

reality according to the modernist mind and be "so absurd as to be incomprehensible, inexplicable, almost unthinkable; in fact, mad" and "[m]adness alone is truly terrifying," as Mr. Vladimir says expounding his "philosophy of bomb throwing" (*SA* 39–40).

Interestingly, to further complicate the relation between the Professor and reality, Conrad's literary bomb was inspired by a real event – and, in turn, itself inspired the Unabomber, Theodore Kaczynski.[128] But being caused by and causing real events in the *real* world, the explosion in *The Secret Agent* is itself a curious "non-event" (Eagleton, 125) – it does not really happen in the text in the sense that we do not see it happening;[129] it is the *opposite* of the image-event.

Also, the inventor of the bomb, who himself is a walking bomb, does not directly detonate his invention and himself never goes off – his intentions are carried out unintentionally and imprecisely by unwitting Stevie, a mentally defective brother-in-law of Mr. Verloc, another man involved in the plot. As Eagleton suggests, the Professor is "a demonic version of the angelic Stevie" (124). Just as the Professor is "a liminal figure poised between life and death, time and eternity" (ibid., 125), Stevie is liminal by being suspended in eternal childhood: he also exists outside society, its laws and expectations, in a kind of "absolute freedom" which at the same time is empty, "flourish[ing] only in this twilight zone, in the no-man's land between decision and execution" (ibid., 123, 125). Thus, there is a similar childishness to both characters, for different reasons. It is not Stevie's decision to blow himself up; because of his naivety he is manipulated into carrying the deadly device and, as Curyłło-Klag observes, is betrayed by the awkwardness of his own body – he stumbles (35). The Professor never makes this decision either, he only "toys" with his toy-like India-rubber ball that would activate the explosives strapped to his body, but dares not squeeze it. His supposed "evident superiority" in depending on death and not life (*SA* 67) is only theoretical.

According to Eagleton, this, in fact *im*potence, which he prefers to deem his potency, as well as his being "in and out of time simultaneously" (123), makes him resemble a Romantic or modernist work of art (ibid.). What is more, it turns him into "a parody of a modernist artist" (ibid., 124) – pursuing the dream of absolute purity. The parody is magnified by the fact that Stevie – like Hammad in *Falling Man* – becomes literally part of the energy of the explosion, in this case conceived by the Professor, and later turns into the macabre bits and pieces (which would match exactly Ahmad's mental image of "organic horror") that mock the Professor's fantasy of an entirely pure and utterly unblemished revolutionary act (ibid., 122). As the reverse of the Professor, Stevie is also a "mad artist" (ibid., 124), as these three quotes illustrate:

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[128] Between 1978 and 1995, Kaczynski (himself a former assistant professor of mathematics, later diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic) mailed sixteen bombs to targets such as universities and airlines; as a result, three people were killed and twenty-three were injured.

[129] As Izabela Curyłło-Klag points out, it is a *hole* in the text, similar to the hole in the ground and the absence after the actual explosion. Interestingly, Eagleton's "non-event" may remind us of Derrida's calling the September 11 attacks "the so-called event" (qtd. in Borradori, 88), although the British literary theorist and the French philosopher used their terms for two drastically contrasting reasons. The "event" in Conrad's novel is *in*visible. The "event" in New York was *too* visible.

His spare time he occupied by drawing circles with compass and pencil on a piece of paper. (*SA* 23) … circles, circles, circles; innumerable circles, concentric, eccentric; a coruscating whirl of circles that by the tangled multitude of repeated curves, uniformity of form, and confusion of intersecting lines suggested a rendering of cosmic chaos, the symbolism of a mad art attempting the inconceivable. (*SA* 49) … poor Stevie usually established himself (…) with paper and pencil for the pastime of drawing those coruscations of innumerable circles suggesting chaos and eternity. (*SA* 196)

Strikingly, apart from resembling a Romantic or modernist creation (the cosmic dimension, association with chaos and timelessness), in its execution the work of the mentally disabled boy appears similar to that of a scientist, a geographer drawing imaginary circles of latitude and longitude on the globe, arbitrarily locating the prime meridian in Greenwich. The longitude of the prime meridian, defined to be 0°, is approximately where Stevie, who used to endlessly draw zero-like circles, becomes zero himself. Indeed, Conrad does apply an "ironic method" to his subject, as he says in "Author's Note" (*SA* 12), but the irony is mirthless and dark.

Stevie's circles also bring to mind the worm that "moved in fatal circles" and prompted Ahmad to ask philosophical questions about himself in Updike's *Terrorist*. Similarly to what we can see in Stevie's drawings, Ahmad saw the "path spiralling inward to no purpose," which I interpreted earlier as a metaphor for terrorism. Other analogies are that Stevie's drawing suggests eternity, while another bug absorbs Ahmad for what seems like eternity. Stevie's "art" appears to represent "cosmic chaos," and the circles made by some "low creature" which left "no little worm-body (…) at the spiral's center" is "a sign" for Ahmad, just as the dead black beetle "[leaves] behind a largeness that belongs not to this world" and is "supernatural." Thus, both Stevie and Ahmad see circles charged with symbolic meaning, although only one of them, the more unfortunate one, repeatedly draws them himself.

Both boys are innocent, sensitive and impressionable, although Stevie incomparably more so; due to this feature, they are both manipulated into carrying life-threatening explosives. In fact, Stevie may have been used twice to commit a violent act involving hazardous materials. When working as an office-boy at the age of fourteen, Stevie had his feelings "worked upon" by two other office-boys, who told him "tales of injustice and oppression till they had wrought his compassion" so much that he let off a series of fireworks inside the building of the firm where he worked (*SA* 22). It is unclear whether the boys' tales were true or not, but they were disturbing and thus true enough for Stevie to ignite his indignation.

This incident can be seen as a miniature version of the future fatal accident in Greenwich Park. The explosion close to the observatory was as mysterious as the fireworks attack initially seemed: at first, "[Stevie's] motives for this stroke of originality were difficult to discover" (ibid.). Consequently, if Jack Levy called Ahmad "a fall guy" – Stevie is a victim to a much greater extent, because, being the more vulnerable and child-like of the two, he dies. "Stevie is an embodiment of the passionate simplicity that operates according to the ancient principle of 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.' Worked up by stories of human depravity, he grows homicidal and can be

used" (Curyłło-Klag, 56) – like a tool that Ahmad also was for the terrorist group led by his imam.

A trace of the insect/worm metaphor can be seen also in the last scene of the novel:

> And the incorruptible Professor walked, (…) averting his eyes from the odious multitude of mankind. (…) His thoughts caressed the images of ruin and destruction. He walked frail, insignificant, shabby, miserable – and terrible in the simplicity of his idea calling madness and despair to the regeneration of the world. Nobody looked at him. He passed on unsuspected and deadly, like a pest in the street full of men. (*SA* 252–253)

This description of the Professor in London bears a certain resemblance to Updike's portrayal of New York at the end of *Terrorist*. In *The Secret Agent*, "in the street full of men," the swarming, vermin-like "*odious multitude* of mankind," the Professor is himself insect-like by being both "frail" and "insignificant" and "deadly, like a pest," which, according to the broadest biological definition is a competitor of humanity. Both paradoxically and not, nobody looked at him, because he looked like everyone else, he looked like a nobody and like *everyman*; furthermore, he is invisible like the contemporary epidemic of terror (and its weapons: suicide bombers, anthrax, means of public transport, the internet). No wonder that Conrad's novel "has acquired a kind of cult status" in the post-9/11 age: the Professor is a "classic" post-9/11 terrorist – he could be anybody – just as anyone could be a terrorist.

"Caress[ing] the images of ruin and destruction" is done today mainly by the media, the substitute for individual thought, but the importance and power of *the image* was evident already a century before 9/11. Conrad recognised that "terrorism has an air of theatricality to it" and that "its impact depends on the choice of a sufficiently extraordinary target" (Curyłło-Klag, 41–42). This selection was all the more decisive "in the times when anarchist attacks ha[d] become commonplace" – as was the case in the 1890s – and "the public's susceptibility to terror ha[d] decreased: people [learnt] to rationalise acts of political violence" (ibid., 41), and consequently, "[y]ou [couldn't] count on their emotions either of pity or fear for very long" (*SA* 39). Whether people today have already successfully learnt to rationalise acts of political violence may not be certain, but the ease with which emotions are deflected must be all the more true in the times of "anaestheticization" and "derealization of reality," to use Welsch's terms.

What also sounds very contemporary (or always contemporary) is the Professor's dream of "regeneration of the world" through "madness and despair." What the Professor literally means by this somewhat contradictorily sounding proposition is itself highly problematic, although – as is usually the case – not to the project's proponent. The project consists in elimination of "the source of all evil on this earth" (*SA* 246), and the problem is that the word "evil" is one of those words that (like "terror") are vast and vague enough to mean anything to different people. On this occasion, "evil" means "the weak" (ibid.) – in a warped reflection of the thought of the epoch's key philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, whose ideas were similarly interpreted and exploited to barbaric ends by the Nazis. "First the great multitude of the weak must go, then the only relatively strong," says the Professor (ibid.). "Every taint, every vice, every prejudice, every convention must meet its doom" (ibid.), adds the "frail,

insignificant, shabby, miserable" man, failing to realise that he is sentencing *himself* to extermination. But, as Eagleton suggests, "in a sense (…) he is dead already" (122).

This is partly due to his living in a state of suspension. The Professor and his "angelic" double in the novel, Stevie, both live permanently in a state where everyday rules and order are suspended – they have, however, their own substitute rules. They are grotesque mirror reflections of each other as well as of the scientist and the artist – they are both suicide-bombers and walking explosions. As we have seen, at the centre of the explosion, that is both at the centre and (on account of its being a "non-event") at the peripheries of *The Secret Agent*, is Stevie – an innocent, sacrificed child; what is more, a child who never will and never *could* grow up, rather like a darker version of Peter Pan. Significantly, even the Professor and the other plotters in Conrad's novel have a considerable quality of childishness to them. A child and infantilism are, then, central to "the first suicide-bomber novel of the English language" and "the classic novel for the post-9/11 age."

III.2. The figure of the "child"

The figure of the "child" belongs to that highly plastic category which lends itself to too many shapes to represent only its own referent. The American linguist George Lakoff has thus described how a "state is conceptualized as a person" in "Metaphor and War: The Metaphor System Used to Justify War in the Gulf":

> Maturity for the person-state is industrialization. Unindustrialized nations are 'underdeveloped,' with industrialization as a natural state to be reached. Third-world nations are thus immature children, to be taught how to develop properly or disciplined if they get out of line. Nations that fail to industrialize at a rate considered normal are seen as akin to retarded children and judged as 'backward' nations.

Ten years after this observation was made it acquired a surprising twist in the dawning of yet another war in the same region: the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the USA. Much symbolism has been read from the image of George W. Bush first hearing the tragic news. That particular Tuesday morning the president was visiting a school in Florida: the cameras captured forever how the Commander in Chief's countenance darkened, after a man whispered something in his ear and how he, nonetheless, continued to silently listen to a children's story ("The Pet Goat") read by seven-year-olds. From the point of view of America's opponents, at that moment, it was the world's superpower that was being "taught how to develop properly" and "disciplined" – reduced to the state of mute infancy, so poignantly embodied by the country's leader, appropriately sent back to school.[130]

Speaking metaphorically of the global power relations at that moment, the world as we used to know it was thus turned upside-down: the role of the teacher was taken over by

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[130] It was also there, at Emma E. Booker Elementary School in Sarasota County, Florida, that George W. Bush gave his first speech after the attacks.

an organisation harboured by the Taliban (in Pashto meaning "students") regime based in countries which the West deems underdeveloped. Due to the incomprehension and sheer shock of this happening, the Western world, as Baudrillard puts it in *The Spirit of Terrorism*, reverted to the childish inability to distinguish between reality and fiction, which became "inextricable" (28). And it is from this, as well as the striking resemblance to "special effects or computer graphics" (Jameson, 297), that the "fascination with the image" (Baudrillard 2002, 29) arises, rather in accordance with Aristotle's observations on the human nature and its inclination to the aesthetic expressed in *The Poetics*: "objects which in themselves we view with pain, we delight to contemplate when reproduced with minute fidelity" (qtd. in Lentricchia and McAuliffe, 8).

A dangerous corollary of this perception is a "dissociation of sensibility," which Fredric Jameson saw as a prevalent reaction to September 11 (297), and which the unrelenting media coverage of the events provoked, if not imposed. The blurring of the reality/fiction division and the corresponding detachment, admittedly playing a useful role in the self-defence mechanism, must be corruptive from the point of view of morality, as it reduces the true tragic event to a flat visual effect. To show the human side of what otherwise might have remained merely a "disaster movie" with supersized bonuses for gaping puerile audiences, several authors have taken upon themselves the task of using their own – and stimulating our – imagination, thus building empathy in place of detachment. Since their subject is a traumatic globally historical event and its repercussions, this clearly is a challenging endeavour. Due to the gravity of this subject, the post-9/11 novel shares a common feature: fear of trivialisation, which is literally vocalised in the works addressing the subject most directly. As I will suggest more fully later, what may fend off this potential charge of not living up to the subject is the very motif of childhood, which appears to be used perhaps unconsciously but strikingly often in the early post-9/11 novel. This consists not only in portraying child characters but also in presenting infantilism as a characteristic of today's Western culture.

"Kant famously wrote that the 'Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another,'" as we read in Borradori's introduction to *Philosophy in a Time of Terror* (14). "Enlightenment describes (…) the affirmation of democracy and the separation of political power from religious belief" and thus "marks a break with the past, which becomes available only on the basis of the individual's independence in the face of authority," we also read there (ibid.). However, in Amis's words, "September 11 was a day of *de*-Enlightenment" (13, italics mine). What follows it is a *regression* to the past, or at any rate a mix of the past, the present and the future:

> The conflicts we now face or fear involve opposed geographical arenas, but also opposed centuries or even millennia. It is a landscape of ferocious anachronisms: nuclear jihad on the Indian subcontinent; the medieval agonism of Islam, the Bronze Age blunderings of the Middle East. (ibid.)

As for Western democratic countries, in particular the chief democracy, the US, so keen on exporting its system of government to other as yet "unenlightened" countries,

the principle of "the separation of political power from religious belief" and of "the individual's independence in the face of authority" became very problematic in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. If *maturity* is the *ability* "to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another," then in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks it was *im*maturity that was fostered in the US citizens by their own authorities. As we learn from Amis's review of Bob Woodward's *State of Denial: Bush at War, Part III*, in some comments, the US citizens were "often referred to" as "an abused child," "a traumatized child" (148). Accordingly, in Lakoff's words from "Metaphors of Terror," "The reaction of the Bush administration [was] just what you would expect a conservative reaction would be – pure Strict *Father* morality" (italics mine). The role of the "Father" was impressed by official messages in which "the public [was] not being asked to bear much of the burden of reality" (Sontag 2001). "The burden of reality" is not for the child to bear. As Susan Sontag put it less than two weeks after the attacks, "The voices licensed to follow the event seem to have joined together in a campaign to *infantilize* the public" (ibid., italics mine). Later in the comment that sparked so much controversy, she said: "Those in public office have let us know that they consider their task to be a manipulative one: confidence-building and grief management. Politics, the politics of a democracy – which entails disagreement, which promotes candor – has been replaced by psychotherapy" (ibid.). Consequently, she concluded, "The unanimity of the sanctimonious, reality-concealing rhetoric spouted by American officials and media commentators in recent days seems, well, unworthy of a mature democracy" (ibid.).

Re-incurred immaturity means some unassimilated knowledge, some failed test – means going back to school. "Terrorism is political communication by other means. The message of September 11 ran as follows: America, it is time you learned how implacably you are hated" (Amis, 3). It is time we all *learned something*. The need to learn is emphasised often in the context of the (post-)9/11 terror. "[W]e are still learning how to feel and think about September 11" (ibid., 196), but "we concede that September 11 will perhaps never be wholly assimilable" (ibid., 139). This is how McEwan described his own need to learn from history and other non-fiction books:

> For a while I did find it wearisome to confront invented characters. (…) I wanted to be told about the world. I wanted to be informed. I felt that we had gone through great changes, and now was the time to just go back to school, as it were, and start to learn. (qtd. in Donadio 2005a)

The German philosopher Odo Marquard puts learning in a broader context and provides a more general observation – in fact, a diagnosis of Western societies today, which can be connected with the increasing role of, and our reliance on mass media:

> (…) more and more often, because of the loss of direct experiences, we are forced during our whole lives to live through experiences indirectly; in short, we are forced to learn: in the end the whole reality becomes literally our school. An individual, fully and in every aspect, consciously becomes a learner, and consequently every adult, also consciously, becomes a child – who lives in every learner no matter how old s/he is. No one grows up any more. (qtd. in Cataluccio, 275)

As I will propose later, early post-9/11 novels also "go back to school" and, in a way, "never grow up" *trying* to learn how to speak about the "great changes" that have taken place. But just as writers and the literary forms they use must "learn," the readers are learners as well. They are learners who are consumers used to instant satisfaction of their hunger for news. This need for "information" mentioned by McEwan is to some extent satisfied in early post-9/11 novels by their frequently (semi-)documentary aspect. Likewise, the "limitations" of pure fiction appear to be "compensated" by these novels' factual side or by blurring the borderlines between fact and fiction. In some cases, even though this blurring does not occur on the structural level, it happens in the minds of narrators and characters. This is because literary narrators and characters, just like us, non-literary characters, are inclined to magical thinking.

III.3. Magical thinking (1)

Let me explain on the onset that the area of "magic"[131] we are concerned with here is *everyday magic*,[132] which Anna Chudzik, the author of a study of verbal magical behaviour, defines after Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan as "the unconscious and mechanical area of superstitious and irrational behaviour that is not related to any belief system" (38). "Our everydayness" – we read further in Chudzik (after Pawluczuk) – "is full of specific mystical elements, it is longing for sense, and it is in essence irrational" (ibid., 81). Chudzik notices to what great degree verbal magical behaviour is "a way of [or a recipe for] 'being' in the world" (ibid., 128), in which "scientific thinking offers [only] the concept of 'a coincidence' to explain phenomena whose direct causes we do not understand," whereas "[m]agic and religion allow us to answer these questions, to solve problems and give us *the impression* that we are active participants in the stream of events (…), that we are not just passively subjected to fate" (ibid., 130, after Mach, italics mine). If this mechanism fulfilling the unconscious need to maintain one's psychological equilibrium (ibid., 42–43, 120, 129) operates in "ordinary" everydayness, it must be all the more at work in the event of an extraordinary emergency.

This is how the American architect Lebbeus Woods described the psychological reaction to witnessing the 9/11 terrorist attacks:

Confronted with the spectacle of something perfectly whole and stable, a coherent human presence within, that becomes – a moment later – a pile of smoking rubble, in which the human presence has been extinguished, imagination quails, reverting to formulas of magic and superstition. (153)

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[131] I.e. a conviction that scientifically unverifiable powers exist and operate in nature (Chudzik, 10).

[132] A term used by the anthropologist Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan to distinguish between this and (at least) two other kinds of magic: Christian magic ("folk Catholicism") and occult magic (Chudzik, 37). Studies of the language of everyday magic include the examinations of the languages of advertisement, politics and children (ibid., 38).

In the September 11 attacks, the ostensibly unshakable power of the West was debunked as fragile,[133] the achievements of science and technology were exposed as effete – paradoxically exactly by being put to such effective use by those who wanted to destroy the culture that created them. Modernity was reduced to a toy, with its futile computers and mobile phones, not working when most needed, and helicopters hovering helplessly over scenes of desperation. The conviction of safety and superiority was taken away from America as if from the hands of a child who needs to be punished – according to a group of fundamentalists from very poor countries, who, on a relatively small budget, caused disproportionate financial loss on a global scale (not to mention the loss of life, which cannot be measured).

In this light, "reverting to formulas of magic and superstition" is very understandable. "These reactions to overwhelming emotion (...) are natural responses of man to such a situation, based on universal psycho-physiological mechanism," writes Bronisław Malinowski in *Magic, Science and Religion* (80). Later, he continues:

> Forsaken by his knowledge, baffled by his past experience and by his technical skill, [man] realizes his impotence. Yet (...) his anxiety, his fears and hopes, induce a tension in his organism which drives him to some sort of activity. Whether he be savage or civilized, whether in possession of magic or entirely ignorant of its existence, passive inaction, the only thing dictated by reason, is the last thing in which he can acquiesce. His nervous system and his whole organism drive him to some substitute activity. (79)

An example of such an activity is writing about what makes "imagination quail," creating a discourse about it – this is why, as we learn from Baer, public poetry writing and reading were so popular in New York immediately after the tragedy (2). The same applies to other kinds of expression, which can be illustrated by Spiegelman's search for "an image of the disaster" mentioned in the Foreword to this study. As I have suggested in Chapter I, this "taming" or "domestication" can also be achieved by categorisation or looking for analogies and patterns in the past as well as for explanation: "We desperately want to 'explain' what happened. Explanation domesticates terror, making it part of 'our' world" (Hauerwas, 426).

Any such "substitute activity" in the shape of analogical rather than logical reasoning, typical for magic, "has subjectively all the *value* of a real action" (Malinowski 81–82, italics mine) – as it is reinforced by the *hope* that it could guarantee real effects: predictability of the threat and thus safety. As Marcel Mauss puts it, "everything magical is effective, because the expectations engender and pursue a hallucinatory reality. (...) It is a kind of comfort which a collective, traditional power of suggestion can provide" (171). And what was true about magical thinking in, say, the Trobriand Islands when Malinowski examined them, is still valid for the Western societies at the beginning of the 21st century. Mauss reminds us that "[t]hough we may feel ourselves to be very far

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[133] "The world order," said Derrida, "is based on the solidity, reliability, and credibility of American power. Exposing the fragility of the superpower means exposing the fragility of the word order" (qtd. in Borradori, 150). This is being proved again and all the more in the current economic crisis.

removed from magic, we are still very much bound up with it" (178), as "mankind, originally, thought only in magical terms": it was "the earliest form of human thought" (ibid., 16), and "an invariable adjunct of all human activities (…) the embodiment of *the sublime folly of hope*, which has yet been the best *school* of man's character" (Malinowski, 90, italics mine).

It is no wonder, therefore, that after a "hyperevent," blending reality with fiction, in the upside-down carnival-like suspension of hitherto accepted everyday order and rules, the Western world, reduced to a state of a helpless childhood and sent back to school, returns to this mode of thinking. Perhaps the majority of us are like "[t] hose New Yorkers without connection to the dead, the injured, and the displaced" – described in "Groundzeroland" – who "would grief (and fear) not for the dead, the injured, and the displaced but for themselves, undergoing now the terror of the new" (Lentricchia and McAuliffe, 6). This terror itself is, in fact, not new, not "original." The fear of "the new" (as of "the other") is probably as old as human kind, however, what *is* new about the present terror is its unprecedented global scale and the sense of proximity due to its tele-presence (Virilio 2002a, 49; Paul, 216). But because this terror involves various societies, cultures and religions – the only kind of reasoning which could universally aspire to encompassing it is the way of thinking which precedes societies, cultures and religions, and is coeval with this fear. This phenomenon is magic – which "never 'originated,'" was never "made or invented": "[a]ll magic simply was from the beginning" and supported all things which "vitally interest man and yet elude his normal rational efforts" (Malinowski, 75). It should, therefore, also support the effort of writing about today's fears and the threat of terror.

III.4. Motifs of childhood and magical thinking in the post-9/11 novel

After this introduction, it is time to trace motifs of childhood and magical thinking in early post-9/11 novels. Let me add that some references to the motifs of childhood (in *Pattern Recognition*, *Windows*, *Extremely Loud* and *Terrorist*) have already been made, and they will not be repeated here; some of the comments will be completed and developed.

The youngest on the list of the literary "children of collapse" discussed here is DeLillo's *Falling Man*, published in 2007. From among several characters in the book it is the youngest one that will receive my full attention here, although critical comments tend to concentrate on his parents, Keith and Lianne, as well as, understandably, on the mysterious eponymous figure. Yet, as I intend to show, a child character's perception may be particularly worth inquiring into, as it can be very revealing.

Ralph Waldo Emerson remarked that "Children are all foreigners." Eva Hoffman, a Polish writer and the author of *Lost in Translation*, who emigrated to Canada as a child, noticed that "Every immigrant becomes a kind of amateur anthropologist" (qtd. in Brown). In a syllogism formed by putting these two ideas together, we could say that children may be a type of amateur anthropologists, too. As Ray French, an Irish-Welsh

author of *All This is Mine* notices: "[children] spend years studying the puzzling world of adults, trying to make sense of their contradictory statements, and attempting to deconstruct their strange rituals." A child narrator, he adds, is perfect for "[m]aking the familiar and everyday seem strange" because "[c]hildren's emotions are so close to the surface, their every day filled with such wonder, fear and confusion" (French). Thus, in the inherently fearful and confusing days after 9/11, it is children, more than adults, who could be expected to adapt more quickly to the upside-down state of the world and be better equipped to observe it.

Indeed, in *Falling Man*, little Justin Neudecker, is a well-equipped observer. Immediately after 9/11, the seven-year-old, and his two little friends, "the Siblings," Katie and Robert, undertake a secret surveillance mission, which arouses the suspicion and worry of their parents. The children "sort of conspire" and "sort of talk in a code" and "spend a lot of time at the window in Katie's room" (*FM* 17), where, "behind closed door" (*FM* 37), they are "searching the skies" (*FM* 71, 73) with binoculars, as it turns out, "looking for more planes" (*FM* 72) and a man whose name they misheard as "Bill Lawton" (*FM* 73). They have "developed the myth of Bill Lawton" (*FM* 74) and a magical connection with him, through which he tells them, and only them, things which nobody else knows. They know that planes are coming (*FM* 102) and they are "waiting for it to happen again" (*FM* 72). Thus the children, fully engulfed by collective apprehension, yet appearing calm and methodical, scare their parents with their "goddamn twisted powers of imagination" (ibid.) – which creates a curious reversal of the roles of "parent" or "adult" and "child."

This shift acquires interesting implications if we realise that the children's behaviour curiously resembles that of the attacked state. The state is also ever more engaged in rigorous monitoring of its (and not only its) territory by means of all available technological devices. The state also maintains what often appears to be "a myth" of an illusive enemy. Also, instead of reducing fear, the state generates it by stimulating the power of people's imagination via methods which can often be seen as "twisting" (of facts – e.g. the WMD in Iraq).

This analogy, indisputably built into the narrative, becomes particularly worrying when we think of Justin's already mentioned denial of facts: "The towers did not collapse" (ibid.), he believes, since he "didn't see it on TV" (ibid.). This equation of media representation with the truth is disturbing – whether attributed to the ruling powers or to the way that today's children's perception is shaped. Such "repositioning of events" (*FM* 102) which "frightened [Justin's mother] in an unaccountable way" (ibid.), such "making something better than it really was" (ibid.) is particularly dangerous in politics – and especially today as such a distortion (making something *other* than it is) can now, thanks to ubiquitous and manipulable media, be achieved as easily as misguiding a child. Finally, if the child's perception envisioned in DeLillo's novel consists now of "the elements of a failed fairy tale (...) the fairy tale children tell, not the one they listen to, devised by adults" (*FM* 102) – it may be because after the failure/collapse of the previous system (of power relations, beliefs, etc.), adults are no longer adults and children are no longer children.

A similar reversal of the roles of "parent"/"adult" and "child" can be seen in Beigbeder's *Windows on the World*. Apart from the two main narrators, the author and Carthew Yorston, two other narrators are children, Carthew's sons. As I have said, seven-year-old David and nine-year-old Jerry are taken by their father to the restaurant at the 107th floor of the North Tower on September 11, 2001, and are eternalised dying there on the pages of Beigbeder's book.[134]

Four sections of the novel are presented from David's (9:09, 9:11, 9:31, 9:37), and two from Jerry's point of view (9:21, 9:25). However, both boys frequently speak a language clearly ascribable to their creator and not likely to be produced even by the more mature Jerry (e.g. "Restaurants cook up all kinds of stuff, just usually not the customers. Up here, we're the barbecue," *WoW* 172 [9:25]). Also the construction of their childlike psyche may not be entirely convincing. However, it certainly tells us a lot about the author, the book, and the world to which it responds.

It is David's narrative in particular that will help me illustrate the above observation. The boy has a much more vivid imagination than his practical elder brother and perhaps the degree to which it becomes activated can be explained by his father's ingenuity. Carthew tries to convince his sons that the airplane crash and the fire and smoke around them are part of "a test," "a fire drill," "a surprise," a theme park "new attraction," a funfair ride called "Tower Inferno" (*WoW* 58 [8:47]), "a game" (*WoW* 64 [8:49]) and that actually all this is "pretty fun," since "it's all special effects" designed by George Lucas (*WoW* 58). After this reassurance, coming from the (fictitious) inside of the event but reflecting what Baudrillard (among others) observed about the external perception of it (i.e. visual similarity to special effects), David's fantasy turns his father into "Ultra-Dude" (*WoW* 133 [9:11]), a Superman-like character who, "at times like this," "can walk through concrete walls, twist metal, even fly, since fear charges his battery pack" (ibid.). He would change into his costume and save the world immediately, if only there was a phone booth around (*WoW* 207 [9:37]).

It has to be deemed debatable whether it is psychologically plausible that at times like this fear can charge a child's fantasy to such an extent. But Beigbeder may be right in suggesting one thing: the impressionability of today's average child, who is an avid consumer of comic books, Cartoon Network, computer games and blockbusters. By analogy, we could also wonder whether Carthew's "Benigni-style" (*WoW* 58) (eventually unsuccessful) attempt at persuading his children that what is happening is not real – is psychologically convincing. What this borrowing from the film *Life is Beautiful* (1997) does effectively, however, is demonstrating the power of popular culture and the entertainment industry, in other words, commercialised fiction, which is employed in this literary work as an antidote to unbearable reality, as a substitute: escapism instead of the more needed escape. This failed role-playing and made-up denial of facts by an adult, which is finally rejected by both children ("David, Jerry,

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[134] In reality, eight children were killed in the September 11 attacks – all were on the planes. No children were present in the WTC (Faludi, 160). The restaurant was not open to the public that morning – thus, the Yorston family's story constitutes an entirely fictional part of the novel.

my little boys, how quickly you've grown up," *WoW* 75 [8:53]), provides perhaps the clearest illustration of how the parent-child distinction is turned upside down throughout the novel.

The above father-child interaction reflects also the cultural and philosophical problem of the "disappearing father" recurring in *Windows* and widely noticed in the *world* in the last century. The father who is absent – because he has failed – as the traditional, (hitherto believed to be) real, figure, becomes replaced by a myth, an idealised fantasy of a superhero. David's fantasy may be reminiscent of the (understandable from the psychological and anthropological point of view) real-life admiration and cult-status given to fire-fighters after 9/11 in the US.

A linguistic equivalent of the child's dream of a superhero who can save him may be echoed in the widespread use of the word "hero" in America immediately after the attacks: not only fire-fighters and policemen but also "employees of private enterprise [became] with their deaths America's war heroes" (Willis, 382). Interestingly, in post-9/11 Marvel Comics (whose earlier editions were read by David), it is ordinary humans who become superheroes, while Spiderman and Captain America, et al., are reduced to the activity (or inactivity) of powerlessly, but compassionately standing by (Diekmann).

This role shift, after the 9/11 multi-layered collapse, may well be a part of the need for a symbolic preservation of the myth of America as the world's only superpower. This is how Faludi describes the creation of the fantasy of invincibility:

> The suddenness of the attacks (...) left us with little in the way of ongoing chronicle or ennobling narrative. So a narrative was created and populated with pasteboard protagonists whose exploits would exist almost entirely in the realm of (...) American fantasy. (64) The media seemed eager to turn our designated guardians of national security into action toys and superheroes. (...) The president's vow to get the 'evildoers' won him media praise *because* it sounded cartoonish. (47)

Faludi notices that "[t]he reversal of hero worship in the comic books" – illustrated e.g. by Superman looking at "a sea of men in fire helmets, hard hats, and police caps (and two female medical workers, who stand, literally, at the margins)" and saying "Wow" on a comic book cover – "underscored a troubling question in real life" (ibid., 51):

> Superheroes are fantasies for a particular type of reader: someone, typically a prepubescent boy, who feels weak in the world (...) and who needs a Walter Mitty[135] bellows to pump up his sense of self-worth. Was the same now true for the national audience, the American people, whose elected and appointed officials were being inflated with imaginary grit and guts into the Heat and the Protector[136] and the Tower of Strength?[137] (ibid.)

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[135] Walter Mitty is a fictional character in a short story by James Thurber (1939). The character's name entered everyday language meaning "An ordinary, often ineffectual person who indulges in fantastic daydreams of personal triumphs" (http://www.thefreedictionary.com/walter + mitty).

[136] These were the "superhero monikers" given respectively to John Ashcroft (the US Attorney General, 2001–2005) and Tom Ridge (Assistant to the President for Homeland Security, 2001–2003) by *The Vanity Fair*. In the same cover-photo story, George W. Bush was "a flinty cowboy in chief" and Dick Cheney (the US Vice-President, 2001–2009) was "the Rock" (Faludi, 48).

[137] The title given to mayor Rudy Giuliani by *The Time* (Faludi, 49).

This psychological explanation behind the need for heroic imagery in depicting oneself or one's own leaders (an extension of oneself) brings to mind the need for the opposite kind of imagery in depicting one's enemy. I have already referred to this issue when analysing Tristram's *After* in the light of Van Buren's "Critical analysis of racist post-9/11 web animations." Both types of cartoons reveal the same about their authors:

> the animators' fervent deployment of violence, gore, scatology, and homophobia against Arab and Muslim animated enemies only seems more revealing. These cartoons are possibly the closest the animators may come to confining, controlling, and vanquishing the elusive and enduring Arab other. (Van Buren)

Both instances of ego-boosting via myth-making can be seen as a substitute activity in the face of a crisis, and thus as akin to magical thinking. And since no real solution is possible, an *un*real one can be easily devised, bringing real enough effects, as "everything magical is effective" (Mauss, 171).

In the same vein, Stanley Hauerwas diagnosed the political reaction to the attacks in the US:

> In the first hours and days following the fall of the towers, there was a stunned silence. President Bush flew from one safe haven to another (...) but he is the leader of the 'free world.' Something must be done. Something must be said. We must be in control. (...) So he said, 'We are at war.' *Magic words* necessary to reclaim the everyday. War is such *normalizing* discourse. Americans know war. This is our Pearl Harbour. Life can return to normal. We are frightened, and ironically war makes us feel safe. (426, italics mine)

Another kind of a substitute activity, another way of fulfilling the "[d]esire to perpetuate the heroic image" (Willis, 375), not on the part of politicians, but ordinary citizens, was "the rapid deployment of the American flag" (ibid.). "The flag is everywhere," wrote one commentator, "and so is the need of the people to display their love of country" (Berns).

This did not go unnoticed in early post-9/11 novels. "The morning after the terrorist attacks, American flags blossomed throughout the megalopolis," wrote Beigbeder (268 [10:06]). Spiegelman was struck by their ubiquity also beyond New York, in a "small town [he] visited in Indiana," which was "draped in flags that reminded [him] of the garlic one might put on a door to ward off vampires" (*ISNT* Foreword). Interestingly, in many cases these "vampires" that the flag, like a silver bullet, was meant to protect one form were not Middle Eastern terrorists but "patriotic" fellow-Americans. This was why the wife of the Arab-looking, but really Persian Muslim man from *After* (Changiz) pasted a bumper sticker to the back of his car, the "one with *Proud to Be an American* written in bold blue letters next to an American flag. An outsized, vulgar thing"[138] (*A* 39–40).

Susan Willis in "Old Glory," provides a detailed analysis of this "circulating signifier" (376) and "supersymbol" (377). The automobile, she says, is "[b]y far the most preferred site for flag display" – turning every trip into a carnival: "the auto flag makes every

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[138] It did help him. When the man's car ran out of gas, he was offered help by a hostile-looking gun-carrying farmer and even got "an extra gallon" – for the flag (*A* 40).

roadway into a Fourth of July parade route" (379). However, the resultant atmosphere is not always festive: "Flags on cars can give rise to patriotic forms of road-rage as the drivers of noticeably flag-bedecked autos attempt to cut off drivers deemed less patriotic by the telltale absence of a car flag" (ibid.). As Changiz's wife knew well, this "road rage" could be significantly exacerbated by the telltale presence of darker skin.[139]

While this clearly juvenile behaviour is entirely spontaneous and folkloric, so to speak (like graffiti on the walls of public toilets), blasting six thousand flags[140] into space with American astronauts in order to, having thus consecrated the flags, return them back to earth (ibid., 380) is a serious (and expensive) state-controlled ritual. According to Willis, "the space flags bespeak an allegory for the twenty-first century, wherein religion merges with science and technology" (382) – which means nothing else but a return to magic which preceded its splitting into religion and science. This ritual shows also how the flag, "[l]ike the Shroud of Turin (...) speaks for a form of patriotism raised to the level of religion" (ibid., 377), in which a believer is distinguished from a non-believer according to the childish rule (adopted by the Bush administration) "If you're not with us, you're against us" (ibid., 379). Finally, this illustration raises the troubling question: "Transported into space, the flags were literally brought closer to God. Have we devolved to the level of the child who imagines God in his heavenly throne among the clouds?" – asks Willis (382). Apparently so.

Let me add this last comment on the flag as a magically charged symbol. Willis points out that it is "an empty signifier, capable of designating a host of references without being perceived as contradictory" (377). This quality of "emptiness," of no inherent meaningfulness, resembles what Derrida (quoted earlier) noticed about the designation "9/11," which itself may have some magical overtones:

> 'Something' took place (...). But this very thing, the place and meaning of this 'event,' remains ineffable, (...) out of range for a language that admits its powerlessness and so is reduced to pronouncing mechanically a date, repeating it endlessly, as a kind of *ritual incantation*, a *conjuring poem*. (qtd. in Borradori, 86, italics mine)

The act of repetition is significant, as to repeat is "as if to *exorcise* two times at one go": firstly, it means "*to conjure away, as if by magic*, the 'thing' itself, the fear or the terror it inspires (for repetition always *protects* by *neutralizing* (...) a traumatization, and this is true for the repetition of the televised images [too])," and secondly, it means "to deny (...) our powerlessness to name in an appropriate fashion" (ibid., 87, italics mine).

The date for Derrida "has the scope of monumentalizing the attacks" (ibid., 151) and by "monumentalizing the terrorist attacks, the date 9/11 also declares that they are over," which is a welcome "illusion" (ibid.) Therefore, the name "9/11" can be seen as a kind of evasion, a neutral-looking euphemism which in a way *taboos* all the negative

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[139] Eric L. Muller writes about the post-9/11 verbal and physical abuse of Arab and Muslim Americans.

[140] One for each of the victims of the 9/11 attacks. This was the initially expected number of victims.

phenomena it stands for, and thus distances the language users from this terrifying referent (cf. Chudzik, 27, 46, 76).

Derrida was not alone in noticing something uncanny about this "number." In *Windows on the World*, "Jerry asks why [his father] keep[s] punching today's date into [his] cell phone: 911, 911, 911. Nine eleven" (89 [8:57]). "It's a coincidence, honey. Just a coincidence," answers Carthew and then explains:

> It's just chance, but gullible people think it's an omen. Like, for instance, some people think that the fact that today's date is the same as the emergency services number is like a secret message. That someone's trying to tell us something. But that's just bullshit, it's obviously a coincidence. (ibid.)[141]

However, unlike Carthew, Beigbeder is more open-minded about the issue and he admits it: "What we know now leads us to look for portents everywhere. (…) It's impossible not to see portents everywhere, coded messages from the past" (34 [8:40]).

Two of the three photographs that the author took and included in his book particularly visibly testify to this attitude. The first picture shows "[t]he Genius of Evil," a "strange monument (…) erected in Baudelaire's honor" in Montparnasse Cemetery (*WoW* 113 [9:04]). The second one shows "what [the Genius of Evil] surveys"[142] (*WoW* 114 [9:04]): the Tour Montparnasse, the "sister site" (*WoW* 34 [8:40]) to the WTC and the very place where Beigbeder is writing the novel, as we read in the novel.

Also two more scenes are examples of "seeing portents everywhere." The first one is the (already analysed) account of the first personal encounter with the towers forming "an upturned V" and constituting "a dangerous whim," a creation of infantilism or madness (*WoW* 242 [9:52]). The other one mentions the "Think Different" slogan on two colossal billboards advertising Apple. The ads were illustrated with photos of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt – to which Beigbeder adds: "Roosevelt was the president when Pearl Harbour happened, but that's a coincidence" (271 [10:08]). Still, he mentions the slogan and the image of the president in his novel. Finally, a trace of magical thinking can be sensed in Beigbeder's frequent use of black humour, a substitute activity meant to release tension, as he admits: "I know, it's not funny, you don't joke about death. I'm sorry, it's a form of self-defense" (34 [8:40]), "Sorry for that bout of black humour: a momentary defense against the atrocity" (60 [8:48]).

In "Terror and Gallows Humor: After September 11?," Wendy Doniger asks in the subtitle to her essay, "September 11: When is it OK to joke?" and then quotes the well-known saying "tragedy plus time equals comedy." Similarly to Beigbeder, she points to the therapeutic role of humour: "By joking we reframe the episode in our own terms, transforming it from a passive suffering thrust upon us into an active

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[141] Nonetheless, as Doniger says, "Urban folklore even gave rise to a legend that the attackers chose September 11 precisely in order to make a joke about 911."

[142] The third photograph shows the sculpture in the New York UN headquarters, entitled "Good Defeats Evil," depicting a dragon defeated by St George (*WoW* 246 [9:54]) – of course, Beigbeder is ironic about the image and the title. The author both acknowledges taking the photographs in his writing and puts them in the novel for us to see, enhancing its paradocumentary character.

response to the world; we take possession of it." More generally, she adds, "at the time of crisis, (...) we use the 'it's just a dream/play' motif to keep from falling apart with shock and grief, while in the long run we need humor to help us go on living" (ibid.). Doniger demonstrates the magical thinking involved in joking by paraphrasing the formulaic statement repeated after 9/11, when many people were initially, quite understandably, disinclined to airplane travel. They "overcame that nervousness by saying, to themselves and others, 'If we stop flying, they win'" (ibid.). Doniger says, "if we stop laughing at our own tragedies, they win. But if we can laugh in the face of the bullies who would destroy us, then we have won."

Speaking of flying and laughing, and coming back for the last time to the superhero motif in *Windows*, let me add that the novel ends with Beigbeder himself turning into a "superhero" in the final "minute" of the book. Onboard a Concorde, he "lay down on the floor, on the carpet in the aisle, fists clenched stretched toward the cockpit" (*WoW* 303 [10:29]). In this position, the author is musing in a solipsistic reverie: "if I just closed my eyes and took away the cabin, the engines and all the other passengers, I'd be alone in the ether, 30,000 feet up, speeding through the blue at supersonic speed"; and concludes, "[y]es, I thought I was a superhero" (ibid.) Thus, if only in his imagination, Beigbeder – the real-life person and the self-portrayed character – became the fantasy of his own creation, the little boy David. However, as an author, he really did have the superpowers that David expected his father to use to save him. Beigbeder-the-author did save a Brazilian businessman lighting a cigar by making him leave the restaurant (*WoW* 25–26 [8:37–38]), just as he randomly, and easily, spared the life of an elderly lady by making her leave the building (*WoW* 51 [8:44]), while maintaining that, although he "would like to be able to change things" (*WoW* 26 [8:38]), he is "powerless" (ibid.) in the case of the Yorston family. Apparently, the author forgets this soon, and with childlike inconsistency asks some thirty pages later: "How can anyone forgive [me] the murder of the old woman in Florida on page 201 of my previous novel?"[143] (62 [8:48]) – in this way not only showing that life-and-death – god-like – decisions are not beyond his scope, but actually revealing himself as the Creator in a (recurring) metatextual act of breaking the fourth wall.

It is such (provocative?) inconsistency and contradictoriness that make childish perception and immaturity surface throughout the book, despite Beigbeder's saying in one interview that the 9/11 attacks at the New York "temple of capitalism" cured him of infantilism: until September 11, he was "seven years old, at best," now he is "a grown-up, sullied, old man" (Krzemiński). Carthew Yorston, whose views often reflect those of his maker, notices: "In the old days, kids depended on their parents to guide them. Now it's the opposite. (...) nowadays, parents imitate their kids. (...) Jerry's my mother and David's my father" (*WoW* 65–66 [8:49]). Earlier, Carthew observed that "Our kids are spoilt rotten, because we are spoilt rotten" (*WoW* 20 [8:35]). In the same vein, Beigbeder defines his whole generation, "the sons of 1968" (176 [9:26]),

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[143] *99 francs* (2000) retitled *14,99 euro* after the new currency was introduced in France. The title is accordingly *£9.99* in Britain and *29,99* in Poland. (The title means the price of the book.)

as "[e]motional cripples. Grown, vaccinated men behaving like kids" (175). Yet, after a further litany of self-accusations recited at 9:36, later – in accordance with his status of RIRE (Fr. to laugh), i.e. "rich rebel" (*WoW* 68 [8:50]) – Beigbeder announces that he is "sick and tired of people saying [he's] just a spoilt brat smashing his toys" – "I'm smashing them so I can create others" (225 [9:44]). This may be true about the whole contemporary Western culture.

During his first visit to America, where "toys have become one of [the] most important industries" (*WoW* 216 [9:40]), ten-year-old Beigbeder saw the Twin Towers for the first time, but it was only after they were destroyed that he realised he was "exactly as old as the World Trade Center" (35 [8:40]). "To built such a monstrosity," such "a dangerous whim," he thought, "you had to be mad or have the soul of a child, or both" (242 [9:52]). In further answering the question "Who were these sixties engineers?" (152 [9:18]) – his parents' peers, or just as well his parents, since he identifies himself with the engineers' creations, the WTC (or its ruins, 206 [9:36]) and Concorde (151) – he says "They were adults, high-minded scientists, aeronautics specialists; and yet they were kids, 'ickle babies playing with their 'ickle toys" (153).

To follow up this toy metaphor, it is worth noticing that one of numerous literary references in the novel, and a significant one, is to J. K. Huysmans's *A Rebours* (*Against the Grain*) (*WoW* 61 [8:48]). One of recurring images in the book is the reversed letter R in the brand name "Toys 'Я' Us," which makes the logo resemble a child's writing. To read it correctly, we would have to put a mirror to it and then the result is quite striking – it almost says: "We R Toys." Humans, no more than toys themselves, treating each other like toys and fighting for more toys with one another, is what occurs to Carthew to be the source of all conflicts in the world. While witnessing a fight between his children for the single Windows on the World lapel badge that he gave them, he notices: "I had just worked out the problem with this planet. There weren't enough lapel badges for everyone" (*WoW* 251 [9:57]). Infantile as it sounds, the bathetic remark does convey some fundamental truth.

So does, frequently, the author's voice on the whole – though often unnervingly childlike in its self-centredness bordering on solipsism, it nonetheless seems genuine and honest. In fact, self-flagellation is unmistakable in all the self-accusatory comments by the author and Carthew about themselves and the culture that surrounds them, which they blame for making them its "defective" products (*WoW* 176 [9:26]), yet which they thoroughly enjoy and have no intention of forfeiting. Exactly this circularity: infantilism criticised with adult seriousness, which nonetheless fails to prevent further infantilism, which turns the adult consciousness into a joke, which, on the other hand, is fully and painfully realised, just not in practice... and so on, *ad infinitum*, is a signature *mise-en--abyme* quality of Beigbeder's writing.

Also the author of the highly metatextual graphic novel *In the Shadow of No Towers*, Art Spiegelman, is painfully self-centred and overwhelmed by self-doubt in the face of the same task, depicting the events of 9/11, which he eye-witnessed. After much struggle, which – just as in the case of *Windows* – is as much the topic of the book as the attacks themselves, Spiegelman's work was completed in 2004.

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I have already pointed to the telling fact that, in this autobiographical comix, the renowned author of *Maus* often appears as the same human-mouse character who struggled with recounting the story of his father, a survivor of Auschwitz. The mouse "mask" in *In the Shadow* represents the same sense of powerlessness, which made Art forever caught in a writer's block in *Maus*. There, on the pages 44–45, Art is trapped in sixteen black-and-white panels, where he is sitting in an armchair, talking to his psychoanalyst, smoking a cigarette, but unable to reach the floor with his feet, because he has been reduced in size and "infantilised through a willed regression back to childhood due to feelings of inadequacy" (Alcobia-Murphy, 32).

In *In the Shadow*, similarly, "our hero is trapped reliving the traumas of Sept. 11, 2001," as the author narrates it himself (4). Also analogously to *Maus*, reduction in size and "infantilisation" is achieved through the author's self-depiction as several cartoon characters from newspaper comics published a century earlier. The characters, however, have changed: Little Nemo in Slumberland is Little Mouse, Happy Hooligan is Hapless Hooligan, Jiggs from *Bringing Up Father* is so paranoid that instead of his wife he sees Osama Bin Laden. Very tellingly, other old cartoon characters populating the book's pages also undergo transformation: Offissa Pupp from *Krazy Kat* joins NYPD, Katzenjammer Kids become Tower Twins with skulls in place of smiling faces, and instead of the Upside Downs of Little Lady Lovekins and Old Man Muffaroo, we see the Upside Down World of George W. Bush (as a juvenile-looking cowboy with a toy-sword and a gun) and Dick Cheney (as a belligerent pig).

From this short description it is not difficult to infer that Spiegelman's problems with dealing with the subject were not lessened by his medium of expression, the graphic novel. The genre, occasionally still not taken seriously by the more entrenched traditional literary criticism, can easily be accused of trivialising the subject or at least of not giving properly solemn form to it. This may affect the book's "unconscious" and, potentially, add to the author's original feeling of inadequacy. Apart from undertaking an extremely challenging topic, Spiegelman's book undertakes it in an innovative and unconventional way, also within its own genre.

I have described the iconic form of the book in Chapter II. Here I can add that the iconic weight of the book, as if materialising the weight of its subject, is simultaneously (and paradoxically) subverted and reaffirmed, repeatedly subverted and reaffirmed by the authorial autobiographical, intertextual and metatextual narrative – self-deprecating but deeply honest (just as in Beigbeder's novel). What demonstrates this paradox most visibly is the fact that this compelling/self-conscious (and *weighty* meaning "important") narrative appears inside the clearly contrasting space of speech *bubbles*.

In a way, a comparable contrast can be seen in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud*. The subject of the book is grave and demanding, while, as I have said, the book's narrator is a nine-year-old child. However, Oskar Schell is not a typical child by any standards. The rather implausibly precocious boy makes a hybrid character. Embodying the ancient topos of "boy and old man,"[144] he dwells simultaneously in two spheres:

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[144] See Curtius, 98.

the sphere of childhood and maturity, innocence and awareness/responsibility/guilt. He is thus a useful vehicle of thought: as a child he can ask difficult, naïve or awkward questions; as a little genius, however, he does not have to limit himself, and us, to a child's language. In other words, he is allowed more, but still less is demanded from him – he is less answerable for whatever he says or does during his peregrinations through New York.

The boy has been strongly affected by the loss of his father on 9/11, and the one truly tragic failure to make his last contact with him. This is illustrated by his dedication to grief, his obsessive-compulsive recording of "Stuff that Happened to Me" in a diary under the same title, his reaching out to strangers, especially to older people, despite his phobias (involving mainly tall buildings, airplanes, lifts and telephones). Still, all this makes him a by far more vocal character than all the adults in his world, who generally suffer from problems with communication. In particular, Oskar's grandfather, traumatised by the 1945 bombing of Dresden, ceased to speak altogether.

But being more vocal than other, older, more (also longer) traumatised characters does not mean that the "child" is capable of saying much about 9/11. As one reviewer points out, Foer has a "taste for naïve or otherwise unreliable narrators" (Miller 2005b); but Oskar is not just unreliable – he is unbelievable. Even the not entirely convincing sons of Carthew Yorston in *Windows on the World* are incomparably more child-like than this "boy," whom the same critic calls "an alien" and merely "a device serving the author's purposes rather than a fully imagined human being" (ibid.). Another difference in the portrayal of children in these two novels is that Foer "prettifies his hero" (Almond), while "[i]t may just be too early to get cute in writing about September 11" (Miller 2005b). I suggest that this, paradoxically along with the *failed* child-likeness of the main character, makes the book particularly childish:

> The book is ultimately a wish fantasy borne of the sorrows of 9/11. It peddles the seductive notion that our best response to those attacks need be no more mature than a childish wish that evil be banished from our magic kingdom. (Almond)

Sounding very similar to Faludi's diagnosis of America's living in a dream or – to phrase it after Malinowski and Mauss – finding refuge in a substitute version of reality generated by magical thinking, Almond adds, "I couldn't help but read Oskar as the perfect stand-in for the American mindset: a glib, self-dramatizing child defined by his victimhood and a plucky determination to endure" (cf. the optimistic flipbook at the end). Oskar is a cartoonish creation, then, but just like the US leaders playing the brave cowboy, the Rock and the Protector, he is an unwitting (and, admittedly, more innocent) caricature, not intended to parody anything – on the contrary, delivered with deadpan earnestness. Therefore I agree with Laura Miller, who says:

> Choosing a child narrator gives Foer access to extravagant emotions and quirky imaginings that would seem cloying or self-indulgent in a grown-up, but at the cost of allowing the central trauma its due. September 11 was a surreal intrusion of the spectacular and malevolent into the banal and safe. But for a kid like Oskar, reality has yet to be fully established, so surreality is impossible. (2005b)

As the example of David and Jerry Yorston from *Windows* has shown, sometimes children can have a better grip on reality than adults, but, as Miller puts it, for a kid *like* Oskar reality is what he makes it to be, reality is his egocentric "Stuff That Happens to *Me*" (ibid.). Thus, as Miller suggests, there is also this "miscalculation at the heart of [*ELIC*]": it is narrated by an unconvincing verbal construct that does not have "the perspective and context" to understand how "cataclysmic" the attacks of September 11 were outside his "magic kingdom" (ibid.).

Similarly to *ELIC*, where characters are predominantly silent or fail to communicate, the need for dialogue amidst deafening silence is also crucial to the narrator of Beard's *Dear Zoe*. This is why fifteen-year-old Tess DeNunzio writes letters to her sister. In fact, like Oskar, she writes "all the time," but, as she says, "nothing anybody would ever want to read" (*DZ* 16). She underestimates herself, because the book that her letters add up to is very readable. This is mainly because, unlike Oskar, Tess is a very convincing child character. To be more precise, she is a convincing contemporary teenager. This is well demonstrated e.g. by her self-perception and insecurity, an obsession with her looks, which leads to her consumption of cosmetics and an hour-and-a-half morning routine involving a long list of beauty products but no breakfast (*DZ* 26-29). What the adolescent narrator has in common with Oskar, however, is that she also finds herself on the border of two worlds: childhood and adulthood.

To a large extent the book is a coming-of-age story recording an abruptly and violently discontinued childhood, also for Tess's other younger sister, seven-year-old Emily. The two girls have to grow up more quickly and often sound very mature. The reason for this is that, as in the case of Oskar's family, Tess's whole family is grieving after the death of a loved one on September 11, 2001. Tess's three-year-old sister Zoe died in a car accident which happened *because* of the terrorist attacks – because the driver and Tess and her mother and practically the whole world had their eyes turned away from the – by comparison – irrelevant event of a child running into a street.

This is why *Dear Zoe is* a post-9/11 novel. There are a lot of comments on this global event in the book, but coming from Tess they are reluctant, even critical – as in this remark about people's vicarious or virtual post-9/11 trauma:

> I knew nothing before that car hit you (…). Nothing. Just like all the people who write poetry about 9/11 for English class as if the fear they are feeling is the same as real loss. And just like all the people who lost no one, the tourists, who go to New York and cry over the rubble. I want to tell them all to go home. (…) I want to tell them that they are using that place as an excuse to be sad and afraid when there will be reason enough for them in their own lives if they just wait. (*DZ* 69)

Tess's observations – here, exposing sham mass emotionality – are shown from an entirely different angle in comparison to the often melodramatic mainstream take on the attacks. This effect is achieved thanks to the juxtaposition of two scales already discussed in Chapter I. The child narrator always focusing on the death of another, close, child provides both a contrast to the first "symbolic event on a world scale" and a condensed reflection of the – probably similarly suffered – enormous loss of individual family

members of individual 9/11 victims, who live on with their real loss, everyday, after the live coverage is over. *Dear Zoe* is a kind of reversal of the whole group it belongs to, the early post-9/11 novel, by relegating the "hyperevent" and "mother of all events" to the margins and foregrounding what is marginal from the point of view of the "whole world." Nonetheless, this secondary (for Tess and her family) meaning of 9/11 is always present, and not just as a backdrop, in *Dear Zoe*. The two meanings – the whole world's 9/11 and *Tess's* 9/11 – are perforce bound into an uneasy family relationship in Beard's book, making the personal tragedy even more painful.

Lynne Sharon Schwartz's *The Writing on the Wall* combines all the crucial elements of *Dear Zoe* discussed above: family tragedy (in fact two tragedies: one death and one disappearance of a family member), the national tragedy, children and silence. Also, as far as the motif of magical thinking is concerned, one of the meanings of the title is, as I have mentioned, a reference to the biblical book of Daniel as well as a now commonly used phrase denoting any "portent of doom," "an occurrence or sign foretelling downfall or disaster." The whole book, then, is labelled "an omen," "a sign," or "a warning." Let us try to decipher what it may be warning us against.

There is, of course, the global threat of terror underlying the story. Accompanying it are the state authorities, whom, as I have said, the main character, Renata, strongly distrusts. But there is also her own personal tale and her secret. Renata, a New York linguist and a librarian, is deeply affected by the terrorist attacks in her city – also because they rekindle an older trauma in her. Renata had a twin sister, Claudia, who died in mysterious circumstances at the age of sixteen, shortly after giving birth to her daughter, Gianna. The child herself disappeared, also in mysterious circumstances, seven years later, when Renata was raising her. Thus, in the days following 9/11, when the whole city is pasted with missing posters, it is as if entire New York shared with Renata her own loss. It is exactly at this chaotic time, however, that Renata's loss becomes resolved (or "resolved").

This resolution is a curious example of blurring the line dividing reality and fiction after 9/11. Renata becomes a temporary surrogate mother to a baby Julio whose mother was killed in the WTC. Then, she meets and "adopts" a stray teenager who, alone in the attacked city, looks in need of protection. Interestingly, the girl is herself baby-like in the sense that, just like Julio, she does not speak: "Silent, she is wholly benign and uncalculating, merely a child who needs help" (*WR* 177). Although her mutism should make Renata wonder, since it "is a common symptom of trauma" (*WR* 232), she never questions it, she "finds it oddly relaxing to speak to someone who never answers" (*WR* 177). Thus, both children, for very personal reasons, predating the current terror, serve as a source of comfort and peace for an adult in the suddenly perilous conditions: "[s]omehow having the baby (…) makes it more bearable" (*WR* 76).

But there is a more sinister side to this semblance of domestic bliss surrounded by a state of emergency. The girl, who was wandering among missing posters when Renata first saw her, looks exactly the way Renata and her sister did when they were the girl's age: thus, in Renata's eyes, she becomes "a poster come to life" (*WR* 242). This makes Renata suspect and hope that the apparently homeless girl, whom she

starts to call Gianna, is in fact her niece, older now after more than ten years of her absence: "This is the real Gianna now. Renata will make herself believe it" (*WR* 177). Thus Renata creates a wish-fulfilment version of reality for herself, wilfully ignoring any evidence that would refute it, such as a missing poster for the girl made by her parents: "It will be as if she never saw it. It's just a piece of paper. Nothing has to change. (…) She will not think about those people (…). She will not allow them to be real" (*WR* 255). In a deliberate denial of facts, she consciously chooses to let these other people think that *their* child is lost, possibly injured, perhaps even dead. Although Renata knows too well what such uncertainty means to wish it on anyone else, she nonetheless makes this ethically reprehensible decision. She does it in the confusing and chaotic days immediately after the attacks, when all rules and the whole way the world used to function appear to have been put on hold. Likewise, it seems, Renata's sense of responsibility gives way to childish amorality and possessiveness. It could even be said that she selfishly exploits the situation and knows it, as she repeatedly rejects appeals to "stop using these children" (*WR* 246) for making herself feel better:

> It's exploitation, maybe, but surely [Julio's] too young to mind. Look how she's kept him healthy and safe these last three wretched days! (…) He's happy, he's getting used to her. (…) Doesn't that count for anything? Does it count at all, can it begin to make up in some miniscule way for the child given to her care years ago, whom she failed to keep safe? (*WR* 102)

Taking care of Julio, a substitute for the real Gianna as a baby, is only temporary, because his family knows where to look for him. As for the other "baby," the nameless seventeen-year-old, who is potentially the real Gianna, Renata can keep her as long as her family is in the dark. Renata finds many excuses (though she does not need to convince herself) for prolonging this situation, which assuages her old feelings of guilt. These excuses may be, to some extent, understandable. One of them is, of course, the suffering she had experienced. However, there is no justification for hypocritically committing what she, so critical of lies and manipulation of the truth on television, so strongly condemns. Yet the need to believe in what seems "like a miracle" to her (*WR* 261), especially in such tragic circumstances, is too powerful to resist:

> I just want to save one person. One person! Five thousand[145] people are gone, turned to ashes, and one is found. (…) I let her down once, I can never make up for that, but at least… she's mine. (…) I've made her mine! (..) I've fed her long enough. (*WR* 263)

In this way, Renata's emotional "reasoning" can be seen as magical thinking, described in the following words by the probable father of the real Gianna, Renata's uncle: "When people can't accept things, they rearrange them in their minds" (ibid., 195). Perhaps this is what we should consider ourselves warned against.

I have already discussed at length how the main character of *After* rearranges "things" in her mind with the help of a Muslim man and a wire hanger. This

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[145] The expected number of victims shortly after the attacks.

psychodrama has nothing to do with childhood but perhaps it can also be seen as a kind of magical thinking providing a symbolic (while being fiercely physical at the same time) resolution to a problem that cannot be solved in reality – it can only be *relieved* with a *substitute* activity.

However, a motif of childhood can be noticed in Wojciech Tochman's *Córeńka*, which, as I have mentioned, means "a little daughter". Importantly, "córeńka" is not just a diminutive but one of the *most* diminutive forms of the word "daughter" in the Polish language (which abounds in diminutives), and is used as a term of endearment by the main character's mother. Interestingly, this highly emotionally charged word (which I could now explain more precisely as "dearest tiny little daughter") denotes also the book itself. This, however, and fortunately, does not make it a pretty little book.

A significant element of *Córeńka*, which it shares with *ELIC*, *Dear Zoe* and *The Writing*, is a family loss (in this case, the death of the main and eponymous character – Beata Pawlak) and the consequent silence. These elements inform also *The Third Brother*. McDonell's main character, nineteen-year-old Mike, is still a teenager, and a sensitive one, while his elder brother Lyle is child-like on account of his psychological condition (post-traumatic stress disorder or perhaps a more serious mental illness) requiring constant attention and protection. This impression is intensified by the fact that, after the fire and because of the still unhealed burns, Lyle's head is now hairless, which makes him look "like a baby" (*TB* 166). Eventually, both brothers believe in the existence of the Third Brother who could be held responsible for the fire, which is quite a magical belief. Furthermore, both Mike and Lyle are always defined in relation to their parents, whom McDonell portrays as representatives of a certain class: rich, spoilt, immature, emotionally unstable, prone to addictions and self-destructive behaviour (indeed, they may destroy each other and themselves in the end). This is the very same class that is depicted in Jay McInerney's more popular fiction, *The Good Life*, itself a particularly childlike "child of collapse."

I have already considered Cayce Pollard as the daughter of a 9/11 victim as well as the Peter Pan motif in *Pattern Recognition*, whose title itself can be related to magical thinking. I have also discussed the teenage and innocent figure of Ahmad from *Terrorist* by connecting him with Stevie from *The Secret Agent*. Therefore, the only early post-9/11 novel still left to be examined here is McEwan's *Saturday*.

As I have suggested earlier, in *Saturday*, Baxter is a terrorist-like character, who is also teenage-like on account of his emotional instability. After being embarrassed in front of his fellow-thugs by Henry Perowne earlier in the day (Henry diagnosed Baxter's illness, Huntington's disease, and thus exposed his weakness during their brief encounter after their fender-bender), Baxter takes Perowne's family hostage in their own home in the evening. The impulsive gangster is more than likely to turn violent, however, in a crucial scene, he is mollified by a sudden appearance of a child who is both visible and invisible.

When Baxter orders Perowne's daughter to undress, he, just like everyone else, discovers that Daisy is pregnant. "It's the pregnancy, Henry decides, the overwhelming fact of it" (*S* 224). This is what started "the transformation of [Baxter's] role, from lord

of terror to amazed admirer. Or excited child"[146] (*S* 223). What excited Baxter so much was a poem by Matthew Arnold, "Dover Beach,"[147] which Daisy recited pretending it to be her own. She did this when Baxter ordered her to read out "[s]omething really filthy" (*S* 220), the "dirtiest" of her compositions from her debut volume *My Saucy Bark*. Daisy avoided this moral assault, a kind of ersatz rape, by reciting Arnold's poem instead – which, out of all things, saved the day. But not before she recited it again "with more confidence, attempting the seductive, varied tone of a story-teller entrancing a child" (*S* 221).

"Could it happen, is it within the bounds of the real, that a mere poem of Daisy's could precipitate a mood swing?" (*S* 221), asks Henry. We could ask the same question with him about McEwan's choice of this build-up to the dénouement. Whether it is convincing or not, the meeting between the pregnant poet Daisy and the gangster Baxter refutes the words of a real famous poet, Seamus Heaney: "In one sense the efficacy of poetry is nil – no lyric has ever stopped a tank." In McEwan's controlled environment of a formally pure novel, a poem stops a terrorist-like thug. This must be magic.[148]

And magic it is. The "mood swing," after which Baxter changes his mind and gives up his original violent intentions, is described as "magic" that makes him "suddenly elated" (*S* 222): he "fell for the magic, he was transfixed by it" (*S* 278). The poem "touched off in Baxter a yearning [Henry] could barely begin to define" (*S* 279). This makes Henry almost jealous. The neurosurgeon could never respond to poetry in a similar way. His thoughts (which are available to us) – the thoughts of a man of science – immediately reached for medical terms as if for surgical tools to rationalise what just happened, but they turned out to be too blunt to explain the "spell" (ibid.) which Daisy cast upon her oppressor. The power of the poem is that, like a magical formula, it conjures up love, family, safety and peace – in other words, all that the attacker wants to destroy in others because he lacks (or has lost) it himself. Significantly, it is exactly these values that return again like a magical incantation in Henry's last thoughts, when he is falling asleep embracing his wife: "There's always this, (…) there's only this" (*S* 279).[149]

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[146] Both Daisy and Baxter are repeatedly compared to or called a child in *Saturday* (218, 221, 226).

[147] McEwan's choice of this poem is very meaningful. "Dover Beach" was written in 1867, eight years after the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, and reflects the time of the book's creation. This period was a turning point in history, as it witnessed a decline of the epoch of faith and certainty in the superiority of human kind (more specifically, white people), which became undermined by the evolutionary theory and geological as well as other scientific discoveries supporting it. Some critics point out that our times are a reflection of that moment, e.g. Jarniewicz suggests that *Saturday* shows a drama "taking place in the world abandoned by God," in which "the role of a divine guarantor of order has been taken over by science, and the soul has been replaced by the genotype" (2005). McEwan compares the genotype to the soul on the last page of his novel.

[148] John Banville calls this "trick" "descend[ing] to a level of bathos that is hard to credit" and no more than a fairy-tale resolution.

[149] Which is a much more optimistic version of the human condition than the one ending Updike's *Terrorist* and Chapter II.

One more thing to do with magic, or rather magical thinking, must be mentioned in my discussion of *Saturday*. The novel begins, typically for McEwan, with a spectacular symbolic scene (Jarniewicz 2005): suddenly awoken and "inexplicably elated" Henry (*S* 3), standing by the window, sees a strange bright object in the night sky which he initially takes for a meteor or a comet (*S* 13–14). After a moment he realises that it is a plane on fire that may be about to crash. "If Perowne were inclined to religious feeling, to supernatural explanations, he could play with the idea that he's been summoned" (*S* 17) – he should see a connection between getting up in the middle of the night like this (something he had never done before) and the unusual thing he alone witnesses – "he should acknowledge a hidden order, an external intelligence which wants to show or tell him something of significance" (ibid.). But Henry, a man of science, does no such thing; he scientifically explains how magical thinking works:

> The primitive thinking of the supernaturally inclined amounts to what his psychiatric colleagues call a problem, or an idea, of reference. An excess of the subjective, the ordering of the world in line with your needs, an inability to contemplate your own unimportance. In Henry's view such reasoning belongs on a spectrum at whose far end, rearing like an abandoned temple, lies psychosis. (ibid.)

Most people (perhaps even some scientists) in Henry's position would interpret this event as an omen that should have warned him about some unexpected threat to befall him that day – even if only retrospectively, even if only because this would make an *interesting story* to tell. Surely, apart from providing the author with the opportunity to speak about our times, this is also the reason why McEwan put this image at the beginning of *his story* about a surprisingly dangerous Saturday – because he knew that, *in our times*, he could count on an emotional reaction to the description of such a sight: a burning airplane. He knew that the readers could make an irrational connection between the scene and what follows. McEwan's using this mechanism driven by the power of an evocative image may be the best comment on this mechanism that he could have ever made.

III.5. The post-9/11 novel in the Language Classroom

"Accumulation puts an end to the impression of chance" said the inscription above the entrance to Paul Virilio's exhibition, serving as an epigraph to the "pilot project for, or more exactly a prefiguration of, the future Museum of the Accident" (Virilio 2002b). It was probably no accident that the words came from Sigmund Freud – whose psychoanalysis bestowed the central role in the human psyche on childhood – and forever changed the way we perceive childhood and ourselves (Cataluccio, 38–39).

Is it mere chance that so many of early post-9/11 novels have used motifs of childhood in their making, so to speak, the first steps in the empty space, the literary "ground zero," left after the attacks? And that they did so independently, yet collectively, roughly at the same time? Whether this is an instance of magical thinking on my part

or not, I find it interesting that after the initial, understandable silence in literature following 9/11, often the first characters to begin to speak in it about the tragedy were those who were still learning to speak about the world themselves: children. Whether literally (babies, seven- or nine-year-olds, teenagers) or metaphorically (adults regressing back to childhood), children abound in the first (Western) literary reactions to the "'mother' of all events." But, what is more, as I have suggested, these books themselves can be seen as the youngest "children" of this "mother," in other words: as *beginners*, the earliest works to try to acquire the language needed to name the *somehow* altered world, and the first ones to risk failing.

Perhaps literature as a whole (just like people around the world) immediately after the 9/11 attacks – or confronted with any major catastrophe – could be compared to an infant (infant – Etymology: Middle English enfaunt, from Middle French enfant, from Latin infant-, infans, adjective, *incapable of speech*, young, from in- + fant-, fans, present participle of fari to speak[150]). Or to a second language learner, who begins with a "silent period"[151] caused by incomprehensible input of the new language. The "incomprehensible input" of the *new* or the *unknown* could be that of the ongoing events, i.e. the reality of a catastrophe, which is not only difficult to understand but also impossible to describe – it constitutes the unspeakable. This can be a metaphorical description of what happened on September 11, when the whole Western world was reduced to the role of a learner who was being taught a lesson, and the greatest world power was brought down to the status of a – speechless – child. Interestingly, this was best illustrated by George W. Bush,[152] who, as I have mentioned, first learnt about the attacks while surrounded by seven-year-olds, and so remained silent for a much commented period of time. He is reported to have said later, as if supplying a thought bubble to his own image frozen in time by the cameras:

> I am very aware of the cameras. I'm trying to absorb that knowledge. I have nobody to talk to. I'm sitting in the midst of a classroom with little kids, listening to a children's story and I realise I'm the Commander in Chief and the country has just come under attack. (Langley)

This confirms what has been discovered about "silent" learners in second language acquisition, namely that many engage in private speech or "self-talk," as if rehearsing "important survival phrases and lexicon chunks," which are then memorised and employed in the subsequent period of "formulaic speech." In the context of politics, "formulaic speech" is, naturally, any kind of speech. In other contexts, such as journalism – especially in the case of breaking news, such as the 9/11 attacks, a different pattern of verbal behaviour can be noticed to emerge: "Whether by choice or compulsion, other learners have no silent period and pass directly to formulaic speech," in which "a handful of routines are used to accomplish basic purposes." Eventually, this "gives way to a more experimental phase of acquisition, in which the

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[150] From: http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/infant, italics mine.
[151] All the following comments on second language acquisition are based on: http://www.eltworld.net/pdf/ARTICLE%20-%20Second%20language%20acquisition.pdf.
[152] Called "the goofy child-president" by Hunter S. Thompson in his *Kingdom of Fear* (162).

semantics and grammar of the target language are simplified and the learners begin to construct a true interlanguage."

This phase of "interlanguage" could be compared to literature – the less formulaic speech. I believe that this term can prove useful in the discussion of literature responding to a global historical and immensely traumatic event, and can be applied especially to the first literary reactions to it, if not, in fact, to all of them (including the future ones). The term "interlanguage" suggests a continued process, and a stage in it – a kind of "in-betweenness" – on the way to proficiency and fluency in speaking. However, unlike in the case of ordinary language learning, this advanced level may never be reached, since the target language of literature about the greatest tragedies is the language which will give them full justice, contain and explain them. In other words "interlanguage" may be all that this literature will ever learn, since mastery in expressing the inexpressible is probably unattainable.

It must be added that this "in-betweenness" of the "interlanguage" on terror, of the novels discussed here, has to do not only with their position on a time-scale – having as its utopian end the perfect masterpiece, the ideal translation of a hyper-real disaster into words. It also refers to a property of this writing and its literary status among hitherto known forms, styles and genres. Just as a second language learner creates unconventional grammatical structures and modifies accepted rules to invent new words defying the codified lexicon, the writers trying to describe events which transgress the established order are compelled to transgress the established order of expression as well. And, also by analogy, just as in the first case the target language, so in the second case the "original" event – must, unavoidably, be simplified. But as the definition has it, interlanguage "is not merely an imperfect version of the target language," but "a natural language with its own consistent set of rules." Interlanguage is "perhaps best viewed as an attitude toward language acquisition, and not a distinct discipline. By the same token, interlanguage work is a vibrant microcosm of linguistics."

I suggest, therefore, that the novels addressing 9/11 and post-9/11 terror most directly are written in a kind of interlanguage, a metalanguage. They present *an attitude toward speaking* about the terrorist attacks and their consequences. For this reason they also speak about themselves and all media of expression in general. And, although selected here as belonging to the same "post-9/11" family, they are not really a *distinct* discipline, in the sense that they *transgress* disciplines and *mix* them – they are hybrid siblings. In collapsing boundaries, they take after their "mother."

III.6. Magical thinking (2):
Magic – "the most childish of skills"

The "children of collapse," written in an "interlanguage," a learner's language, inevitably face the consequence of having the status of childishness imposed on them – a status from which they will never grow up, just as they will probably never really live up to their subject. The serious writers addressing the tragedy, unlike those merely

weaving it into the lighter fabrics of their narratives (which certainly could not carry any more weight), take many more risks, and are aware of it. It is only natural, then, that they should take some protective measures.

All of the books discussed here, especially those that come the closest to the explosion, the central threat of terror, illustrate magical thinking or even employ some motifs of magical thinking – as by all means a *realistic* way of depicting mental and emotional reactions to a major crisis. Such reactions themselves may appear immature – since, typical for childhood, magical thinking is later subject to systematic elimination by the process of upbringing and schooling. However, presenting it in literature and admitting that it nonetheless does operate, especially in moments of danger, testifies to the authors' psychological perceptiveness. Also, it would be surprising if such books did not reveal some predilection towards magical thinking – either openly (as in *Windows* and *In the Shadow*) or at least in their own "unconscious."

Magic is possibly the oldest of skills, says Mauss – and, he asserts, it is "the most childish of skills" (175). This could additionally have to do with the fact that "[c]hildren may be in great demand as assistants to the magician, particularly in divinatory rites" – since, "[a]s we all know, children have a very special status;[153] (...) they are still thought to possess uncertain, troublesome natures" (ibid., 36). And yet – as can be added – because they are children, this "uncertainty" and "troublesomeness" is justifiable and generally accepted.

Perhaps this is why most writers undertaking the challenging topic of post-9/11 terror, and using hybrid, problematic forms, employ either the figure of a child or at least the concept of childhood in their books. This can be best and most representatively illustrated with the following quote from *Windows on the World* – as I have said, the most extreme early post-9/11 novel discussed here. Its author ventures inside one of the Twin Towers, thus takes the greatest risks and, consequently, takes the most visible magical precautions, namely puts two "lightning rods" (a kind of amulet) at the beginning of the book's architectural structure in imitation of architects who used to "put gargoyles at the top of towers" because "they knew that one day danger would come from the air" (*WoW* 122 [9:07]):

> In the past, they used to put gargoyles at the top of buildings to protect them, like on the Chrysler Building. Sculptures made to look like dragons, monsters, demons like the ones at the top of the towers of Notre Dame in Paris, intended to drive away devils and ward off invaders. Will my children, these little blond gargoyles leaning into the void, be enough to ward off evil spirits? (ibid.)

Perhaps employing child characters, these "assistants to the magician," is a kind of (unconscious?) insurance against the accusations of immaturity and trivialisation, or melodramatisation or of otherwise not living up to the gravity of the topic. When tragedy or a disaster is chosen for the main theme of a book, the book's turning into

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[153] Children's verbal behaviour is often magical, in fact, as Chudzik puts forward, the very "conception of children's language is magical" (124). There is a similarity between the child's attitude to language and the attitude to language of an adult with a magical worldview (23).

a disaster, or at least a disappointment is very likely, if not inevitable. Therefore, it may be possible that, if not as a result of a conscious authorial strategy, then at the level of the book's "unconscious," a kind of insurance against the risk may be provided by as if metaphorical "self-infantilisation," or deliberate "self-diminution" of the work (lying down and making oneself small are well-known defensive mechanisms among many living organisms, and they are deeply ingrained also in human psyche). Child narrators and characters, child figures and childlike voices are generally known to be unreliable, thus one cannot really blame them for what they say. It could be surmised, then, that in this possible forestalling of future criticism by openly eschewing pretences to "adulthood," to greatness, even to "standing erect" (Schehr), the books may be practicing the lesson they have learnt from their main object of interest – the giant skyscrapers: after all, were they not attacked exactly because of their imposing size?

The use of a child-narrator/character or of the concept of childhood by no means, of course, diminishes the stature of a literary work, nor does it relegate it to the shelves with literature for young readers, as so many examples (from Charles Dickens through Mark Twain to J.D. Salinger, Harper Lee and Gunter Grass and many others) demonstrate. In the early post-9/11 novel, it does not make the main subject "smaller" or "simple." On the contrary, it often reveals the difficulty in moving on from silence to trying to speak all the more. This is because, as Gaston Bachelard has put it, the child has an "enlarging gaze" – like "the man with a magnifying glass" (155).

CONCLUSION

In "The Days After," an introduction to "Reflections by our authors in the aftermath" assembled by Chicago University Press and available on their website, we read:

> At the moment of catastrophe we fall silent. Language fails. / The words come back; understanding takes much longer. As we return to normal – or to the state of heightened alertness we now call normal – we return to the task of explicating a world which seems suddenly to have become inexplicable.

Frédéric Beigbeder, one of many to have compared the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks to the Holocaust,[154] summed up his novel, *Windows on the World*, as "simply an attempt – doomed, perhaps – to describe the indescribable" (55 [8:46]). Art Spiegelman said in his graphic novel, in several of the smoky gray *Maus*-like panels,

> I remember my father trying to describe what the smoke in Auschwitz was like. / ... The closest he got was telling me it was 'indescribable.' / ... That's exactly what the air in lower Manhattan smelled like after Sept.11! (3)

These are not the only instances of linking 9/11 to the earlier, much larger, but also technologically orchestrated, horrific crime against humanity. Similarly, these are not the only instances when "indescribable" is paradoxically, the most descriptive word, "inexplicable" the aptest explanation. In a comment about the Holocaust, Elie Wiesel said that it is not possible to express the inexpressible, let alone to show it on the screen (meaning film, qtd. in Cataluccio, 170). But what if the tragedy, the "indescribable" or "inexpressible" (even if on a smaller scale, if the number of deaths is a suitable measurement) is shown to (the majority of) us on the screen *while* it is unfolding? What if this is exactly the mode in which we learn about its taking place – and thanks to which we can witness its taking place? What about language then? Can language describe what is indescribable *and* broadcast live and then repeated for days on end till "[w]e can call up, at will, the image of that second plane slamming into the south tower. Over and over and over again [as] [t]he immediacy of those images lets us put ourselves in that plane" (Clarke)?

In Author's Note to the American edition of *Windows*, Beigbeder says that English is "the language in which the tragedy *happened*" (307). Consequently, "rereading the novel in English," he said, made him "intensely aware" that "merging fiction with truth – and with tragedy – risks hurting those who have already suffered"

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[154] "[T]he Shoah is a mystery: September 11 is too" (263 [10:02]); "In Windows on the World, the customers were gassed, burned and reduced to ash" (274 [10:10]). In the French original (334) and in the Polish translation (247) we can read the addition: "like in Auschwitz." This fragment has been removed from the English translations.

(ibid.). This is why "some scenes" – present in the French and Polish editions – "have been revised in this [American][155] edition" (ibid.).

I can agree with the *intention* behind these words, but I cannot agree with their actual meaning. 9/11, as any other tragic historical event, did not happen in any language – English, for obvious reasons, was the first and predominant language into which the events became *translated*.[156] It is not because of descriptions in English that we all – not only the English language users – recall "that second plane slamming into the south tower" and "put ourselves in that plane." We can all, regardless of our language and country of origin, see that plane, because if it can be said that 9/11 happened anywhere apart from time and space (i.e. exactly: September 11, 2001 in New York, Arlington, Shanksville), it would be most accurate to say that it happened *on the screen*, *as an image*.

Therefore, how can not language in general but literature in particular respond to, and represent a tragic historically, politically and culturally monumental event that was, as Baudrillard called it, an *image-event*? An image-event whose memory will forever be inseparable from its mass media coverage? This is exactly the question that was central to the present analysis of selected post-9/11 novels.

Examining thirteen novels from four different (Western) countries and stretching across a wide spectrum of formal variations of the novelistic genre, I have attempted to find a pattern that would somehow connect all these works and would allow me to draw general conclusions about these earliest (2003–2007) literary reactions to the September 11 terrorist attacks and/or their aftermath, while locating them in a wider cultural context.

What can be above all concluded about this body of writing is that it has been strongly influenced by the *image* of the attacks, which, consequently, is embedded in it. The books emphasise the role of the image as a universal means of expression understandable and accessible to everyone thanks to global television networks, which gave the event its "world scale." In this sense, post-9/11 novels reflect on the power of the audio-visual media and their effect on our perception of the world. Additionally, many of the post-9/11 novels reflect also on other media: they either contain works of visual arts (*Pattern Recognition*, *Falling Man*, *Terrorist*) or provide "links" to known artists by making their works meaningfully present (*Saturday*, *Windows*, *The Writing*). This aesthetic aspect of the early post-9/11 novel corresponds with, and evokes the problematic question of the aesthetics of the events of 9/11 themselves. Thus, literature does not shy away from confronting us with our tricky and uncomfortable position of witnesses/viewers/consumers of tragic events.

But most importantly, unlike mass media, this literature reflects on its own mode of representation. This can be seen especially in the works which additionally

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[155] And British, published earlier (2004), which seems to be more censored than the American one (2005).

[156] In the sense proposed by H. White. Any verbal account of any historical event is a translation. And such a historical text is a literary artifact.

highlight the visual and material side of their own, literary medium. Employing special typography (*Windows*, *Extremely Loud*) or iconic size and shape of the volume (*In the Shadow*), incorporating photographs and other images (*Windows*, *In the Shadow*, *Extremely Loud*), such works convey meaning also through their very form. In one case, *Windows*, the architectural structure of the book allows it to reach the greatest symbolic proximity to its subject by iconically representing it.

These qualities – hybridity, fragmentariness, collage-like structure, i.e. blending of genres, styles and modes of expression, can be seen also in other works. On the narrative level these features are accompanied by reversals and juxtapositions of hitherto stable binary oppositions (such as "adult" and "child" in *Windows*, *In the Shadow*, *Extremely Loud*, *Falling Man*, *Dear Zoe*). The quality of mixing or reversing categories has been connected here with Bakhtin's concept of carnivalisation. There may be an affinity between carnival and terror, carnival's bleak(est) variation, due to their shared potential for turning the world upside-down.

The aforesaid collapse of clear-cut boundaries and predictable structures can be said to mimic the atmosphere which early post-9/11 literature tries to reflect. Inevitably it also must address the question of psychological and emotional consequences of the events and, especially, the problem of ensuing trauma. In over a dozen novels discussed here, at least one, but usually more than one character suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder and/or depression. Apart from this, grief, fear, phobias and neurological disorders abound. In fact, it may be no exaggeration to speak about the literature's own anxiety or even trauma. This is caused by two related reasons. The first one is the undermining of the reality/fiction division (in the Western perception) following the "hyperevent" of September 11. This in turn makes certain post-9/11 works pose questions about the relation between fact and fiction, and consequently about their own ontological status, which brings them particularly close to their subject, and manifests itself in metafictionality. But there is another reason for this self-reflexivity and the abovementioned anxiety. Most of the analysed books are clearly self-conscious in both meanings of the term: 1) being self-aware and 2) being "excessively conscious of one's appearance or manner,"[157] because they are the first literary works to respond to 9/11 and its aftermath. This makes them, as I suggest following Baudrillard, the "children" of "the 'mother' of all events," and evokes a fear of not living up to their subject. Consequently, what becomes an integral part of this subject, is an awareness of this risk and the need to address it. And a (possibly unconscious) way of coping with this risk and fear may be the very use of motifs of childhood and magical thinking. As we know from anthropology, magical thinking becomes particularly activated at times of crisis, when the inability to actually affect reality in our favour breeds the need to involve oneself in substitute activities restoring psychological balance, providing comfort and hope.

An example of such a substitute activity, I suggest, is writing. A unique position in this broad category belongs to the novel. I have shown in this study how the authors of

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[157] On the basis of: http://www.thefreedictionary.com/self-conscious.

early post-9/11 novels, similarly to other artists, want to contribute their creative effort to the process of ordering the violently defamiliarised space around them. Even if this symbolic rebuilding leads to unstable, "less assured" constructs, they still – in fact, as I suggest, in this way all the more – "accommodate" the mess and chaos that is the fallout of terror. They provide a narrative framework for somehow grasping the subject, and a way of looking at it that prevents this grasp from being contained within one inflexible dogma. What is more, these works fulfil a therapeutic role – for the readers and the authors alike – by contributing to the discourse on terror, and "domesticating" it, even when calling it "inexplicable."

Trying to order a mess as big as the one after September 11, 2001 – by means of art – may ostensibly resemble the small gesture in the following quote from Beigbeder:

> The Earth slumps under the weight of rubble like a ballroom on the morning after a party. Things need to be tidied up, but no one knows where to start. Faced with the enormity of the task, we sigh, empty an ashtray. (272 [10:08])

But, as Charles Bernstein says, in one of the *110 Stories*: "The question isn't is art up to this but what else is art for?" (Baer, 46).

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