The shadow of the Falling Man as an end of (im)mediate trauma

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1. Introduction

“das Paradies liegt nun zwischen uns”

9/11 has often been called a semiotic event, a “total breakdown of all meaning-making systems,” as Kristian Versluys writes in his book September 11 and the novel. This can be read as an indirect response to Don DeLillo’s essay, “In the Ruins of the Future,” written shortly after the events in December 2001, in which he describes writing post 9/11 as filling a hole: “There is something empty in the sky. The writer tries to give memory, tenderness, and meaning to all that howling space.” This void in the depiction of 9/11 is an essential criterion in the attempt to establish a system of organization for the different kinds of novels dealing with 9/11. While struggling with the representation of the void, they must also face the crisis of depiction, which has established the discussion of a cesura in literary, as much as in American, history. I argue that most literary responses have copied the media’s unmediated response to 9/11, while certain texts have opposed this response. The latter have created a strong literary role within the responses to 9/11, disintegrating the concept of a cesura in literary history post 9/11.

While the novels written after 9/11 are often grouped together under the umbrella term “Post-9/11-novel”, I see a strong need for more differentiated categories. Twelve years after 9/11, if we look at the great pool of novels that have been published, two categories have emerged. To the first category, I would like to assign the term “9/11-novels.” These novels attempt to fill the gap left by 9/11 in order to give a full account of the events of that day, thus creating a complete explanation and reintegration of the attacks into a narrative, cultural context. The second category, on the other hand, consists of novels that consciously search for the gap in events, looking for a new narrative form in the face
of traumatic events, characterized by a strong belief that the gap might never be overcome, that narration might never be able to adequately describe the traumatic experience. Their approach towards this confrontation is dialogical, and prepares the terrain for a departure from 9/11. I refer to this second group as the “Post-9/11 novel.”

Based on two novels, this essay explains the development away from a compulsive reproduction of trauma towards an integration of the events of 9/11 within the 21st century American novel: while Jonathan Safran Foer’s novel Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close (2005) remains wedged in the desire for a pre-9/11 America, Jess Walter’s novel The Zero (2006) is already looking to the future of American identity, for an “after, a “post.” His “falling man” is no longer the image of a man jumping into his own death but rather that of a man on a search for reintegation after an emotional, intellectual and societal fall.

2. (Im)mediated utopia

“Trauma is what is absolutely there. But to describe it in metaphor is already to be partly outside it.”

9/11 has not only been a crucial event in American history but also in the history of media representation, since its unique use of live coverage can be closely linked to trauma theory. The strong impact of traumatic experience is due to its immediacy, as leading trauma scholar Cathy Caruth points out: "It is not, that is, having too little or indirect access to an experience that places its truth in question, in this case, but paradoxically enough, its very overwhelming immediacy, that produces its belated uncertainty." Due to the traumatic experience being unprocessed at the time of its unraveling, it leaves a blank space, a kind of mental ground zero where memory should be located, hence supporting the (immediate) repetition instead of the (mediated) memory of the experience: “If repression, in trauma, is replaced by latency, this is significant in so far as its blankness – the space of unconsciousness – is paradoxically what precisely preserves the event in its literality.” Sigmund Freud describes this creation of traumatic memory in his much-quoted essay The Pleasure Principle (1920): “The patient cannot remember everything repressed in him – maybe not even the most important thing – and thus gets no convincing evidence that the construction communicated to him is accurate. Indeed, he is compelled to repeat the repressed content as current experience instead of remembering it, as the physician would prefer, as part of the past.” Since traumatic events cannot be mediated or integrated into one’s own memory, they can only be repeated in their literality. Instead of an integrated, contextualized memory, “a void, a hole is found.”

The live coverage of 9/11—TV broadcasts of the towers’ collapse, without comment apart from the frequent exclamations of terror—reflects this very idea of traumatic experience. In its structure, the immediate transmission of falling bodies (that were prohibited from public viewing only later) resembles the experience of traumatic impact, since the TV audience bears witness to 9/11 in its unedited form. Just as traumatic events skip processing at their moment of unraveling, TV skips the editing process in its live coverage of 9/11. In film, the audience is happily ready to accept a signifier without expecting the existence of the signified. A dead person in a film remains nothing more than a signifier existing in relation to other signifiers within the film, creating a structure
that is completely independent from any correlation with reality. This explains the numerous descriptions of the towers’ collapse as resembling a movie scene. On 9/11, however, the signifier on TV receives a signified, inseparably linked to reality: Unlike a movie character, the symbol of the “Falling Man” signifies a real person. The images of the towers’ destruction and the falling bodies represent the last seconds of a human being; they refer to actual death: “Something happened, was happening, was happening over and over – in memory and on television and in memory and on television [...] There was nothing to call it because it had taken over reality entirely.” Therefore, the media deprives itself of its own identity, becoming abstract and bodiless, and fully transmits death—as Paul Virilio predicted long before 9/11. Without mediation, the event adopts its traumatic character: exposure to immediate presentation resembles that of actual testimony to the event. Judith Greenberg notes that “[i]n place of the psychological and geographical distance, the images of trapped and falling bodies pull one into an immediate confrontation with the dead body of the Other.” While this undelayed transmission raises ethical questions—how can the death of hundreds of people be mediated? Which narrative form would be adequate?—it also points to the media’s own existential crisis, which, robbed of its very essence as mediator, must redefine its identity.

Since immediate presentation of reality, however, merely shows without interpreting, it falls flat in the moment of the towers’ dissolution: “They passed some guy on Canal Street painting the towers. Glancing south, they could only see the billowing toxic smoke... the damned model had moved,” Art Spiegelman writes about the uncanny presence of absence after 9/11, and compares New York to a “ghost town.” The mediated horror dissolves into an Ort Null, a Ground Zero, named after the debris Hiroshima left behind, a No-Place as Virilio might call it, a U-Topos. On 9/11, Virilio’s prediction of the media’s complete abstraction of the event turns into a concrete utopian horror: since there is no signifier for the emptiness at Ground Zero, and since presentation depends on its correlation with the signified and with reality, it becomes impossible in the face of the absent. Ground Zero, thus, can be understood as a symbol of traumatic experience in general: instead of integrated experience, it leaves a gap within memory, a so-called traumatic memory.

The complete disappearance of the towers, the victims’ dissolution, and the lack of bodies all nurture the desire for material traces or a remnant one could say goodbye to, since “[p]rocesses of grief often involve a need for a material trace of the dead.” While the actual presentation is unable to transmit such a trace, re-presentation, however, stands the chance of creating such a remnant: “A representation maintains the trace of an absent object to which it refers analogously, thus affirming both its visual resemblance and its temporal and spatial difference.” Although the live transmission of events and their immediate presentation proves to be traumatic, their delayed procession makes therapeutic re-presentation possible. What Walter Benjamin calls a kind of “optisches Unbewusstes” and what literary scholar Marianne Hirsch attributes to photography is true for the mediation of 9/11 transmission in general: “To photograph, we might say, is to look in a different way – to look without understanding. Understanding is deferred until we see the developed image.” In the context of having complete exposure to the events, recording them allows for their subsequent understanding and reintegration: “Even as we watched, we wanted to record everything ourselves.” This desire to record has its roots in ancient times, as Viktor Ieronim Stoichita points out in his history of art and shadow: “Wenn das Bild (als Schatten, Malerei, Statue) in der plinianischen Tradition
das Andere des Selben ist, ist für Platon das Bild (als Schatten, Spiegelung, Malerei, Statue) das Selbe als Kopie, das Selbe im Status des Doppels."¹¹ For Platon, the image already holds a negative connotation, as it represents the original’s deterioration and thus remains wedged in what Lacan calls “the state of the Imaginative”, a state of self-identification. The Plinian tradition, on the other hand, allows for the introduction of the Other within art. It closely links the Self with the Other and constantly points to its own identity as a re-presentation. As a result of this metanarrative process, it casts its own remnant or shadow²², which Victor Stoichita says is an essential byproduct of a dialogical discussion of the self. In order to move from mere presentation to re-presentation, 9/11 needs such an inclusion of the Other. The omnipresent recordings of the event, therefore, make re-presentation possible and, in turn, re-interpretation as well. They introduce the possibility of integrating the event into cultural memory, therefore filling Ground Zero with new meaning.

9 Not surprisingly, only a day after the event, the media was overly concerned with the creation of meaning. The flood of images reappeared, in what seemed like an intention to completely erase the absence, as well as its own trauma. “It is as if the sign of disaster, this irrefutable, brutal absence revealed in and at Ground Zero, demands that ‘the hole in the real,’ the term that the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan once used to express the sudden apparition of death, not be allowed to remain empty”²². The actual event, however, remains absent in these mass images: In fact, it can be read as another symptom of the media’s own trauma, namely the compulsive need for repetition of the event. As described above, traumatic experience cannot be mediated nor integrated into one’s own memory, and can only be repeated in its literality – always in the hope of overcoming the trauma. Thus, the constant looping of the towers’ collapse shows a sort of standstill, a “Leerlauf,”²⁴ as Virilio calls it. At the same time, “the image of the earlier disaster lies behind the later event like a ghostly, tragic presence. It is the phantom image behind the image, the invisible writing behind the writing, the dark shadow moving at the bottom of the well of the present.”²⁵ However, the desire for a coping mechanism to deal with the empty space – a completion of Ground Zero – leads to the abandonment of this shadow, this remnant that is essential to the working-through of traumatic experiences.

10 The desire to explain the event has established a “tyranny of meaning”²⁶ at Ground Zero. The images become political, simplified, and receptors of a message. Thus, they are no longer mere presentations: “Interpretation overwhelms event; metaphor replaces history.”²⁷ Art Spiegelman describes this process of creating meaning after 9/11 as one-dimensional: “I had anticipated that the shadows of the towers might fade while I was slowly sorting through my grief and putting it into boxes. I hadn’t anticipated that the hijackings of September 11 would themselves be hijacked by the Bush cabal that reduced it all to a war recruitment poster.”²⁸ He expresses his fear of losing his own images of 9/11 in the “Darwinism”²⁹ of images carried out by the media: “I wanted to sort out the fragments of what I’d experienced from the media images that threatened to engulf what I actually saw.”³⁰ Instead of dealing with his own experiences of the event, he is now haunted by “images he didn’t witness... images of people tumbling to the streets below...especially one man (according to a neighbor) who executed a graceful Olympic dive as his last living act.”³¹ Although “flattening and miniaturizing death is a coping strategy,” a simple refilling of the gap and a simplification of the traumatic experience are politicizations for Spiegelman, since “new traumas began competing with still-
fresh wounds and the nature of my project began to mutate.” Thus, without a signifier for absence, reality cannot be adequately described, especially not after 9/11. Therefore, the strong US desire for memorialization ironically leads to a loss of memory: “Nothing like commemorating an event to help you forget it. September 11, 2001, was a memento mori, an end to civilization as we knew it. By 2003, Genuine Awe has been reduced to the mere ‘shock and awe’ of jingoistic strutting.”

Spiegelman’s own attempt to answer a magazine’s call for a commentary on 9/11 merely ends in “a black-on-black afterimage of the towers published six days after the attack.” Ironically, however, it is this very shadow that embodies the departure from trauma. For the working-through of trauma, the simplified and politicized representations of 9/11 do not suffice. In fact, they need an additional quality: a scrutinizing of their own existence as media, a critical look back at themselves. Just as Plinius describes the importance of shadow in the production of art in ancient times—it was only possible since artist and model were not identical—the difference between image and original, signifier and signified needs to be rendered visible again in the context of 9/11. While the politicized and simplified representations of 9/11 remain wedged in a state of what Lacan calls the Imaginative—which does not yet belong to the Symbolic Order realm necessary for overcoming trauma—the shadow always refers to the Other, to the Symbolic Order. “We must learn to see in the interval between frames, to tear perception away from technology in order to render visible the invisible, the ‘never-before-seen’ of mechanical vision. Writing [...] resituates the body at the center of perception and restores the element of deferred time lost with the real time communication of the screen.”

The hopes of overcoming trauma, therefore, point towards an integration into the Symbolic Order, towards writings, and towards literature.

3. The shadow of the Falling Man as the end of trauma

“Sometimes I think fiction writers are the only ones who can make sense of what has happened to us since 9/11.”

The numerous lectures and readings following 9/11 reflect a strong effort to find an alternative to omnipresent images. They all strive to depart from the repetition of trauma, of making the gap disappear, of explaining the inexplicable. They search for the dissolution of fragments, for the connection of individual parts, for causalities. While some of them fall into the same pattern as the political media messages post 9/11, another category of novels emerges, carrying its own shadow and, thus, moving beyond the traumatic experience of 9/11.

If we look at the first category of novels following the media’s attempt to erase the absence post 9/11, they ceaselessly haunt the events of 9/11. Jonathan Safran Foer’s bestseller is an example of this kind of literary approach to 9/11: Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close explains the search by nine-year old Oskar Schell, whose father died in the World Trade Center, for a key he found in his father’s belongings. The search resembles that of an archeologist trying to put his single findings together in a meaningful context: “I could connect them to make almost anything I wanted, which meant I wasn’t getting closer to anything. And now I’ll never know what I was supposed to find.” He correctly calls this search “fixing a Hole” and the dispersion of insecurity: “I want to stop inventing. If I could know how he died, exactly how he died, I wouldn’t have to
invent him dying inside an elevator that was stuck between floors, which happened to some people, and I wouldn’t have to imagine him trying to crawl down the outside.”

To Oskar, the end of trauma can only happen once he finds the actual owner of the key at the end of the novel and once every single detail has been explained. This attempt to overcome the traumatic experience, however, remains a superficial one. No actual working-through of the trauma takes place. On the one hand, the choice of using a child’s perspective symbolizes the feeling of not being able to meet head-on with the traumatic experience. Even more important, though, is the gapless explanation of the event itself: while the images function as foreign objects within the narration, they are quickly embedded into the story. The event is deprived of the inexplicable, and the gap is filled. Since Foer reestablishes the story’s equilibrium, he falls into the pattern followed by numerous 9/11 novels, which describe the trauma but fail to offer new approaches for moving past it. Instead, they are characterized by the desire to return to a world prior to 9/11. By denying the absence, by filling the gaps within one’s memory and experience, plus those left by propaganda and the media, a reflected worldview and an adequate approach towards trauma are forbidden, and a standardized interpretation of the event is created— one the government implants into American cultural memory.

In fact, Oskar sees the only chance in dealing with his trauma in the rewinding of the Falling Man, who he believes is his father: “And if I’d had more pictures, he would’ve flown through a window, back into the building, and the smoke would’ve poured into the hole that the plane was about to come out of.” Thus, the novel remains wedged in the traumatic moment, as Laura Frost writes: “On a deeper level, the arrested, suspended bodies reflect a tendency to think of 9/11 as a moment frozen in time, as a city’s and a nation’s disaster, rather than as part of a political process.” This literature itself remains a Falling Man, frozen in the moment of falling. It remains a Ground Zero, in debris, a kind of No-Place, eager to be disintegrated, a destroyed U-topia. Ulrich Baer calls it “the end of the postmodern game” and argues that the primary reason for language’s inadequacy lies in the overwhelming power of images. Thus, the story of Oskar’s grandparents, who have no words for their live story, ironically becomes the very symbol of the novel itself: “We had everything to say, but no ways to say it.”

While so-called 9/11 novels attempt to get rid of the gap, the hole, the cesura, Post-9/11 novels are characterized by their attempt to keep this gap alive. Most importantly, these novels clarify how a representation of the gap is only possible through the awareness that it can never be completely filled. According to Hegel, it is characterized by plurality and...
difference, by paradoxes and complexity. Hegel explains that “einzig eine Odyssee, ein ins Unendliche verlängerter dialektischer Prozeß die Leere füllen kann,”48 or, to say it with Poppe's words: “Die adäquate literarische Antwort auf das Ereignis des 11. September bestünde demnach nicht in Texten, die das feuilletonistische Geschwätz perpetuieren, sondern im Schweigen davon.”49

16 This new approach especially characterizes *The Zero*, the novel I would like to discuss as the first example of post-9/11 novels. In Jess Walter's novel, Remy wakes up to find he has shot himself in the head at an indistinct moment following 9/11, suffering from gaps in his memory. Throughout the course of the novel, he repeatedly misses the necessary connections and information in order to understand the events around him. Thus, most paragraphs and chapters end with em-dashes in the middle of the sentence:

So guess who calls last night asleep. What am I suppose around makes me feel sex is good, though and I part off he attraction worried about t scared to March50

17 Walter takes it as far as Remy being accused of torturing an Arab, another act he can't remember: “Remy walked the bent edge of the city, everyday things suddenly as mysterious and suggestive as archaeological artifacts.”51 This also shows the desire for understanding, for causality: “But we’ll need a story.”52 At the same time, Remy already criticizes this explanation mania: “Doesn’t everyone react to the world as it presents itself? Who really knows more than the moment he’s in? What do you trust? Memory? History? No, these are just stories, and whichever ones we choose to tell ourselves—the one about our marriage, the one about the Berlin Wall—there are always gaps.”53 This not only shows an indirect critique of the Bush government’s propaganda campaign and its rhetoric of binary oppositions (“us versus them”), but also refers to the crisis of representation experienced after 9/11: "But there are things we can't say now.”54 Remy sticking his finger “in the wire fence surrounding the hole where the world had been”55 can be read as a criticism of literature’s attempt and failure to fill the gap.

18 Whereas Foer remains wedged inside the crisis of language, Walter searches for new ways of overcoming it, by choosing the very crisis as his primary topic: Walter’s characters struggle either with speechlessness or an overly strong desire for conversation, characteristic of the media’s response to 9/11: While Remy longs for silence—“Why can’t everybody just be quiet? Why can’t everyone shut up?”56—, Paul talks endlessly: “Maybe this was Paul’s art: He couldn’t stop talking about the things that so many others had trouble talking about.”57 Just like the debris of the World Trade Center cannot be cleaned up completely, language does not regain its strength after 9/11: “there are things we can’t say now.”58 The failure of language as a signifier reflects the absence of meaning. Just as Remy locks his fingers “in the wire fence surrounding the hole where the world had been”59, literature is unable to fill the gap. By making the gaps visible through em-dashes, however, Walter not only reflects the novel’s plot but also creates a metanarrative level that visualizes the difficulty of language and literature to adequately represent a traumatizing event without turning to a different mode of (re)presentation.
Ironically, it is the very acceptance of the gap that constitutes the strength of the post-9/11 novels. Instead of excluding the Other, in the way 9/11-novels and political propaganda do, these novels focus on the Other and embody it within themselves. By explaining the origin of the word zero, Walter reveals the Other as already enclosed within the Western world:

“It’s an Arab word [...] Zero. From the word sifr. Means empty, like cipher. The world had no concept of zero, of nothingness, until we brought it west. Of course, we stole it from the Hindus. But it had never occurred in the West that there could be a number before one. [...] Civilization. They couldn’t even get their minds around the concept of emptiness, of infinity, the circle completing itself. If you can’t count nothing, you can’t conceive of everything. Without zero, you can’t comprehend negative numbers. So you can’t see infinity. There’s no sense to the universe. No negative balance to the positive, no axis on which to turn, no evil to balance the good. Without zero, every system eventually breaks down.”

Without a signifier for absence, the world cannot be adequately described. Post-9/11 literature, therefore, and especially The Zero, is not afraid to include absences or gaps of meaning. They remain critical and reflective sources for a discussion of 9/11. Their combination of presence and absence makes possible the dialogical process of healing that Hegel praises. The medium itself remains visible, carrying its own eternal shadow with it by constantly referring to itself: “Das self finds itself by losing itself. True contentment (as opposed to ennui, enchainment, suffocation, or distraction) is the result of self-distancing.”

Thus, Walter’s novel allows for the reintegration of trauma without ridding it of its own differential quality: It “erweitert die Sprache um etwas, das leise mitschwingt, eine Qualität, die, obwohl sie in den Wörtern steckt, weder auf Intentionalität noch auf Phänomenalität reduziert werden kann, und die sich deshalb dem Schweigen nähert. Dieses beredte Schweigen scheint ursprünglicher zu sein als das Sprechen und verkörpert sich im Schreiben.”

This “talkative silence”, as Geoffrey Hartman describes the effect of metanarration, resembles Stoichita’s idea of the shadow or remnant as a necessary byproduct for a dialogic form of representation. Therefore, Post-9/11 literature allows for a working-through of trauma, since it never completely explains 9/11 and frequently self-reflects.

This metalevel has to exist in order to break the uniformity of illusion and to make the Other visible: “Nichts [...] kann uns von der (uns von der Welt trennenden) Imagination befreien als die Imagination selbst, die ihr eigenes Verschwindenphantasiert, um auf diese Weise sowohl dem unmittelbaren Sinn der Dinge (”the plain sense of things”) als auch der todesähnlichen Abwesenheit des imaginierenden Selbst nahezukommen.” In Walter’s version of the Falling Man, one can already find a metaphorical realization of the fall: instead of rewinding the images, as in Foer’s case, Walter’s falling man becomes a symbol of possibilities. The gaps are no longer traumatic but rather a testimony to a new (lack of) understanding:

“and he was airborne, free, light... like paper, tossed and blown with the other falling bits and frantic sheets, smoking, corners scorched, flaring in the open air until there was nothing left but a fine black edge... then gone, a hole and nothing but the faint memory of a seething black that unfurled, that lifted him and held him briefly on the warmest current,...the gaps were fluid and he no longer lurched, but skipped from moment to moment with no anxiety, no expectation of comprehension.”

Ground Zero, thus, moves away from its singular meaning as a place of horror, of debris, and instead becomes a place of absence, of new meaning: Thus, Ground Zero as a place of
absence—a non-place—not only returns to the roots of the Zero—of the gap—but also becomes a literary utopia. Stemming from its original meaning as a “no-place,” the gap promises a departure from 9/11.

23

4. Conclusion

24 “As an event, 9/11 is limned as a silhouette, expressible only through allegory and indirection.”

25 In the context of 9/11, therefore, the desire to fill the gap paradoxically must remain incomplete: “The testimony [...] cannot deny it. It cannot bring back the dead, undo the horror, or reestablish the safety, the authenticity and the harmony of what was home. But neither does it succumb to death, nostalgia, memorializing, ongoing repetitious embattlements with the past, or flight to superficiality or to the seductive temptation of the illusion of substitutions. It is a dialogic process of exploration and reconciliation of two worlds – the one that was brutally destroyed and the one that is – that are different and will always remain so.” Stoichita’s shadow or Hartman’s “talkative silence”, in their singular conjunction of presence and absence, of image and original—namely without their disintegration of one another—become a symbol for the possible representation of 9/11 and traumatic events in general, since Michael Rothberg claims that 9/11 “demands a literature that takes risks, speaks in multiple tongues, and dares to move beyond near-sightedness.”

26 Whether mediation can arise in literature post 9/11 is essentially a question of metanarration, which is strongly linked to trauma theory. The two categories suggested in this essay, therefore, can be used to organize the flood of novels written after 9/11. The table below is a first attempt to organize a number of them within such categories. Interestingly, even The Commission Report, the formal report on the events leading up to 9/11 issued by the President and Congress in 2004, can be attributed to the 9/11 novel, since it is written in a novelistic structure and aims for the gapless reconstruction of the event. Additionally, the categories can be applied to novels emerging from outside the US in that, by their nature, they introduce the position of the Other into the event’s representation. Among such novels are Mosin Hamid’s A Reluctant Fundamentalist (2007), and Thomas Lehr’s September. Fata Morgana (2010).

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<th>9/11 novels</th>
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<td>Extremely Loud and</td>
<td>In the Shadow of No Towers (2004)</td>
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27 Both initial categories are constantly reproduced, as Thomas Lehr’s latest novel September. Fata Morgana (2010) shows: in its complete abandonment of punctuation marks, the novel sharpens Walter’s use of em-dashes and creates a form that makes the absence visible—literally within the sentence but also semiotically. These novels,
therefore, dissolve notions of the popular “end of criticism” and instead continue by using a postmodern metanarration. Literature, in turn, receives an essential role in the context of media responses to 9/11—one that successfully moves away from trauma.

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NOTES

1. Lehr, Thomas: Fata Morgana. Munich: Hanser 2010. p. 25: “Paradise now lies between us” (Translation is mine)


15. See: Caruth, Cathy.


21. Stoichita, Victor Ieronim: Eine kurze Geschichte des Schattens. Munich: Fink, 1999. p. 27: “If the image (as a shadow, a painting, a statue) in the tradition of Plinius is the Self’s Other, to Plato, the image (as a shadow, a mirror image, a painting, a statue) is the Self as its copy, the Self in a status of its Double.” (Translation is mine)

22. Idem.


32. Idem. Foreword.
34. Idem.
37. See: Spiegelman, Art: Foreword.
42. For a definition of the term please see: Assmann, Aleida: Cultural memory and Western civilization: functions, media, archives. Cambridge: Cambridge, 2011.
43. Idem. p. 325.
50. Walter, Jess: p. 159.
56. Idem. p. 16.
57. Idem.
60. Idem. p. 310.
62. Hartman, Geoffrey: p. 11: “It extends language by something that silently vibrates along, a quality that although inherent within the words cannot be reduced by either intentionality or phenomenality, and that, therefore, approaches silence. This talkative silence seems to be more original than speaking and embodies itself within writing.” [Translation is mine]
63. Idem. p. 40: “Nothing can free us from the imagination (separating us from the world) other than the imagination itself that phantasizes about its own disappearance in order to come closer to the immediate sense of things (the plain sense of things) as much as the deathlike absence of the imagining self.” [Translation is mine]

64. Walter, Jess: p. 323.


ABSTRACTS

Twelve years after 9/11, one needs to differentiate between the so-called “9/11 novel” and the “Post-9/11 novel”. Based on Jonathan Safran Foer’s Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close (2005) and Jess Walter’s novel The Zero (2006), this essay describes the development away from a compulsive reproduction of trauma towards an integration of the events of 9/11 within the 21st century American novel. With references to trauma theory and the media crisis post 9/11, the novels’ (lack of) representation of Ground Zero as a gap within cultural memory becomes their distinguishing mark.


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Sanna Stegmaier is a German M.A. student of Comparative Literature at the University of Vienna. Her master’s thesis focuses on forms of traumatic memory in literature after 9/11, especially emphasizing the relationship between literature and other media in the context of trauma. She has studied at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and also holds a B.A. degree in Drama, Film and Media Studies from the University of Vienna. In the fall of 2013, she will start her Ph.D. in Comparative Literature.