

## Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Anglo-American Writers' Responses to September 11

I think it better that in times like these  
A poet keep his mouth shut, for in truth  
We have no gift to set a statesman right;  
(W.B. Yeats, 'On being asked for a War Poem')<sup>1</sup>

Al Qaeda's attack on New York's World Trade Center on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001 sent seismic reverberations through the geopolitical bedrock of the nascent twenty-first century, but its impact on cultural politics was, and continues to be, equally momentous. Despite Norman Mailer's recommendation to Jay McInerney to 'wait 10 years ... it will take that long for you to make sense of it', recent years have begun to see the creative reflex being exercised with increasing confidence and self-assurance.<sup>2</sup> Ignoring Mailer's advice, McInerney's novel *The Good Life* was published in 2006 where it joined such fictional treatments of the events as Fredric Beigbeder's *Windows on the World* (2004), Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), Ken Kalfus' *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* (2005), Patrick McGrath's *Ghost Town* (2005) and Claire Messud's *The Emperor's Children* (2006).<sup>3</sup> John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006) and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) have also lent weight to the trend of anatomising the multivalency of post-9/11 cultural landscapes. But though 9/11 novels and stories have begun to form a sub-genre of their own, they follow a pathway of literary response that can be traced back to the immediate aftermath of the WTC's destruction. On 12<sup>th</sup> September Ian McEwan wrote of the confused but compelling horror of the events as they unfolded on the television in front of him, but in truth even he was a late starter, Paul Auster, amongst others, having recorded his impressions on the day itself.<sup>4</sup> In the week after, so many literary figures contributed commentary, consolatory, inflammatory or diagnostic pieces that by 20<sup>th</sup> September Sam Leith in the *Daily Telegraph* could provide a summative overview of the litterati's collective effort which included Auster, McEwan and McInerney, but also referenced Martin Amis, Blake Morrison and Jeanette Winterson.<sup>5</sup>

In *The New York Times* on the same day Dinitia Smith sampled the views of 'prominent authors' to discover whether the city's catastrophe would impact upon

their work.<sup>6</sup> Smith called upon Rosellen Brown, Joan Didion, Bobbie Ann Mason, Tim O'Brien, Joyce Carol Oates and John Updike, among many others to express their views on the future of writing after 9/11. By 24<sup>th</sup> September *The New Yorker* felt able to anthologise writerly responses with pieces by Updike (one of the more loquacious of respondees), Jonathan Franzen, Denis Johnson, Roger Angell, Susan Sontag and Amitav Ghosh being included.<sup>7</sup> The process of consultation with literary eminence continued on both sides of the Atlantic so that by 30<sup>th</sup> September John Dugdale could record in the *Times* that: 'Among the literary authors to have written about the World Trade Center bombing so far are Martin Amis, Peter Carey, Amitav Ghosh, David Grossman, Ian McEwan, Jay McInerney, Susan Sontag, John Updike and Jeanette Winterson'.<sup>8</sup> He goes on to itemise those of more populist literary credentials such as Robert Harris, Tom Clancy and Frederick Forsyth before concluding by mentioning Jonathan Franzen, Philip Hensher and Rick Moody.

For the literary researcher tracking down writers' responses in the days after September 11 such compulsive recording and filing of views is helpfully comprehensive and time-saving but it begs broader questions: why are the views of writers, and in particular novelists, deemed so worthy of collation and dissemination? Why in the aftermath were novelists sought out to air their opinions on the traumatic character of events? What, in other words, does the novelist have to offer that cannot be provided by reportage or political commentary? Through examining a small proportion of the body of literary response, this essay will explore the roles of the novelist in contemporary world-historical events both as explicator and arbitrator of human psychology and emotional dumbfoundedness. It will additionally address what I, following Karen Alkalay-Gut, will choose to call an aesthetics of rawness which is the reconstitution of a stable representational ground from which to regard the events that is, paradoxically, both engaged fully in the raw emotionality of the moment and sufficiently distanced from it to enable aesthetic contemplation.<sup>9</sup> In such a collision of affect and artistry the enormity of the human tragedy overwhelms the meaning-making apparatuses of narrative representation but not completely, leaving an aestheticised space that is at once paralysed and recuperative. One question that emerges in post-9/11 discourse is whether rawness and artful constructedness can be reconciled, or whether one must ultimately dominate the collective response.

The focus of this essay will be primarily on Anglo-American responses for though there are many interesting articles by writers such as Peter Carey, Ghosh and

Arundhati Roy,<sup>10</sup> British and American voices offer valuable comparative insights not only into distinct geo-specific cultural responses but also into a perceived fellow-feeling of violation and empathy that has ultimately informed and problematised the discourse of transnational kinship during the subsequent Afghan and Iraqi wars. Whether some unconscious, archaic or subcutaneous connection beyond the commonality of language or economic ‘Special Relationship’ still identifies Britain with American interests is debatable, but in examining the outpouring of benumbed fellow-feeling in the British press in the days after the attacks, one can certainly discern a sense of outrage at what is regarded as the violation of a family member. On 18<sup>th</sup> September Mary Dejevsky summarised a week of British newspaper front pages that ‘reflected British grief, British losses and British empathy with the US and its shocked public’.<sup>11</sup> Dejevsky records how several tabloids devoted their front pages to enlarged images of the American flag ‘with the invitation to display it as a mark of solidarity’ (Dejevsky 2001), and notes how on 15<sup>th</sup> September *The Mirror* ran its back page with an interlocked Union flag and Stars and Stripes. Such impassioned assertions of popular support and unity were interestingly out of kilter with the American press response which Dejevsky characterises by its ‘sobriety’ and ‘distance’. Such a dichotomy suggests the inversion of a popular stereotype of Anglo-American emotional characteristics, but it does provide intriguing contexts within which to read the copy of the writers under consideration here. A desire to empathise with America’s crisis is also a desire to reassert a shared history and a common genealogy, and, though generally more measured in their language than the press, British novelists nevertheless articulated an identification by emphasising a sympathetic world-view. Whatever our differences, we are led to infer, Britons and Americans are siblings under the skin.

My original intention had been to focus solely on the articles produced in the week after the attacks as the lack of distance and time for reflection seemed a valid starting point, but given the richness of the material that became available in October, November and December 2001, it increasingly seemed sensible to extend the area of focus to include such pieces as Toni Morrison’s elegy for ‘The Dead of September 11’, published in *Vanity Fair* in November, Don DeLillo’s article ‘In the Ruins of the Future’ which was printed just before Christmas 2001 and Joyce Carol Oates’ year-ending ‘Words Fail, Memory Blurs, Life Wins’.<sup>12</sup> The focus will additionally slip away from the novelist at times to address poetic responses such as those by Morrison

and Charles Bernstein, but primarily this essay is concerned with establishing the roles that prose writers felt were assigned to them, why some struggled for appropriate forms of words and why some fell, as Sam Leith puts it, ‘face-first down the open manhole’ (Leith 2001).

### **Street Writing:**

For Alex Houen those of us who were not victims of the attack were caught up in the ‘traumatic crossing between mediation and visceral reality’.<sup>13</sup> The scale of the disaster could be processed only with the greatest difficulty, its unrealness apprehensible only through the comforting anaesthetisation of the mediated image. The reality principle having been temporarily suspended, it was necessary, according to Houen, for the media to call upon ‘the experts at imagining the unimaginable, the masters of other worlds of possibility’ (Houen 2004, 420); the novelists. Novelists could provide ‘a restitution of reality as a common principle; personal responses that could translate suspension of belief into emotional eloquence for a public forum’ (420). It is this confirmatory engagement of the emotions with intellectual life that Alkalay-Gut describes as a ‘transient aesthetics of the art of “raw” emotion’ (Alkalay-Gut, 2005, 259) and it is here that we begin to see the complex demands that were being made of novelists in the emotionally heated aftermath. Novelists are required to feel as deeply (if not more deeply) as us, to chime with our sense of distress and bewilderment, and yet must simultaneously be above the arena of the moment, able to generate the necessary distance and objectivity to turn raw, uncauterised reality into the palatable stuff of, if not art, then certainly the artful. This tension is expressed well in Ulrich Baer’s introduction to his edited collection of stories, memories, poems and reflections, *110 Stories: New York Writes After September 11*.

Baer makes an initial discursive distinction by stating that while ‘commentators and journalists’ have produced a flood of writing, ‘no single collection has yet recorded how New York writers of literary fiction, poetry and dramatic prose – those for whom language has always been a vital concern – responded to September 11’ (Baer 2002, 1). The unsubtle but ultimately confused qualification here about those for whom language is a life-giving concern creates a hierarchical stratification of discourse that predicates a particular kind of ‘appropriate’ linguistic response. In claiming, by implication, that language is not as important a consideration for journalists as it is for writers, he suggests that ‘language’s’ mythopoeic qualities

override the everydayness of journalese but are at risk of being drowned out by the very profusion of casual and non-reflective babble. Writers, by which I mean in Baer's terminology, literary authors, are privileged for their transcendence and powers of rationalisation. But Baer takes his specification further by admitting his critical bias towards a particular kind of writer, one who is 'sharply sceptical of preconceived ideas, and willing to ask unwelcome questions and locate unwelcome truths' (3). What we are hereby presented with is a very deliberate codification of the kinds of narrative (politically or ideologically dissenting) and kinds of language (intellectually engaged, self-conscious and elevated) that are appropriate for memorialising the city's losses. By excluding from consideration significant areas of post-9/11 response such as the emotionally charged testimonial poetry and survivor accounts that overwhelmed public spaces, internet fora and periodical publications in the days after, Baer shows us not only what he believes to constitute a fitting memorial but also what he believes a writer to be.

The ironic addendum to Baer's proscription is that novelists' contributions to newspapers in the days after the attacks were, on the whole, neither dissentient nor particularly imaginatively liberating; they may have been employed for their creative skills but 'fiction is precisely what they were not being asked to produce' (Houen 2004, 420). Indeed many felt their skills for creating other worlds had escaped them as they were drawn involuntarily back to the brute realities of a situation that seemed to outstrip fiction's power for fantasy. For McEwan the line between fiction and non-fiction had been spectacularly transgressed, propelling the watcher into a dreamlike state of confusion: 'We had seen this before, with giant budgets and special effects, but so badly rehearsed' (McEwan 2001a). Aharon Appelfeld felt the pressure of his profession: 'Like everyone else, I am groping in this darkness. From a writer, people expect a wise word or a joke. But what can one say when what is happening blunts the few thoughts one has?', whilst McInerney records that in the days after the attacks 'the idea of "invented characters" and alternate realities seemed trivial and frivolous and suddenly, horribly outdated (McInerney 2005).<sup>14</sup> At the same time there is a recognition not only that fiction can offer a refuge but also of the power of art for transforming the confused, fragmented stuff of life into palatable models of reality, in Charles Bernstein's phrase: 'The question isn't is art up to this but what else is art for?'.<sup>15</sup> The point is echoed by Jeanette Winterson who asked 'What do we do? I'm still going to the theatre, to the opera, and reading books. This is not escapism – this is

confrontation. I want clarity, and art can give me that'.<sup>16</sup> The process of aestheticization as a confrontation of a terrorised asymbolia, a deliberate and self-affirming challenge to the traumatised retreat from artistic engagement, is a noticeable counterpoint to the self-disgusted conviction in the irrelevance of fiction exhibited by those such as McInerney, McEwan and Zadie Smith in the aftermath.<sup>17</sup>

Yet when Martin Amis' piece 'Fear and Loathing' (18<sup>th</sup> September 2001) tried to provide an artfully semi-detached analysis of the context in postmodernity for the attacks he was criticised by Sam Leith for a form of self-parodic hubris: 'Amis portentously recorded the date as "the eleventh day of the ninth month of 2001 (the duo-millennial anniversary of Christianity)" and summed up the damage with flip machismo: "Manhattan looked as though it had taken ten megatons"' (Leith 2001). Amis' article is certainly a curious hybrid; a wish to record his own muted impression of the day jostles with a burning desire to be the one to colour events with his patented brand of cool intellectualised swagger and tortured neologism (the 'Tuesday Terror' is how he would have us term the day).<sup>18</sup> But in many ways one could argue that Amis is doing exactly what is required of him as a novelist - disinterring from the rubble of a symbolic implosion the connecting shards of shattered meaning - and to critique him for his creative forays into linguistic machismo seems unforgiving. Leith's criticisms revolve around what he sees as a blasé, self-aggrandising posturing on Amis' part, but equally one could see him as having responded 'inadequately' or 'inappropriately' to the human cost of the events, privileging the macrocosmic ideological context over the individual losses and collective grief. Yet it seems harsh to condemn a writer for doing what is expected of him, that is, as James Woods summarises, 'to go on to the streets and figure out social reality'.<sup>19</sup> It does however re-emphasise the tension that existed in the weeks after September 11 around the role of the novelist-commentator.

Debates about the writer's relationship to social events were played out on both sides of the Atlantic in the Autumn of 2001 as both novelists and critics questioned what impact, if any, 9/11 would have on the ways in which fiction was produced and what it would address. The differences that emerge suggest that both British and American writers registered the likelihood of the events casting a shadow over the subject-matter of contemporary fiction, but there is a distinct difference in emphasis on the perceived role of the novelist. Dinitia Smith's roll-call of American writers' opinions revealed a surprisingly phlegmatic resilience to the tumult of the attacks, as she says 'while many temporarily questioned their work, they ended up

affirming to themselves the value and purpose of what they do' (Dinitia Smith, 2001). Many - including Updike who describes being a novelist as 'my contribution to the civil order' – embraced the Arnoldian notion of art as a salutary and uplifting thing 'beneficial to the general health of man' (Dinitia Smith 2001). The received opinion behind Smith's findings is that novelists have a job of work to do as part of the socio-economic fabric and should return to it as soon as possible. Stephen King even readily admits to having put in earplugs and continuing to work while the drama of 9/11 was unfolding.

By contrast, the debate that was waged in the British literary press was altogether less pragmatically informed. James Woods launched a provocative critique of contemporary American fiction in early October inciting a discussion that embraced not just the cultural fall-out, but also more broadly the ambitiousness of the twenty-first century novelist for accepting the role of social chronicler. For Woods, contemporary fiction on both sides of the Atlantic is characterised more by a self-indulgent metaphysical rumination than by a desire to understand how the world works. Wary of insensitively transgressing the boundaries of current identity politics and assuming the universality of any psycho-social position, novelists have, in Woods' view, abandoned their historical roots in social commentary in favour either of ostentatious displays of arcane and localised knowledge or the directly personal and domestic, ascribable only to the private consciousness. "[K]nowing about things" has become one of the qualifications of the contemporary novelist' (Woods 2001) but what have been lost in this specialization are the grander ambitions of the novel: recording, extrapolation and diagnosis of social reality. This tentativeness, an unwillingness to make up what cannot be known or felt directly, may, suggests Woods, be forced into more combative open-ground by the events of September 11 through the recognition that 'whatever the novel gets up to, the "culture" can always get up to something bigger' (Woods 2001). If contemporary fiction is to remain relevant as a forum for social examination, he argues, it must abandon its predilection for the flash presentism of topicality and return to its task of identifying and describing the forces that direct our lives.

Zadie Smith, one of those criticised by Woods, responded by admitting her own fallibility on the 'big' questions and deliberately confronting the impossible isolation of the novelist in moments of public trauma. Far from the glib prolixity of Amis or the dumbfounded empathy of McEwan, Smith recognises that writers 'have

the most pointless jobs in the world ... We are more like a useless irritation; the wrong words, the wrong time, the wrong medium' (Zadie Smith 2001). Does anyone really care what writers think she demands, should they address head-on the geopolitical climate post-9/11, or should they instead provide an escape route through the anaesthetising normalcy of 'love and drawing rooms and earth and children and all that is small and furry and wounded' (Zadie Smith 2001). Smith's anxiety about her role stems from a desire to find the words that are equal to the times - a commensurability that is a common locus for concern for writers at this time<sup>20</sup> - but for Andrew O'Hagan that anxiety is at the very heart of the definition of what a novel is. 9/11, he suggests, has merely connected with ongoing debates about the contemporary status of fiction: 'a couple of months ago it was clarity v. prolixity, and then after 11 September it was the unimaginable v. the imagination. Now, again ... it is the social v. the aesthetic, as if the aesthetic was something stable and unchanged by society'.<sup>21</sup> O'Hagan rejects Woods' criticism of the contemporary novel as too rigidly compartmentalising the social and aesthetic as colours on a writer's palette that must be blended for the correct combination of novelistic integrity. The aesthetic he contends emerges from the social framework, is shaped by it and in turn influences and moulds the perception of the cultural product. The problems of writerly response to September 11 therefore are not primarily caused by a dramatic rupture in the relationship between the event and the means of representation, but by the burden of adequacy, of finding the appropriate combination of words, sentiment and tone to measure against the enormity of the shock.

Very few either British or American authors were reduced to silence by the attacks but many did reveal a crushing self-consciousness about the requisiteness of their response, a requisiteness that is described by Joyce Carol Oates: 'Words fail us. There is an overwhelming wish to "sum up" - "summarize" - "put into perspective."' As if typed-out words possessed such magic and could not, instead, lead to such glib summations as "The United States had it coming" (Oates 2001). The trap of adequacy is ultimately what Amis falls into for Leith; by aestheticizing tragedy, however gesturally, he reveals a conviction in the pre-eminence of art over life and by implication, an unappealing and emotionally incorrect coldness. In truth Amis' clunky attempt at summarisation reveals not the inappropriateness of the aestheticization of tragedy, but its unavoidability.

## **The Aesthetics of Rawness**

The question proposed by Charles Bernstein of the role of art in representing such cataclysmic events underpins many of the responses by novelists in the immediate aftermath, but the incommensurability discussed above does not appear to have fundamentally hindered the production and circulation of another generic form: poetry. As Alkalay-Gut notes, within hours of the destruction of the WTC ‘poems began to surface in public places and public forums’ (Alkalay-Gut, 2005, 257). Posted on trees and noticeboards, on sidewalks and railings, these poems became, with the photographs and calls for information about the missing, enduring symbols of a disoriented grief. Poetry soon began to be exchanged and crossmailed electronically, posted on internet sites and offered in a spirit of democratic fellow-feeling. Former Poet Laureate, Robert Pinsky, records how in the days after 9/11 he was inundated with poems from friends and strangers, some original works, others chosen for the fit to the present circumstances.<sup>22</sup> Though some of this poetry reduced the art ‘to the rhyme department of clinical psychology’, Pinsky nevertheless believes that the form contains an apposite ‘vocal intimacy: a human scale of emotion and understanding’ (Pinsky 2002, 303, 306) that it gains from its curiously personal but dialogical quality. ‘Prose wasn’t enough’, claim Dennis Loy Johnson and Valerie Merians, ‘There was something more to be said that only poetry could say’.<sup>23</sup>

For Alkalay-Gut that ‘something more’ may have been the desire to communicate more directly across the disembodied space of grief for by so doing ‘one was simultaneously participating in a universal event and contributing to an understanding of a communal trauma’ (Alkalay-Gut 2005, 259). This inclusiveness gives rise to a testimonial imperative that can be identified with an aesthetics of rawness even though it would condemn any overt element of artistic constructedness. Rawness temporarily defers the artificiality of art, privileging the immediacy of articulated suffering over the contemplative impulse and, just as Amis is ‘dubious’ for his artfulness, so Alkalay-Gut claims certain kinds of ideological and representational censorship prevailed that demanded no graphic details of horror, no complex political and moral analysis, and above all no polished “poetic” poetry’ (268). This is a rejection of the mediated voice, the ventriloquised and the honorific in favour of the instinctual utterance of affect, but this in itself has its own aesthetic, and as much as the diagnostic urge is suppressed, the need for order and meaning are irresistible. Alkalay-Gut records how the day after the attack ‘almost every literary journal on the

web called for submissions to special issues devoted to September 11' (258) adding that many online journals promised to publish all submissions. On the one hand this immediate recognition of the cultural significance of the event indicates a first step in the process of aestheticization, but on the other the suspension of critical discrimination indicates a therapeutic rather than an artistic intent. Rawness here is about the democratic participation in and ownership of trauma, but at the same time its transference into a symbolic and politicised coherence.

Such a process is evident in Bernstein's 'Report from Liberty Street' from where his position on the working of art is drawn. Written between 18<sup>th</sup> September – 1<sup>st</sup> October 2001 the piece privileges the artlessness of the everyday over the self-consciously 'made'. Bernstein gradually moves from plain descriptive writing about the sights and sounds of September 11 to a more thoughtful consideration of why the events have occurred. His apparently random thoughts flick between films that he has been reminded of, advertising hoardings that he has seen to the more pressing memories of the day. The strange unnormalcy of the normal is tied together by the phrase '[T]hey thought they were going to heaven' (Bernstein 2002, 42) which appears ten times in the piece and offers itself as the only artful structuring device. Amongst the randomness of Bernstein's thoughts the phrase offers a point of fixity but also crucially a point of difference: it is, we assume, an insight into the hijackers' reasoning for their actions and, if so, the only one offered by the piece. It stands at once both as an unassimilated nub of incomprehensibility and the only meaningful statement in the prose poem. Given this context, Bernstein's comment on the purpose of art suggests that in the chaotic aftermath any kind of writing about the event will ultimately aestheticize simply because that is what the process of writing enables.

Nancy Kuhl's 'Some Thoughts on the Unthinkable' achieves something similar.<sup>24</sup> Presented as a series of bulleted sections without a central connecting thread, the piece gradually forms itself into a self-defensive deviation from knowledge at the same time as it acknowledges that the only way to engage with the unthinkable is through thinking about it. Its digressive tactics involve concrete enumerations of tragedy such as the number of people aboard each flight, the number of windows in the WTC towers, the amount paid to the shift workers tasked with clearing away the rubble, but these figures form part of a wider search for answerable questions that could bring the disaster within a system of knowledge. Kuhl intersperses her calculations of the material impact of September 11 with more personal deviations:

“How are you?” a friend asks. I say, “I am at loose ends” by which I mean: I am uncertain, uncomfortable, disoriented, afraid; I am nauseated, anxious; I am bereft, filled with grief; I am sleepless; I am confused, paralysed, utterly bewildered’ (Kuhl 2002, 238). Such adjectival perambulations distance intellect from affect and suggest the paradoxical situation that the unthinkable can only be thought about by not thinking directly about it but by allowing it to seep into the mind through displaced attention. By such a process the traumatic kernel may be brought within the realm of peripheral consciousness and eventual assimilation. Like Bernstein’s unavoidable aesthetic, Kuhl presents an unthinkable that is always already thought.

The prevalence of, particularly American, poetic responses in the immediate aftermath clearly did not preclude prose testimonies, but it is evident that each medium offered different cognitive and therapeutic approaches. For Ulrich Baer ‘Poetry offered us guidance in the first uncertain days’ (Baer 2002, 3) and for Pinsky there was an almost instinctual reflex to look to the poetic past for precedents on how best to recover.<sup>25</sup> Poetry also ‘signaled the attempt to shape the way in which one’s experience is written into history’ whereas ‘the work of fiction cauterises the wound with uncomfortable questions and unflinching reflection’ (Baer 2002, 3). This is an interesting summation in spite of Baer’s rather singular cauterisation metaphor, it dichotomizes poetry and prose into centrifugal and centripetal media: poetry is appropriate for providing solace and the inward-oriented means of recuperation, whilst prose is characterised as outward-looking, social, and politically engaged. But looking back over the responses by novelists in the week after, that neat distinction between generic responses is not clear-cut. As has been pointed out, fictiousness was not immediately requested or required of novelists and many were caught up in what I’ve been terming the aesthetics of rawness. Philip Hensher for instance emphasises the pain of identification with the suffering as a pathway to empathetic fraternalism: ‘against the unspecific, unnameable grief, there is no protection, and none that one would wish for’ (Hensher 2001). The rawness of the wound must be felt in all its intensity so that no opportunity to distance, rationalize or trivialize the magnitude of grief can be enacted.

The dominant mode of expression in prose was still testimonial, but for those novelists caught up in events, the more traditional role of social documenter offered itself. Many, particularly those resident in the city, write of the chaotic sequence of events as they experienced it, usually with a striking specificity about their locations

and movements in the hours after the attacks. Caryl Phillips is in 'lower Manhattan between 14<sup>th</sup> Street and Canal', Peter Carey is 'standing on the corner of Houston and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue' (Carey 2001b) whilst Erica Jong is at her '27<sup>th</sup> story window on East 69<sup>th</sup> Street' and John Updike is watching from 'a tenth-floor apartment in Brooklyn Heights'.<sup>26</sup> Some (Auster, Donald Antrim, Art Spiegelman) position themselves in relation to others through their phone-calls to loved ones, concerns over retrieving children from school and anxieties about restricted movement around the city to check on friends and family.<sup>27</sup> Some home-based British writers declare a vicarious interest in events by pondering as Hensher does on the 'dozens of people I was at university with [who] went into the City, and disappeared from my life into a busy existence of transatlantic crossing and arbitrage' (Hensher 2001) or as Martin Amis does in considering his 'wife's sister [who] had just taken her children to school and was standing on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Eleventh Street at 8.58am' (Amis 2001). Other British-identified writers such as Phillips and Salman Rushdie who reside periodically or permanently in New York, experienced the trauma as a personal assault against the inclusivity of the city's polyglot community. Rushdie mourns that 'They broke our city' (Rushdie 2001) whilst Phillips openly describes his dazed and tearful meanderings around a city he feels to be his. Many of those naturalized or resident in the city record their compulsion to be on the streets, connected to a social mass as hysterically uncomprehending as they felt and many simply document the unrealness of the cityscape from the war-zone appearance of Ground Zero to the impromptu shrines and memorials of Union Square. For Jay McInerney the poignancy of these sites lies in the sense of the abruptly curtailed stories they convey, the quotidian instantaneously converted into the unbearably irretrievable: 'The missing have names and faces. They have their quirks – multiple earrings, scars, sartorial statements: one is described as wearing a pinstripe suit with a yellow tie in his breast pocket ... One of the stranger posters, showed a middle-aged man standing next to an elephant'.<sup>28</sup> Such projections of the intimate into the public sphere are a response to the dissolution of the symbolic, the aesthetics of rawness involve the loss of a sense of an ending and, quite apart from their role as social documenters, it is clear from the accounts of those caught up in the drama and those accessing it through televisions that many saw their primary recuperative role in the reconstitution of the symbolic through the restitution of narrative.

### **Storeys and Plots:**

If in Baer's terms poetry offered guidance then prose 'sears the event into the collective imagination by embedding the initial shock in narratives' (Baer 2002, 3). Prose is designated the role of locating, contextualising and ordering the multiple loose ends of September 11 into credible ontological narratives because what has been lost are precisely the symbolical co-ordinates that guarantee our faith in the jumble of stories that we identify with reality. For Slavoj Žižek the period after the attacks was one of hiatus, 'the unique time between a traumatic event and its symbolic impact', a time before symbolic structure could be re-erected to justify and legitimise the acts that were to come.<sup>29</sup> The painstaking rebuilding of the symbolic edifice of New York is a task that Baer sees as the responsibility of the writers in *110 Stories*. The architectural mimicking of the twin towers' height in the homonymous title of the collection and its deliberate material similitude to the shape of a tower emphasise the extent to which the reconstruction of the city's physical appearance is deemed compatible with a reconstitution in words. If the city's construction crews and emergency services are vital to the process of remaking the physical space of Ground Zero, then it is clear that many writers saw the task of rebuilding the city's imagined space to be of equal importance. Baer suggests an equivalence between writers and rescue workers; their job may not be to provide food and blankets but they are required to provide meaning and order. For some such as McInerney there is a literal equivalence: after 9/11 he 'worked as a volunteer for a couple of months, feeding the national guardsmen and the rescue workers near Ground Zero, listening to the rumours and the strange paranoid lore of the place' (McInerney 2005), experiences that later informed his novel, *The Good Life*.<sup>30</sup>

In the immediate aftermath however what comes through most strongly amongst both American and British prose writers is the disruption of an implied narrative order, a disjunction that is described by Jonathan Franzen as a 'deep grief for the loss of daily life in prosperous, forgetful times' and by McEwan as the recognition 'that the world would never be the same (McEwan 2001a).<sup>31</sup> McEwan's two pieces (on 12<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> respectively) offer an interesting test-case of how the suspension of belief that many felt became translated into a crisis of narrative. In his first piece McEwan immediately establishes a narrative context not for the attacks themselves but our responses to them: 'even ... [the] darkest dreamers of disaster on a gigantic scale, from Tolstoy and Wells to DeLillo, could not have delivered us into the

nightmare available on television news channels yesterday afternoon' (McEwan 2001a). The disaster is so disorienting because it exists outside our realm of imagining and even Hollywood's apocalyptic precursors could not have prepared us. The deficiency here is in the symbolic order for failing to provide a narrative model which could account for the enormity of what is unfolding before us and consequently McEwan implies we are thrown into an interpretive fugue where the familiar and the unfamiliar collide in a single perceptual moment. Žižek decodes this confusion as a separation between the fantasmatic and the Real: far from the WTC attacks destroying the illusory sphere by the intrusion of the Real, 'it was before the WTC collapse that we lived in our reality, perceiving Third World horrors as something which was not actually part of our social reality ... and what happened on September 11 was that this entered our reality. It is not that reality entered our image: the image entered and shattered out reality' (Žižek 2002, 16).

McEwan reads this confusion more primitively as a loss of narrative control, an inability to direct or dictate the image as we would expect or like. His desire that the camera 'go round that tower and show me that aeroplane again; get down in the street; take me on to the roof' (McEwan 2001a) reflects a detached, directorial impulse that presupposes a narratorial trajectory, yet one that is frustrated by the unpredictable presentness of the events. As an observer McEwan is caught between a voyeuristic desire for the filmic money-shot and a terrifying seizure in the processing of the unimaginable fantasy. In contrast, by 15<sup>th</sup> September McEwan has re-established a perspectival grounding through the re-assumption of narratorial authority; that which was beyond imaging three days earlier is brought within the power of the teleological and credible. The piece begins with the reassertion of the narrative metaphor: 'Emotions have their narrative. After the shock we move inevitably to the grief, and the sense that we are doing it more or less together is one tiny scrap of consolation'.<sup>32</sup> The notion of a shared humanity has re-established itself over the isolated individualism of the initial shock and this second article is striking for its yearning to empathise with the suffering of those in the planes and towers by identifying imaginatively with their predicaments. Like Franzen who felt himself forced to 'imagine what I don't want to imagine' (Franzen 2001), McEwan projects himself into the aircraft during the process of dumb realisation that something beyond horror is being enacted. For him the mobile phone – iconic symbol of the era of late-capitalism – is the means to show 'an ancient, human universal': love.<sup>33</sup> Like

McInerney's severed lives displayed through posters and photos, the last messages to loved ones are affecting because 'they compel us to imagine ourselves in that moment. What would we say?' (McEwan 2001b). Imagination is so important here because it is exactly the quality that the terrorists lack in McEwan's opinion, a lack that reveals itself in their failure to empathise with their hostages. 'If' he contends 'the hijackers had been able to imagine themselves into the thoughts and feelings of the passengers they would have been unable to proceed' (McEwan 2001b). This second article is a moving piece of writing partly because it does what all good fiction does which is to project the reader into the situation of the protagonists, but also because its consolation comes in the form of a story, a cause and effect narrative that goes some way to filling the 'howling space' (DeLillo 2001) by re-engineering imaginative connections temporarily severed by the disaster.

McEwan was not alone in seeing the attacks as a crisis of narrative. In his essay 'In the Ruins of the Future' Don DeLillo agrees that 'the event itself has no purchase on the mercies of analogy or simile. We have to take the shock and horror as it is' (DeLillo 2001), but he disagrees with those such as Oates who see the events as beyond description, believing instead that the day's happenings were precipitated by, enacted through and resisted by a complex intertwining of narratives and counternarratives. Written from the perspectives of several months after the events, DeLillo is able to suggest that what occurred on September 11 was a collision of narratives where one ideology of economic privilege, which 'summoned us all to live permanently in the future' (DeLillo 2001), came into conflict with a competing ideology dedicated to the restitution of the past. 9/11 is thus a clashing of global narratives with the terrorists' spectacularly triumphant; their America-hating story of dispossession and indifferent geopolitical interference, which for most Americans has been played out beyond their field of political vision, has intervened in the narrative of progress, prosperity and self-empowerment held by the West. Effectively, DeLillo suggests, it is not just the four planes that were hijacked on that day, but the narrative of entitlement and security that had become so inured against dissent.

By contrast to the breadth of the Western world, that of the terrorist is narrowed by plotting for: 'plots reduce the world. He builds a plot around his anger and our indifference' (DeLillo 2001). The double meaning of plot as a covertly planned operation and a collection of events mapped into a structured coherent pattern points here towards DeLillo's collocation of the terrorist and the writer as agents of

social and political upheaval (a comparison at the heart of his 1991 novel *Mao II*). Plots in both senses involve the ordering of circumstances for particular ends; they indicate a centralised control and the privileging of particular ways of reading events and in both political and narratological contexts they enable powerful teleological impulsion. For DeLillo the terrorists' narrative of self-sacrifice and justifiable murder in the name of religion is refined by the process of plotting to the point that it occludes all that does not support or further its implementation. The 'narrative ends in the rubble and it is left to us to create the counternarrative' (DeLillo 2001). The plotting involved in the production of counternarratives is directed at the process of reclamation through the generation of narratives that reintroduce breadth, diversity of vision and multiplicity of perspective. The counternarratives to 9/11 are the profusion of stories that press in on each other and inhabit the absent space left by the WTC; they operate through proximity and propinquity and can emerge from the banal as readily as from the considered: 'just as scraps from two unrelated conversations can momentarily spark new meaning when they meet in the empty space just before a subway door slams shut, when the light changes, or before an elevator that has just disgorged one load of storied passengers is rushed by a new crop of stories pushing in' (Baer 2002, 9).

Counternarratives are thus oppositional in their multiplicity and affirmative in their humanness and stand in contrast to the unitariness of the terrorists' narrative. The babble of stories, anecdotes, testimonies, rumours, half-truths, mishearings and lies are all counternarratives as are the thousands of sheets of paper that fell like confetti from the towers; uncontained and unprogrammatically these micronarratives of individual lives resist the dogma of the plot and offer a way of reclaiming the hijacked narrative through sheer profusion of response. And this is ultimately why for DeLillo language is not stilled by the workings of tragedy: the writer must project her/himself into the towers or the planes because 'language is inseparable from the world that provokes it' (DeLillo 2001) and the need to imagine and reconstruct emerges from a primal terror of not understanding human feelings. To imagine the unimaginable is a necessary rehabilitation, a powerful counternarrative to the dominance of terroristic discourse.

### **Seen and Obscene:**

If, as the previous section has shown, both American and British writers responded to the drama of September 11 as a crisis or collision of narratives, then that was partly due to the spectacularly filmic quality of the unfolding events. An operation planned with ‘a pause of 15 minutes, to give the world time to gather round its TV sets’ was for Martin Amis ‘the apotheosis of the postmodern era – the era of images and perceptions’ (Amis 2001), and this self-consciously visual aspect to the attack was something that was picked up over and over by the first novelist respondees. Subsequent critical thinking about the day, most notably by Jean Baudrillard in *The Spirit of Terrorism* (2002) and Slavoj Žižek in *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (2002), has effectively theorised the ironic return of the postmodern spectacle but my intention here is not to rehearse those arguments.<sup>34</sup> Rather this final section will address the motif of mediation that emerges repeatedly from the initial accounts to reveal how the distinction between looking and seeing became increasingly important.

For home-based British writers, the events unfolded solely televisually and, as is discernable from McEwan’s Amis’ and Hensher’s responses, that distance was both an anaesthetising and a disempowering experience. The interspace of mediation articulates the confusion of one’s simultaneous inclusion in a world-historical event and separation from it, and for these writers that hiatus increased the derealising effect of the drama. By contrast, almost universally amongst the American authors addressed here the sight of such magisterial destruction forms a point of compulsive immediacy, a traumatic core that draws the eye at the same time that it quiets the imagination. Most record when and where they first saw the attack or its consequences and, for New York writers in particular, the disjunction between watching events develop on television and seeing the burning towers from windows, balconies or roofs leads to a dislocation of the real which for some is profoundly disturbing. A.M. Homes is overpowered by the magnitude and ‘ever-unfolding implications’ of the attacks and recognises that ‘seeing it with your own eye, in real time, not on a screen, not protected by the frame of the television set, not set up and narrated by an anchor man, not in the communal darkness of a movie theatre, seeing it like this is irreconcilable, like a hallucination, a psychotic break’.<sup>35</sup> There is no anaesthetic for the witnessing mind here, only the irreconcilable crisis of seeing without frames. Such is also the dilemma for Art Spiegelman who asserts that his own return to ‘narcotized normality’ has been slower than others because he ‘first experienced those events unmediated by television’ (Spiegelman 2002, 254). As for

Homes the trauma of witnessing is the trauma of seeing without having the ability to mediate, distance or deflect the unbidden images. Homes' way out of this horrifying engagement with the real is to artificially manufacture defining frames by taking 'dozens of pictures, clicking faster, more frantically, as I feel myself pushing away' (Homes 2002, 152). The unwillingness to encounter the unimaginable directly and to record it instead is a displacement, the erection of a protective shielding for the self behind the objective eye of the camera. This framing apparatus provides an edge (however peripheral) to the drama for in order to accept what is happening centre-stage there has to be an acknowledgement (albeit tacit) that a corresponding off-stage exists. Without that division, the events taking place in full view become decontextualised and monstrously huge.

The irony of Homes' response is that the unimaginable real is turned into the aesthetic product whereas for most the events are interpreted initially as fiction before the seeping dread of actuality takes over. Homes, Spiegelman and Siri Hustvedt emphasise a hierarchy of trauma, forging a distinction between the witness and the voyeur with the 'psychotic break' of the former taking precedence over the (dis)comfort of the latter.<sup>36</sup> This dichotomy of experience is also identified by Paul Auster who describes the derealising effect of television and the need to confirm through sight: 'All day ... I have watched the horrific images on the television screen and looked at the smoke through the window' (Auster 2002, 35). Erica Jong similarly comments 'Between the eerie uptown streets and the blazing television sets replaying and replaying the moment of impact, there was a profound disconnect' (Jong 2002, 217) and records how, in the days after, many New Yorkers went to Ground Zero 'as if we need proof that this was not just another disaster movie' (220). The seen and the scene are inextricably connected in most accounts, symbolically cross-fertilising the smack of the real with the virtual reality of image and representation. But how, Žižek wonders, could we read what was happening in any other way when the frames of perception have been so robustly planted in our collective Western imagination by a series of catastrophic movies libidinally channelling our anxieties and fears of penetration and humiliation into fantasies that we both recognise and misrecognise when they are enacted upon us. The dialogue between seeing and witnessing in post-9/11 discourse is thus both an acceptance and a denial of the shifting ontological spaces and politics of late-postmodernism.

Whatever the response to September 11 may have been it was certainly not wordlessness in the face of an act of audacious postmodern terrorism, nor was there any significant collective imaginative hiatus as some have claimed. Rather there appears to have been a deliberate writing out of trauma, a self-conscious desire to capture the moment in all its rawness and intensity. Its aesthetic is determined by a rejection of reflection as in the case of William Heyen's collection *September 11, 2001: American Writers Respond* which was proposed to a publisher within days of 9/11 and whose introduction was written before any responses were received. This desire to catch at the mute disorder and confusion of the aftermath and turn it into a knowingly post-traumatised narrative may be one ramification of the popular currency of theories of psychological distress within Western culture and it may be a product of the technological democracy that enables and validates broad public participation in instantly globalized events. But what is clear from the flood of literary responses is that the working through of the trauma went hand in hand with its aestheticization, a paralleling that in some cases produced work of moving transcendence and in others led to overblown and premature philosophising.

It is clear that in seeking to distinguish between British and American writerly responses one is vulnerable to lumpen and unenlightening generalisations, and, in an age of transnational identity formulations, such discriminations may run the risk of arbitrariness. But what is equally clear is that geographical distance does produce a distinctly different timbre to the response of British writers. For all Martin Amis' mid-Atlantic posturings, British writers generally tended towards more measured idioms and were, on the whole, quicker to analyse and prognosticate on the likely causes and effects of the attacks. Distance may yield perspective but what is also evident is the desire to identify with and share in America's suffering; the attack is seen less as an assault on economic or foreign policy than on a symbolical projection of collective Western desire. The reverberations of the WTC's destruction are felt across the Atlantic Ocean as a scarcely believable broadside against a community of diverse imaginings, a detotemization of a globally owned fantasy which, in its moment of tragedy, is revealed only as a fantasy of the West. The Britons that Blake Morrison describes cruising the 'designer discount stores by the World Trade Centre[sic]' (Blake Morrison 2001) have, as fully as the American and British writers who bewail its injury, constructed New York as an outpost of capitalism's democratic

invulnerability, a myspace of the imagination. Its disarrangement is as much a serious blow to the idea of New York as it is to its material fabric.

The last words should perhaps be left to Toni Morrison whose poem 'The Dead of September 11' is a reminder that the ultimate dislocation caused by the attack was that between those that survived and those that didn't. For all its virtuosity in the face of the unthinkable, language is insufficient in consoling the dead. For Morrison language becomes crowded from the weight of use and is cumbersome and ineffectual at expressing honesty, transparency and integrity. Speaking to the dead she suggests must involve a recognition that speaking is always inflected by the different opinions, values and beliefs that we hold as individuals, we are always speaking 'about' something. Morrison strives to memorialise 9/11 by cutting through the already-spoken quality of language in search of the core of humanity that unites us all. Language fails to tell adequately because it is rooted in a desire to explain or to justify. Her advice, applicable to many who have been addressed by this essay, is that we should try to understand less and instead communicate through a non-verbal form of comfort: 'I want to hold you in my arms and as your soul got shot of its box of flesh to/ understand, as you have done, the wit/ of eternity' (Toni Morrison 2001).

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<sup>1</sup> W.B. Yeats, 'On being asked for a War Poem', *Collected Poems*, (London: Macmillan, 1982), 175.

<sup>2</sup> Jay McInerney, 'The Uses of Invention', *Guardian*, 17 September 2005, <http://www.jaymcinerney.com/guardiansept05.html> (2 March 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Ian McEwan's *Saturday*, which treats the attacks obliquely through the collision of personal and political responsibility in a post-9/11 climate was also published in 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Ian McEwan, 'Beyond Belief', *Guardian*, 12 September 2001, 2; Paul Auster, 'Random Notes – September 11, 2001, 4:00PM; Underground' in Ulrich Baer (ed.), *110 Stories: New York Writers After September 11*, (New York, New York University Press, 2002), 34-36.

<sup>5</sup> Sam Leith, 'Writers who let their words get in the way as tragedy unfolded', *Daily Telegraph*, 20 September 2001, 20.

<sup>6</sup> Dinitia Smith, 'Novelists Reassess Their Subject Matter', *New York Times*, 20 September 2001, Section E, 1.

<sup>7</sup> 'The Talk of the Town', *The New Yorker*, 24 September 2001, [http://www.newyorker.com/printables/talk/010924ta\\_talk\\_wtc](http://www.newyorker.com/printables/talk/010924ta_talk_wtc) (27 February 2007).

<sup>8</sup> John Dugdale, 'World Trade Center Bombing', *Sunday Times*, 30 September 2001, 37.

<sup>9</sup> Karen Alkalay-Gut, 'The Poetry of September 11: The Testimonial Imperative', *Poetics Today*, 26:2 (Summer 2005), 257-279.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Carey, 'We close our eyes and say a prayer, although I don't know who I'm praying to. There is no God', *Observer*, 23 September 2001, <http://www.observer.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,,556597,00.html> (2 March 2007), 'Union Square in Baer (2002), 54-56; Amitav Ghosh, 'Neighbours', *The New Yorker*, 24 September 2001, reprinted in Baer (2002), 102-105; Arundhati Roy, 'The Algebra of Infinite Justice', *Guardian*, 29 September 2001, 1, 'Brutality Smearred in Peanut Butter', *Guardian*, 23 October 2001,

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/afghanistan/story/0,,579195,00.html> (5 March 2007). There is also the added connection that many British writers in particular established a psychological and sometimes geographical affiliation with America, such as Salman Rushdie who declared New York ‘our city’ (Salman Rushdie, ‘Fighting the Forces of Invisibility’, *New York Times*, 2 October 2001, 25), or Blake Morrison who claimed: ‘There are people in the southern half of this country who know Manhattan far better than they do Glasgow or Manchester’ (Blake Morrison, ‘We Weren’t there for Troy or the burning of Rome. This time there were cameras’, *Guardian*, 14 September 2001, 6.

11 Mary Dejevsky’s, ‘The Great Transatlantic Divide’, *Independent*, 18 September 2001, 8.

12 Toni Morrison, ‘The Dead of September 11’, *Vanity Fair*, November 2001 reprinted at [http://www.legacy-project.org/index.php?page=lit\\_detail&litID=83](http://www.legacy-project.org/index.php?page=lit_detail&litID=83) (5 May 2007); Don DeLillo, ‘In the Ruins of the Future’, *Guardian*, 22 December 2001, <http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/generalfiction/story/0,,623732,00.html> (4 April 2007); Joyce Carol Oates, ‘Words Fail, Memory Blurs, Life Wins’, *New York Times*, 31 December 2001, 11.

13 Alex Houen, ‘Novel Spaces and Taking Place(s) in the Wake of September 11’, *Studies in the Novel*, 36:3 (Fall 2004), 419.

14 Aharon Appelfeld, no title, *The New Yorker*, 24 September 2001.

15 Charles Bernstein, ‘Report from Liberty Street’, in Baer (2002), 46.

16 Jeanette Winterson, ‘In a world that makes no sense, artists, writers and actors have a right to speak out against war’, *Guardian*, 16 October 2001, 11.

17 McEwan stated in interview that the 9/11 attacks prompted in him a turn away from fiction toward firmer factual reading-matter: ‘I did find it wearisome to confront invented characters ... I wanted to be told about the world. I wanted to be informed.’ (Rachel Donadio, ‘Truth is Stronger than Fiction’, *New York Times*, 7 August 2005, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/07/books/review/07DONA2.html?ex=1184126400&en=2dbebea0d6de881b&ei=5070>, [9 May 2007]). Zadie Smith complained of her own sense of imaginative ennui: ‘Sick of sound of own voice. Sick of trying to make own voice appear on that white screen. Sick of trying to pretend ... that idea of words on blank page feels important.’ (Zadie Smith, ‘This is how it feels for me’, *Guardian*, 13 October 2001, <http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/generalfiction/story/0,,568381,00.html>, [23 April 2007]).

18 Martin Amis, ‘Fear and Loathing’, *Guardian* 18 September 2001, <http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/politicsphilosophyandsociety/story/0,,553923,00.html>, (9 May 2007).

19 James Woods, ‘Tell me how does it feel?’, *Guardian*, 6 October 2001, <http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/generalfiction/story/0,,563868,00.html>, (23 April 2001).

20 In his poem ‘New York, 12 September 2001’ Breyten Breytenbach addresses exactly this struggle for a suitable form of words through repeated use of the phrase ‘who will tell today’ and the final question: ‘will any poem some day ever carry sufficient weight/ to leave the script of scraps recalling fall and forgetting/ will death remain quivering in the paper’, in Baer (2002), 49-50.

21 Andrew O’Hagan, ‘Everything Must Go!’, *London Review of Books*, 23:24 (13 December 2001), [http://www.lrb.co.uk/v23/n24/print/ohag01\\_.html](http://www.lrb.co.uk/v23/n24/print/ohag01_.html), (2 May 2007).

22 Robert Pinsky, ‘Enormity and the Human Voice’ in William Heyen (ed.), *September 11, 2001 American Writers Respond*, (Silver Springs, MD: Etruscan Press, 2002), 303.

23 Dennis Loy Johnson and Valerie Merians (eds), ‘Foreword’, *Poetry After 9/11: An Anthology of New York Poets*, (Hoboken, NJ: Melville House, 2002), ix.

24 Nancy Kuhl, ‘Some Thoughts on the Unthinkable’, in Heyen (2002), 237-239.

25 Blake Morrison recalls how he picked up books for light relief in the days after the attacks and came across ‘Musée des Beaux Arts’, ‘W.H. Auden’s famous meditation on how great events always catch us unawares, when we’re opening a window or just walking dully along’ (Morrison 2001).

26 Caryl Phillips, ‘Ground Zero’, *Guardian*, 14 September 2001, 8; Erica Jong, ‘New York at War’, in Heyen (2002), 217; John Updike ‘[September 13 2001]’, in Heyen (2002), 380.

27 Paul Auster (2001); Donald Antrim, no title, *The New Yorker*, 24 September 2001; Art Spiegelman, ‘Re: Covers’ in Baer (2002), 284-286.

28 Jay McInerney, ‘Names and Faces that keep the missing on our minds: Remembering New York’s disappeared’, *Guardian*, 22 September 2001, 12.

29 Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Dessert of the Real*, (London: Verso, 2002), 44.

30 Like McInerney, several of the novelist-commentators addressed here have gone on to produce full-length fictional treatments of the events of 9/11 and their impact on twenty-first century culture. McInerney’s novel reprises the characters from *Brightness Falls* (1992) and situates them and their mid-life crises around the drama of the day, while McEwan’s *Saturday* (2005) offers a subtle but

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strangely colourless account of the nervy political climate in the lead-up to the Iraqi war. John Updike's *Terrorist* attempts to project the reader into the mind of a home-grown, half-Egyptian, half-Irish teenager radicalised by Islam in the face of America's moral exhaustion, whilst Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* focuses on the traumatised compulsion to testify through the voice of a survivor from the Towers.

<sup>31</sup> Jonathan Franzen, no title, *The New Yorker*, 24 September 2001.

<sup>32</sup> Ian McEwan, 'Only love and then oblivion', *Guardian*, 15 September 2001, <http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/politicsphilosophyandsociety/story/0,,555258,00.html>, (5 March 2007).

<sup>33</sup> Writing on the same day Fergal Keane comes to a similar conclusion; 'it is the battle between love – as those telephone calls so powerfully exemplified – and hate' (Fergal Keane, 'It is not terrorism we're fighting – it is hatred', *Independent*, 15 September 2001, 3).

<sup>34</sup> Baudrillard's and Žižek's readings of the events as an ironic return of the West's postmodern self-regard have been perhaps the most widely adopted theoretical positions amongst humanities scholars of 9/11. Crucially their unAmericanness lends an – at times – confrontational distance to their views, particularly their interpretations of events within symbolical rather than material realms, but in this they follow the leads of Karl-Heinz Stockhausen and Damian Hirst who are alleged to have claimed the collision of the planes and towers as a work of art. (See Julia Spinola, 'Monstrous Art', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 25 September 2001, [http://www.osborne-conant.org/documentation\\_stockhausen.htm](http://www.osborne-conant.org/documentation_stockhausen.htm), (23 April 2007); Rebecca Allison, '9/11 wicked but a work of art, says Damian Hirst', *Guardian*, 11 September 2002, <http://arts.guardian.co.uk/news/story/0,,790058,00.html>, (19 April 2007).

<sup>35</sup> A.M. Homes, 'We All Saw It, or The View from Home', in Baer (2002), 151.

<sup>36</sup> Siri Hustvedt, 'The World Trade Center' in Baer (2002), 158-9.