

Also by Kristine A. Miller
BRITISH LITERATURE OF THE BLITZ: Fighting the People's War

**Transatlantic Literature and
Culture After 9/11**
The Wrong Side of Paradise

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Archifictions

Constructing September 11

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Enter through the gift shop: the 9/11 Memorial Preview Site in downtown Manhattan includes an exhibition space, an oral history booth, and a souvenir store. New York Fire and Police Department paraphernalia dominates the shop, followed by books and videos about 9/11 and a wide assortment of keepsake objects. One line of merchandise – key chains, magnets, and T-shirts – stands out because of its trademarked slogan: “In Darkness We Shine Brightest” (“In Darkness”). The design is based on concrete poetry, with the shape of the Twin Towers at night formed through iterations of the phrase. The “we” around which the sentence pivots signifies, simultaneously, the survivors and the local victims of 9/11, as well as the buildings themselves. The collective voice of the slogan and the images formed by the words bind buildings and bodies together in an elegiac but laudatory message. In a gesture of metonymy, the “Darkness” logo recasts a narrative of terror and vulnerability as a motto of consolation and strength. Its time is the continuous present, suggesting that we are still in that terrible and yet apparently heroic moment.

This design is a good example of kitsch memorabilia that performs a “depoliticization of the story of 9/11” (264), as Marita Sturken describes objects such as post-9/11 snow globes and FDNY teddy bears. The word-buildings of “In Darkness” are a compensatory, counterfactual version of the real events and a hagiographical rendering of buildings that were, in life, symbols of a global capitalism experienced by many as oppressive and arrogant. Along with depoliticization, the design also performs a precise spatialization of the event, locating it in Manhattan and on the site of the World Trade Center. Shown from the awestruck perspective of a viewer at their base, the buildings become not just towers of strength and collective humanity, but also symbols of nation building. In this rendering, 9/11 is the Twin Towers, local and historically singular. The image of the buildings asserts visibility, presence, wholeness, and spatial specificity against a history that was and continues to be unclear, disappointed, and globally dispersed. Indeed, it is not unusual, when walking in downtown Manhattan, to be stopped by tourists asking, “Where is 9/11?”¹

It is easy to see what the design simplifies. The question of how to draw the temporal, spatial, and ontological boundaries of what is commonly referred to as “9/11” has vexed the likes of Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler, and one does not expect to see a sophisticated answer in a museum souvenir. However, “In Darkness We Shine Brightest” displays several of the tropes through which that historical event and others related to it have come to be depicted and understood. The Twin Towers’ spectacular collapse was one of the central reasons why 9/11, though clearly a national and global set of events, was overwhelmingly portrayed as a New York disaster. The “In Darkness” design expresses this localization, as well as a widely perceived symmetry between bodies and buildings that determined much of the subsequent representation of September 11. The design sums up a decade-long imaginative, affective consolidation through which 9/11 became associated with heroic architecture and a telescoping of time and space. This essay tells the story of that process and how, while architectural discussions about the World Trade Center shored up this narrative of a local, heroic 9/11, other forms of discourse, including literature, have been showing those same architectural gestures to be a limited panacea and have thus been expanding the spatial and temporal dimensions of the story.

Years before the 9/11 Memorial Preview Site existed, uptown at Columbia University in 2002, Leon Wieseltier, the literary editor of the *New Republic*, and Daniel Libeskind, best known at that point as the architect of the Jewish Museum in Berlin, debated the proper way to commemorate the events of September 11. They quarreled about the relationship between memory and physical memorials, the meaning of building, and the role of the architect. Perhaps the most surprising aspect of the discussion was its note of disciplinary animosity that pitted architecture against literature. Wieseltier was critical of the whole enterprise of rebuilding at the World Trade Center: “The planes exposed [...] the frailty of matter,” he asserted. “Among the many illusions that crashed to the ground with the two towers, I would have thought, was the worship of architecture” (Libeskind, Wieseltier, and Nuland, *Monument* 34). More specifically, he criticized recent design competitions for the new World Trade Center: “Lower Manhattan must not be transformed into a vast mausoleum, obviously, but neither must it be transformed into a theme park for advanced architectural taste” (34). He declared, “All I need at Ground Zero is a void and a flag [...]”. The void is a retort to the din. A void is an unarchitectural monument” (34). Against architecture, Wieseltier extolled narration and storytelling as a means of transmitting traumatic history and honoring memory over the materialistic impulse to build.

Libeskind countered Wieseltier’s attack on his profession by remarking that it “is the specialty of shallow people [to] think that literature can replace true space” (42) and insisting that “architecture does have a communicative function, that stone can talk” (42–3). Libeskind’s own designs

for the Jewish Museum and the Imperial War Museum in Manchester, he argued, gave visitors a spatial forum for working through historical ruptures. Defending himself against the claim that all building is about the ego of the architect, Libeskind retorted, "You have a fascist idea of architecture that comes straight from Ayn Rand's idea of an architect" (44), invoking Howard Roark, the character in Rand's *The Fountainhead* who sneers at altruism and concession as weakness.

Although the hero-genius-architect image only applies to a small number of "starchitects," and the real practice of building entails compromise, architects were actively charged, in the weeks, months, and years after 9/11, with the superhuman task of repairing Ground Zero and making it a functional and profitable space. There was, *New York Times* architecture critic Paul Goldberger wrote, "a genuine craving for an architectural response to the crisis, for creative designs that would somehow manage to demonstrate the ability of architectural aesthetics to heal a broken world" (Up 55). Architects were vested with the heroic power of materially and aesthetically transforming Ground Zero: a sort of "thinking person's" firefighter who would bring about recovery through the built environment. By contrast, many writers floundered immediately after 9/11, bemoaning the irrelevance of their craft. *Times* literary critic Michiko Kakutani asserted that "[l]anguage failed" the week of September 11: "Words felt devalued and inadequate to capture the disasters at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and near Pittsburgh" ("Struggling"). Novelist Ian McEwan commented, "For a while I did find it wearisome to confront invented characters. I wanted to be told about the world. I wanted to be informed" (Donadio, "Truth"). The surge of nonfiction about the history, politics, and religious dimensions of September 11 attested to this desire. In this climate, architecture seemed to have a tangible, concrete relevance that literature lacked.

Despite Wieseltier and Libeskind's clash and the obvious disciplinary differences between them, there were significant correspondences between literature's and architecture's approaches to September 11. Both fields wrestled with abstraction versus figuration, with direct versus elliptical treatment of the events, with finding the right tone (mournful? respectful? uplifting? critical?), and with the question of whether a certain period of time needed to elapse before one might produce an adequate aesthetic response to historical trauma. Wieseltier, arguing that "the banalization of September 11 was accomplished by the media with indecent alacrity" (*Monument* 35), voiced a widespread concern that the process of redeveloping lower Manhattan was happening too quickly. Libeskind would go on to be chosen as the new World Trade center "Master Planner," a truly Randian title.

At the same time that the development in lower Manhattan was moving forward, some fiction writers were answering Wieseltier's call to ruminate rather than rush to repair. This essay examines the discussion about rebuilding lower Manhattan in conjunction with what I will call archifictions: literature

that deploys architecture – and architects – to think through the spatial and temporal boundaries of September 11 as well as the implications of repairing national trauma through literal building. While many fictions have addressed the implications of September 11 by leaving New York and America behind entirely – a more obvious and perhaps easier way of displacing and decentering 9/11 – my focus here is literature that connects the local New York-centric narrative of 9/11, which is intimately grounded in architecture, to broader, wider spheres. This double focus, produced in what we will look back on as the first generation of 9/11 fiction, is present in texts such as Frédéric Beigbeder's *Winnows on the World*, Deborah Eisenberg's "Twilight of the Superheroes," Jess Walter's *The Zero*, Amy Waldman's *The Submission*, and Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. All adopt architectural imagery and discourses of building, but they do so to amplify concerns that were bypassed or minimized in the push toward spatial and economic recovery. In questioning architecture's narrative of recuperative heroism, exploring how the built environment cultivates or effaces spatial memory, and imaginatively shifting the presentist, anchored nature of buildings, these fictions recast the coordinates of time and space that have typically anchored 9/11 in order to explore more expansively the implications of that day.

A Tale of Two Buildings

From their debut in 1973, the Twin Towers sparked a controversy. Many people saw them as brutal and alienating. They were despised for destroying historic neighborhoods and the livelihoods of small business people on Radio Row. Writing about what he called the "Towers of Mammón" for *Newsweek* in 1973, Douglas Davis asserted that "the World Trade Center is not a work of skyscraper art but it is definitely a marvel of engineering" (41), emphasizing architecture's mechanical, technical side over its more aesthetic, artistic side. Lewis Mumford argued that the "purposeless gigantism and technological exhibitionism" of the towers were impositions on "the living tissue" of the city (qtd in Darton 128). Goldberger described the towers in 1979 as "an occasion to mourn: they never should have happened, they were never really needed, and if they say anything at all about our city, it is that we retreat into banality when the opportunity comes for greatness" (*City* 11). Although Minoru Yamasaki, the architect of the Twin Towers, said that he had tried to "humanize" the buildings with delicate gothic flourishes on their exterior (Davis 41–3), they were experienced by many observers as grotesquely inhuman in scale. The venerated architectural critic Ada Louise Huxtable's comments of 1966 are hauntingly prescient: "Who's afraid of the big, bad buildings? Everyone, because there are so many things about gigantism that we just don't know. The gamble of triumph or tragedy at this scale – and ultimately it is a gamble – demands an extraordinary

payoff. The trade-center towers could be the start of a new skyscraper age or the biggest tombstones in the world" ("Who's Afraid").

In our century and the last, Manhattan has been a landscape of constant construction and demolition, or "creative destruction," as Max Page has suggested. However, the sudden and stunning collapse of the Twin Towers produced a crisis in the collective sense of space and time. Many New Yorkers voiced their disorientation at seeing the skyline change radically in a matter of hours, and at seeing the skyscrapers, which had been visible for miles in all directions, suddenly disappear. When the towers fell, the city underwent a conversion of sorts, a retrospective love affair with – or at least a newfound loyalty toward – the buildings, which were strikingly anthropomorphized throughout the coverage of 9/11. In a September 12, 2001, interview in the *New York Times*, one of Yamasaki's partners said, "The buildings are like our children [...]. To see that happen to one of our most beloved creations, before our eyes, it was a devastating, emotional experience for us" (Hakim). Other articles mourned the "Two Fallen Giants" (Johnson), emphasizing the parallel mortalities of buildings and humans (Dwyer et al.). The repeated imaginings of the Twin Towers restored – in artworks such as "Tribute in Light," in the frequent post-9/11 retelling of Philippe Petit's tightrope walk between the towers in 1974, and in artifacts such as "In Darkness We Shine Brightest" – express not only a nostalgic desire for the towers' return but also a persistent disbelief that they are indeed gone.

When the news media showed the physical devastation of September 11, that destruction usually took the form of architectural obliteration. The towers fell over and over on television; falling humans, however, were shown sparingly, and there were virtually no images of the deceased, most of whom were vaporized. Architecture registered the day's wounds when human deaths were almost entirely occluded. Subsequently, the remaining fragments of the towers took on a charged aura: pieces of steel salvaged from the site have been incorporated into many memorials, like religious relics. (The 9/11 Museum will integrate into its design architectural elements from the World Trade Center such as the so-called "survivors' stairway," the "last column," and a massive steel trident.) The plan for rebuilding was similarly charged: a favorite design for the new World Trade Center skyscraper was Norman Foster's proposal for two buildings that seemed to be kissing.

Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's assertion on September 11, 2001, that "we will rebuild. [...] The skyline will be made whole again" was largely applauded. However, his words left ambiguous what exactly rebuilding would mean: replication? reconstruction with a difference? or something entirely new? Pete Hamill demanded that the city should "Let a Park Bloom in the Ruins of the Twin Towers, a Monument to Our Own Vietnam"; artist Ellsworth Kelly glued a green trapezoid shape onto an aerial view of Ground Zero and wrote, "I feel strongly that what is needed is a 'visual experience,' not additional buildings, a museum, a list of names or proposals for a freedom

monument" (Muschamp, "One Vision"). At the end of September 2001, Deborah Solomon interviewed architects and artists about how the site should be treated and concluded, "The conflicting opinions about what should be done in Lower Manhattan might be viewed, at least partly, as a clash between the solid and the void, between new buildings and no buildings, between a desire to reach into the future and an opposing desire to mourn, to recall, to hold a vigil that never ends." Architects and urban planners were mostly for advancement; while many artists and writers rallied for the void and a temporal pause to try to understand the experience.

Most likely, these two positions would have come closer together with more time. However, that was not to be. Ada Huxtable, acting as Cassandra again, predicted exactly what would happen to the site. "If the usual scenario is followed," she wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* on September 17, 2001, there would be a routine of competitions and input from the public, all of which would "be ignored by the movers and shakers," and what would ultimately emerge would be "a properly pious, meaningless gesture." She urged that,

until the answer is found and built, the site should be a ruin, a place to gather, and mourn, to think about how great, or trivial, our values are, perhaps even to know each other, and our city, better. Ruins are the repositories of memory; construction erases them. A city's greatness is not measured by square footage or pricey views. We need a different kind of symbolism now. ("New York")

Even more distressing than the void, the ruins were a material incarnation of the analogy of buildings and bodies in its most visceral, traumatic form. To insist on the ruins was to preserve the memory of the trauma, and to forestall the development that was aligned with recovery offered a political rejoinder to the perceived enemy in the emerging war on terror. To pause was to question what the Twin Towers had represented before September 11, to examine the myth of America's innocence, to consider how US foreign policy was implicated in the September 11 attacks, and to evaluate how those events and the space of Ground Zero itself have been used politically since 9/11. But the void could not hold. Larry Silverstein and other financial stakeholders in the World Trade Center were not about to let the 16 acres of prime real estate at Ground Zero lie fallow.²

Before any architectural plans were formalized, some of the most thought-provoking writing about September 11 focused on this brief, raw, and politically charged period when human remains and smashed buildings were devastatingly jumbled at the site. William Langewiesche's nonfictional *American Ground: Unbuilding the World Trade Center* (2002) was one of the earliest challenges to the narrative of the saintly rescue workers at Ground Zero, to which he bluntly and repeatedly refers as "the pile." Langewiesche focuses on and clearly admires the structural engineers working at Ground

Zero, the "people unheralded on the outside," rather than the firefighters and police officers who were heralded by the press (22). Langewiesche's most controversial claim, that firefighters looted the stores in the concourse below the World Trade Center "even before the first tower fell" (76), was met with considerable hostility.³ As Michiko Kakutani pointed out, *American Ground* dispensed with the usual sensitivity exercised around September 11 matters and approached the disaster of the World Trade Center as an "engineering project" ("Order"). Langewiesche's descriptions of the site itself were more autopsy than funeral.

The "unbuilding" took place at an astonishing pace. The Department of Design and Construction declared the cleanup of Ground Zero complete in May 2002, although human remains continued to be unearthed at the site. In July of 2002, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation unveiled six plans for the development of the area. By the second half of 2002, the World Trade Center site had changed from gritty and deathly wreckage to a clean-swept plain of ground. *American Ground* captures the pre-architectural moment of the site that was over more quickly than anyone imagined. "We want to wrap up the fate of ground zero," Frank Rich wrote in 2003. "We want to move on. And therein lies the leading front of the culture war: can architecture, commerce and artistic entrepreneurship [...] so quickly bind the gravest wound in New York's modern memory?" ("Ground Zero or Bust"). The debate between pausing and moving forward, and about how to move forward, was quickly resolved with the selection of the Master Planner.

In January of 2002, Daniel Libeskind contributed to an exhibition at the Max Protetch gallery displaying some 60 designs for the new World Trade Center. Libeskind's drawing of a multi-use building was more of a theoretical stance than an actual plan. He wrote that the World Trade Center was "no longer a fully profane site because of the number of innocent people murdered there" and that any structure in that location had to address "memory and the future of that memory." Above all, "The urban strategy would have to incorporate a new understanding of form and function – one which has been altered by the irreversibility of what has happened. It must be a response which takes into consideration the relationships between the uniqueness of a site and its global significance; fragility and stability; stone and spirit" (Stephens, Luna, and Broadhurst 152). Libeskind's official proposal, entitled "Memory Foundations" and submitted to the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation competition in 2003, was a much more elaborate plan with high-concept features, including the Park of Heroes, the Wedge of Light (an area that would be illuminated every September 11 between 8:46 and 10:28 a.m., between the moment of the first airplane's impact and the collapse of the North Tower), a 70-foot-deep memorial space featuring the exposed slurry wall, and the heavy-handedly 1776-foot skyscraper known for a while as The Freedom Tower. While Libeskind did not wax anthropomorphic

about the towers, he did strongly narrativize and politicize 9/11 as a heroic struggle. He described the slurry wall, the structure that kept the Hudson River from flooding the area, as a brave actant whose form "revealed" the heroic foundations of democracy for all to see⁴ and referred to the World Trade Center site as "hallowed ground" (*Monument* 46, 49). At the same time that he emphasized 9/11 as a local tragedy, Libeskind also discussed it in terms of other devastating historical events such as the Holocaust or the Blitz. "It's not about quantity," Libeskind asserted, "It's about the qualitative spiritual change of the world, suddenly." While acknowledging that "[o]f course you cannot compare 9/11 to the Holocaust," Libeskind maintained that "both signify the permanent struggle in life and the permanent threat to democracy and culture" (Round). His simultaneous presentation of 9/11 as a local trauma and a world event (albeit a very selectively described world event, without even an allusion to American-waged war), alongside his seeming ability to offer a plan for psychological and geographical recovery, had much to do with Libeskind's selection as Master Planner.

Libeskind's most germane previous project was the Jewish Museum in Berlin, with its Stair of Continuity, Garden of Exile and Emigration, and Holocaust Void. Libeskind explained that when faced by the "amnesia" around Berlin's violently anti-Semitic history, which had never been adequately recognized, he had "introduced the idea of the void as a physical interference with chronology" (J. Young, "Daniel Libeskind" 16). The building conveys spatial and psychological disruption through fractured structures: dead ends, claustrophobic corridors, and negative spaces. Implicating time and space to expose the past is an unusually ambitious aim for a large-scale structure. Architecture more typically strives for permanence and timelessness – presentism – and adopts a positivistic teleology in which, as Anthony Vidler describes it, "time moves inexorably toward a goal" (*Architectural Uncanny* 102). Libeskind's Berlin museum, Vidler notes, does not seek "to arrest the tempo of history, nor to return to a better time, but to deploy space in a historical way that recognizes its own temporality at the same time as it provides a momentary fusing of the two, a temporary respite for reflection and experience" (*Warped Space* 241). Libeskind's work in Berlin would seem to be a compromise between the solid and the void, the local and the global, and the competing urges to dwell on the past and to surge toward the future.

But there were no voids in "Memory Foundations." Its components did not seek to destabilize the visitor as the Berlin museum's do. While the slurry wall and the Wedge of Light embedded features of the attack into the site's design, they gestured toward motivation and triumph rather than the abyss. "Memory Foundations" shared with the general rhetoric around the development of the World Trade Center a strong narrative of progress and closure: the longing to "wrap up," "move on," and "bind." "In a sense," Mark Wigley asserts, "architecture is always driven by the need to bury trauma [...]."

For all their occasional talk about experimentation, [architects] are devoted to the mythology of psychological closure" (85). Unlike the Berlin museum, which allowed Libeskind to reflect on historical trauma with the benefit of almost 50 years of hindsight, "Memory Foundations" proposed a design not even five years after the event it was meant to memorialize. On such an accelerated timeline in New York, the kind of questioning, thought-provoking architectural stance that Libeskind took in Berlin was not possible.

Looking from the vantage point of the present, the most remarkable thing about "Memory Foundations" is not its execution but its erosion. The site today bears almost no resemblance to what Libeskind proposed. Through a series of fierce battles, another architect, David Childs, was enlisted to design the skyscraper, with Libeskind only nominally attached. Michael Arad's memorial, "Reflecting Absence," overrode Libeskind's own concept for a memorial, as well as several other parameters of the site. Of particular note was what happened to Libeskind's Wedge of Light. On paper, the plan to inscribe "the precise time of the attack" into the built environment was an intriguing expression of the obsessive rehearsal of temporality that has characterized both fictional and nonfictional representations of 9/11 (*Monument* 48). However, the design was shown to be physically unrealizable, as the buildings around the site would cast shadows on what were supposed to be areas of sunlight. Libeskind's attempt to make architecture express a complex temporal sequence failed (Wyatt). An aptly titled *New York Times* article in 2004, "The Incredible Shrinking Daniel Libeskind," summed up the dissolution of "Memory Foundations": "Arguably the sole remaining trace of what made Mr. Libeskind's ideas distinctive is the spire on the Freedom Tower—and some of the people involved in downtown redevelopment say even that may not survive" (Pogrebin). As the World Trade Center development moved forward, Libeskind receded like some depleted superhero, less Rand's Howard Roark than another literary architect, Ibsen's fallible *Master Builder*.

On the tenth anniversary of September 11, many prominent architectural critics were excoriating in their assessment of the new World Trade Center and its individual buildings. Like Huxtable, Vidler and Michael Sorkin were against precipitous buildings. Sorkin described 1 World Trade Center as an "Everest of bad design and a steady lowering of architectural expectations," pronouncing the site "a record of much that is wrong, ungenerous, and crass about American culture today" ("Smoke"). Vidler lamented that an opportunity for imagining new kinds of architecture and "a public realm that represents more than the amorphous sum of individual wills, or the triumph of monopoly capital" had been squandered ("Redefining" 472). He argued that "in the urge to quickly clear the rubble, idealize the process of designing the site [...] and construe architecture as a form of reply to the attackers; in the very name Freedom Tower, we find ourselves in the world of Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead*, with the architect as the savior of American individualism" ("Air War and Architecture" 30).⁴ Invoking the same character

that Daniel Libeskind had disavowed in the 2002 Columbia discussion, Vidler joins Huxtable in a belated plea for the rubble and a more thoughtful approach to development.

As much as a muscular architectural fix for Ground Zero seemed wrong to some critics in 2002, it seemed even more amiss once the results began to materialize. With the exception of Santiago Calatrava's soaring, biomorphic Transportation Hub, none of the new buildings could be said to articulate "a new understanding of form and function—one which has been altered by" 9/11, except through reactive engineering measures such as concrete reinforcements or the empty top stories of 1 World Trade Center. Instead, these buildings have been designed to construct a future that is continuous with the past of triumphant capitalism. There are, however, lessons to be drawn from the precipitous architectural response to 9/11, and architecture's disappointment may be literature's gain.

Building the Future of Memory

Flashback: Don DeLillo's 1997 novel *Underworld* shows the Twin Towers in the 1970s, "under construction, already towering, twin-towering, with cranes tilted at the summits and work elevators sliding up the flanks." One character, who sees the World Trade Center "bulked up at the funneled end of the island" and notices the towers "everywhere she went," discusses the buildings with a stranger:

"I think of it as one, not two," she said. "Even though there are clearly two towers. It's a single entity, isn't it?"

"Very terrible but you have to look at it, I think."

"Yes, you have to look." (372)

Even before they were completed, the towers seemed to necessitate new language to describe them ("twin-towering"), and their morphological uncertainty caused perceptual and linguistic confusion. "A model of behemoth mass production" (*Underworld* 377), the towers were oppressive, terrible, and unavoidable. Even earlier, in *Players* (1977), DeLillo was exploring the psychological impact of the World Trade Center. Pammy works for the Crisis Management Council on the 83rd floor of the North Tower. She mixes up the buildings and accidentally ends up in the South Tower; she is flummoxed by their network of express and local elevators. While bored in her office, she "contrived to pass the time by devising a question. [...] If the elevators in the World Trade Center were places, as she believed them to be, and if the lobbies were spaces, as she further believed, what then was the World Trade Center itself? Was it a condition, an occurrence, a physical event, an existing circumstance, a presence, a state, a set of invariables?" (47–8). In moments like these, DeLillo detaches the towers from their monolithic thingness and

their spatial coordinates and instead casts them as a condition: the alienation of global capitalism. He emphasizes the physical tyranny of the towers at the same time that his character imaginatively dematerializes them: "To Pammy the towers didn't seem permanent. They remained concepts, no less transient for all their bulk than some routine distortion of light" (19). These passages dislocate the spatial and temporal coordinates of the towers in a way that unsettlingly anticipates Delillo's own words, decades later, in 2001: "Now a small group of men have literally altered our skyline. We have fallen back in time and space" ("In the Ruins").

Like architecture, literary fiction has had its share of misfires in its responses to 9/11. Most early attempts read like barely disguised memoirs or topical ruminations in fictional frames. In 2005, literary critic Rachel Donadio wrote, "It's safe to say no novels have yet engaged with the post-Sept. 11 era in any meaningful way" ("Truth"). Yet it was also in 2005 – the year that the New York City Medical Examiner concluded the search for human remains at the World Trade Center site – that the more successful 9/11 novels began to appear. These works were written during the period of passionate debate about the architectural solutions to the devastation. Literary fiction had the luxury of time that architecture did not, and indeed, time as well as space became a conspicuous preoccupation of fiction related to 9/11. This is especially evident in what I am calling archifictions: novels and short stories that foreground the architectural aspects of the events of September 11, 2001, to challenge architecture's recuperative heroism and the identification of "9/11" as a specific time and place.

For example, Frédéric Beigbeder's *Windows on the World* (2005) locates the events of September 11 in a complex structure of spatiality and temporality. Carthew Yorston's narration on the morning of September 11 and the narration of the character named "Beigbeder" a year later are both contained in chapters marking each minute of the attack: the very same stretch of time Libeskind's Wedge of Light was supposed but failed to illuminate. The novel would seem to be intensely presentist, as Beigbeder constantly calls attention to chronology: at 8.44, for example, Beigbeder announces, "Welcome to the minute before. The point at which everything is still possible" (50). The novel also strikingly empties this doomed linear time against the architectural catastrophe: "You know how it ends: everybody dies" (1). However, *Windows on the World* actually expresses simultaneous perspectives from different points in time and space. At 8.32, the narrator called "Beigbeder" comments from a point that is elsewhere (Paris) and in the narrative future: "This is one of the lessons of the World Trade Center: that the immovable is movable. What we thought was fixed is shifting. What we thought solid is liquid. Towers are mobile, and skyscrapers first and foremost scrape the ground" (8). Inside the strict chronology of disaster time, the novel simultaneously narrates the past, present, and future of the towers, scrambling traditional conceptions of time and space ("skyscrapers first and foremost scrape the ground").

As if in retort to the climate of heroic architecture, Beigbeder popularizes his novel with off-putting, materialistic, selfish, unheroic personalities. Both of the narrators happen to know a great deal about the Twin Towers. At 8.33, Yorston, a Texas businessman, reels off technical statistics: "Under the watchful eyes of the Rockefeller family and the supervision of the New York Port Authority, the Twin Towers were imagined by architect Minoru Yamasaki (1912–1982) and associates with Emery Roth and Sons. Two concrete and steel towers 110 stories high. Almost 10,000,000 square feet of office space" (50). The narrator "Beigbeder" also mulls over the engineering and design details of the buildings, reminding the reader again about the Twin Towers' provenance and their structural idiosyncrasies: "The towers, the brainchild of Yamasaki, the Japanese architect, who was keen to use exterior pillars that had the span of human shoulders, looked like the interior of a vast prison," and so on (78). The North Tower becomes the novel's third primary character, whose "death" coincides with Yorston's. *Windows on the World* performs the kind of conflation of bodies and buildings that appeared widely in culture, from journalistic coverage of September 11 to "In Darkness We Shine Brightest," but it does so in an ostentatiously artificial, constructed manner that lays bare the strain of these rhetorical equivalences. The Twin Towers are the signature of American arrogance and capitalist ambition that Beigbeder likens to the Tower of Babel, even as they carry the representational burden of human death. At 10.28, the novel's penultimate chapter and the moment of the North Tower's collapse, the text itself breaks into two columns, imitating the shape of the towers in defiance of both time and space. "When buildings vanish," the Beigbeder narrator asserts, "only books can remember them" (132). While hardly a flattering obituary of the Twin Towers, *Windows on the World* does depict September 11 as, simultaneously, an occasion, a location, a time, and a "condition," as Delillo described the World Trade Center itself in *Players*, that exceeds the novel's temporal backbone and the walls of Yamasaki's buildings.

Not just architecture but also architects deteriorate in Deborah Eisenberg's short story "Twilight of the Superheroes," which resonates with the *Times* article about "The Incredible Shrinking Daniel Libeskind."⁵ A group of college graduates witnesses the attack on the World Trade Center from the panoramic terrace of a borrowed apartment. "When they'd moved in, it probably was the best view on the planet. Then, one morning, out of a clear blue sky, it became, for a while, probably the worst" (16). The story repeatedly switches between before and three years after September 11, and this unstable chronology maps onto a series of architectural rifts, the most obvious of which is the fall of the towers, but which also includes the characters being unhoused when the subplot abruptly ends. Before coming to New York, the main character, Nathaniel, lived in the Midwest and worked as an assistant at an architectural firm while he wrote a popular comic strip whose hero, "Passivityman," opposes the greedy and corrupt "Captain

Corporation." As time passes, however, Passivityman seems to be losing his superpowers. Nathaniel gets a job in New York "in the architectural division of the subway system" (9). "Once [Nathaniel had] dreamed of designing tranquil and ennobling dwellings, buildings that urged benign relationships, rich inner harmonies," but now he describes himself as "[t]wenty-eight years old, no superhero, a job that just might lead down to a career in underground architecture, a vanishing apartment" (30). Nathaniel and Passivityman are diminished in the post-9/11 context, losing their focus, their purpose, their ambition. Not only has the World Trade Center become a heap of wreckage – "now it's unclear what they are, in fact, looking at" (16) – but time itself is also experienced as distorted, warping and doubling back upon itself. "One kept waiting," one character thinks, "as if a morning would arrive from before that day to take them all along a different track. One kept waiting for that shattering day to unhappen, so that the real – the intended – future, the one that had been implied by the past, could unfold" (28). These meditations on the psychological effects of September 11 emerge in – indeed, are produced by – the unsettling surroundings of the pre-architectural rubble. Instead of grounding the characters in space and time, September 11 is experienced as setting them adrift.

To date, archifictions have suggested that literature's – as distinct from architecture's – response to 9/11 is not primarily one of healing or closure. These texts take up Huxtable's assertion that "[r]uins are the repositories of memory; construction erases them," and they dwell on that wreckage, the temporally knotty terrain of memory, and the deeper, wider consequences of the day. Archifictions emmesh built structures in convoluted, recursive, nonlinear, or arrested arrangements of time as a means of resisting the forward and upward trajectory of recuperative architecture.

This idea is particularly well illustrated by Jess Walter's *The Zero* (2006). An atypically satirical account of the brief period when the World Trade Center was in ruins, Walter's novel shares with Langewiesche's *American Ground* a critical, unsanctimonious stance and adds to it, from the perspective of several years later, a resistance to architectural progress. Walter has acknowledged Langewiesche's book as an influence, and *The Zero* signals this debt in several ways. Like *American Ground*, Walter's novel complicates the heroism of rescue workers through its cynical, opportunistic characters who gravitate around "the zero" (Walter's version of "the pile") and its central anti-hero, former police officer Brian Remy, whose ethical position is enigmatic even to himself. In Walter's account, the disaster brings out the worst in everyone. One police officer promotes his post-9/11 acting career by starring in an advertisement for a new cereal, "First Responder: the breakfast of heroes" (203). He is approached by an agent who urges him to sell his 9/11 story in order to take advantage of the "cycle of opportunity: first inspirational stories, kids and animals, shit like that; then the backdrop stories [...] and then the big money – thrillers. [...] After thrillers come anniversaries: five years, ten, and the real money – [...]. Nostalgia" (150). More harrowingly,

Remy finds himself involved in an effort to expose terrorists through scenes of "enhanced interrogation" of the sort featured on the Fox television series *24* or Kathryn Bigelow's 2012 film *Zero Dark Thirty*. The novel conjoins the turmoil and bad faith surrounding the physical site of "the zero" with the ethical depletion of its characters. A particularly troubling sequence implicates Remy in the torture of Middle Eastern men in offshore locations.

Walter correlates the built – and destroyed – environment with memory and represents the cleanup as an erosion of remembrance. Remy's blackouts or memory voids might be the result of a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head, or they might be symptomatic of a general cultural amnesia following September 11, exacerbated by the breakneck speed of lower Manhattan's "unbuilding." Near the end of the novel, Remy is distressed to find himself at an excavated Ground Zero: "*Was this really it?* [...] Before, it had been vast enough to contain every horror (falling and burning and collapsing) ... but that was all gone now. [...] [W]hat can you feel about a place when that place has been scraped away?" (308). Remy feels

cheated in some way, as if they'd taken away his memory along with the dirt and debris. Maybe his mind was a hole like this – the evidence and reason scraped away. [...] No wonder they couldn't remember what it meant anymore. No wonder they'd gotten it all wrong. How can you remember what isn't there anymore? [...] It looked like any other place now, like the site of a future business park, or a mall parking lot. (307–8)

In this and other passages, Walter explores what Max Page calls "spatial memories": recollections that are stored and preserved in landscapes and built structures. "[N]ot only are collective memories 'socially' constructed," Page writes, but "they are also literally constructed. Memory is built into the physical landscape and individual encounters with buildings, natural sites, and whole regions. Landscape and memory are codependent" (251). Thus, when landscapes change and buildings disappear, memory is literally unhoused. Remy longs for the ruins, the "undefined rubble," because it is a testimony to history, to the ground of reality that he finds slipping away. Worse still for Remy is the renovation that will follow. He observes,

It was just a deep tub now, a concrete-walled construction site, like any of the other sockets in a city that lived by creating such holes, cannibalizing itself block by old block to make way for the new, smoking sockets surrounded by razor-topped construction fences, waiting for buildings to be screwed in – and this the largest socket, a cleaned-up crater ringed by American flags and dead bouquets. Waiting for cranes. (308)

This specter of pre-fab buildings mechanically screwed into the sterile, sand-blasted space suggests how the messy, ugly details of the site's history might be evacuated and replaced by patriotic structures such as the "Freedom

Tower." By the end of *The Zero*, it's clear that this amnesiac state is not just Remy's personal pathology: "Perhaps nothing made sense anymore (the gaps are affecting everyone) and this was some kind of cultural illness they all shared" (264). Walter embeds the temporality of traumatic amnesia into the narrative structure of his novel much in the way Libeskind inscribed voids into the Jewish Museum in Berlin to suggest aspects of history that a culture was not facing. The black holes of Remy's consciousness and his inability to hold onto memory offer a cautionary tale for a culture racing to leave the traumatic past behind.

Any Waldman's novel *The Submission* (2011) focuses on one brief period in an alternative history of the 9/11 memorial competition. Like Walter, Waldman never names the attack as September 11, but her descriptions leave no doubt. Both authors use a temporally bound occasion to meditate on the tension between architectural development and the culture's slower and uneven recovery. Waldman consolidates the discussion around the memorial, the built structure designed to express, contain, and resolve historical trauma. When the author of submission number 4879 in the competition is revealed to be Mohammad ("Mo") Khan, a Muslim American born of Indian immigrants, the jury's panicked response and the ensuing media circus read as not just plausible but reminiscent of past events – "It's Maya Lin all over again. But worse," one character remarks (17) – as well as the 2010 controversy over the Park51 Muslim Community Center two blocks from the World Trade Center. Clearly drawing from the process of selecting Michael Arad's "Reflecting Absence," the novel effects a vertiginous play between journalistic verisimilitude and slight degrees of invention.⁵

The Submission lingers on the stage that followed the rubble: Ground Zero is a blank space (or, in Walter's words, a "cleaned-up crater") onto which Waldman's characters project their anxieties. The jury chairman, Paul, ponders the concern "that it was too soon for a memorial, the ground barely cleared; that the country hadn't yet won or lost the war" (8). He dismisses these apprehensions with the "patriotic exigencies" that carry the day: "The longer that space stayed clear, the more it became a symbol of defeat, of surrender, something for 'them,' whoever they were, to mock. A memorial only to America's diminished greatness, its new vulnerability [...]. Paul would never put it so crudely, but the blank space was embarrassing" (8). The razed 16 acres broadcast an intolerable vulnerability and weakness because the equation of fallen buildings and bodies has not yet been reversed and recuperated by new buildings rising from the rubble. The memorial, then, is a way of imposing structure on this unbearably formless moment. Any memorial implies a symbolic relationship between built structures and bodies, but in the case of September 11, the relationship was especially direct.

Mo's six-acre design, "the Garden," is uncontroversial, if benign. "The concept was simple: a walled, rectangular garden guided by rigorous geometry" with a "raised pavilion meant for contemplation," two canals

dividing the site, and rows of "both living and steel" trees. The memorial recapitulates the analogy between buildings and bodies. "The victims would be listed on the wall's interior, their names patterned to mimic the geometric cladding of the destroyed buildings," and the steel trees would "reincarnat[e] the buildings even more literally: they would be made from their salvaged scraps" (4). Mo articulates his rationale for the Garden in an "elegant, anecdotal submission essay" and in the first press conference after his design is selected (116). "I believed my idea would provide a way for the families, the nation to mourn and to remember all that was lost that day, and also to heal" (92), he explains, using the standard language of architectural renewal after 9/11. Ultimately, however, the debate that ensues about the memorial is not about the design but about the architect himself, who undercuts the authoritative and redemptive vision of the post-9/11 architect. When a critic points out the seemingly Islamic features of the Garden and Mo is called upon to defend his work, he is simultaneously intransigent, uncooperative, and equivocal. The group that leads Mo's defense organizes a publicity campaign that highlights his profession, insisting that he is "an architect, not a terrorist." To that end, they photograph Mo leaning "over a drafting table in a crisp white shirt with the sleeves rolled up. He looked faux-serious, as if he were advertising an expensive watch or a credit card, and he was drawing, or pretending to draw, on a blank page. [...] [T]hey wanted the cliché or, as the art director put it, the 'archetypical architect image'" (172). The ideal architect of this moment is less of an artist than he is a promoter of merchandise and commerce, a figure of consumer-friendly neutrality. Mo's unwillingness to defend his design and "sell himself" – a stance he eventually comes to regret – aligns him more with Eisenberg's Passivityman than Rand's uncompromising Howard Roark.

Mo is a body marked as foreign, enigmatic, and threatening. In this respect, Waldman connects him to Asma, a Bangladeshi widow, who also thinks through the trope of architecture (at the hearing for Mo's design, she reminds the audience of the architect Louis Kahn, who designed the National Assembly Building in Dhaka). When Mo has a crisis about the effects of the media frenzy on his personality, his lover, Laila, says, "The edges of you may be changed by this. But Mohammad Kahn is intact. You're like your steel trees." Given the provenance of the trees, however, Mo thinks, "Steel breaks, steel melts [...]. We all know that now" (155). Rather than feeling resolute, "Never had he been shakier" (185). Asma also expresses her crisis in terms of an architectural metaphor when she ponders the irony that the terrorists and her husband are supposed to go to the same garden paradise that is also said to have inspired Mo's design: "Faith for her had always been something like an indestructible building. Now she had spotted a loose brick whose removal could topple the whole structure" (74). Both Asma and Mo are bodies of racial and religious otherness that cannot be assimilated into the unified, patriotic narrative of 9/11 recovery

that architecture was charged with realizing. The architect, who is supposed to bring about the triumphant symbiosis of buildings and bodies, becomes instead a lightning rod for all the strife, violence, and prejudice that his memorial is supposed to assuage.

The epilogue of *The Submission* leaps many years forward: Khan's design has been constructed not as a 9/11 memorial but as "the private pleasure garden of some rich Muslim" (296). In its place in New York is a memorial that Claire describes as a "Garden of Flags":

Hideous. As ugly as the whole process. [...] [B]y the time it got built I'm not sure anyone cared. [...] And so many more Americans ended up dying in the wars the attack prompted than in the attack itself that by the time they finished this memorial it seemed wrong to have expended so much effort and money. But it's almost like we fight over what we can't settle in real life through these symbols. They're our nation's afterlife. (295)

In an almost casual reference to the wars the attacks prompted, Waldman undercuts the entire premise of her novel. In a matter of years, the raging argument about the memorial has become almost irrelevant. Indeed, already the decade of architectural debate about the World Trade Center has faded as construction gives the resulting buildings an air of inevitability. "Memory Foundations" has gone the way of Radio Row: it has become local folklore.

One reads Waldman's alternative history of the 9/11 memorial process with a sense of relief. Michael Arad's memorial has been widely praised for its elegance and force. But the very fact of the memorial suggests a summing up and closure, a literal, permanent representation of the event. As if reprising Jess Walter's response to the "cleaned-up crater" in *The Zero*, on the tenth anniversary of the attack, Philip Nobel's essay, "Memory Holes," draws a contrast between visiting Ground Zero when it was a disaster zone and visiting the built space of Arad's memorial. In the "pre-memorial years," he writes, people would walk a

ritual circumambulation around the rim of the ruined super-block, antipating at every corner a chance fence crack or unscreened elevated view that might allow a peek in, hoping for an experience that would indicate in what direction meaning might be found. [...] The site itself could offer nothing but raw presence. [...] The touching human habit to seek a vector for emotional resolution in architecture (standing, impending, or lost) can have only one end: disappointment.

Visiting Arad's memorial today, one needs to purchase a ticket with a timed entry, go through several checkpoints at which one's body and bags are

searched, and walk a long series of winding corridors to the site, supervised by walkie-talkied personnel along the way. Nobel contends,

The purpose-built memorial will never equal in quality the spontaneous one we are now losing. A search for meaning enacted as a circular walk around a forbidden center, a quest with high expectations ending in futility, was an excellent, instructive, fitting (if accidental, unscripted) mechanism to aid in processing an event, like all fresh violence, that has no inherent message or palliative truth. ("Memory")

Nobel suggests that architecture has put an end to meaningful thought about September 11; now that there is a built environment to guide and organize one's response, September 11 has been effectively concretized, fixed, and localized. Arad's memorial is deeply referential to – and reverential of – the Twin Towers. The names of the dead are inscribed around the pools' perimeters, but the main events, architecturally, are the twin chasms, the footprints of the fallen colossi. In contrast to Maya Lin's Vietnam Memorial, which with its dark cut in the earth refers to a diaspora of damage across many nations, Arad's memorial, because of how it traces the Twin Towers, continuing the anthropological relationship between bodies and buildings, is deliberately and deeply focused on its immediate location. In one sense, this response is reasonable, as the memorial marks the place where the primary – but not the only – attack on September 11 occurred. In another sense, however, the memorial reflects the persistent desire to keep 9/11 local.

This desire was made particularly clear in another piece of history that is now but a blip: in 2004, an International Freedom Center (IFC) was approved to be built next to Arad's memorial. The proposed institution, with cultural historians on its board, was dedicated to putting the attack on the World Trade Center in the context of other world historical events and thus to promoting international freedom. It was precisely this impulse to expand the meaning of 9/11 beyond the singularity of one time and place that led George Pataki, bowing to protests, to cancel the IFC in 2005 as too controversial. The interlacing of local and global factors that authors such as Delillo, Beigbeder, Walter, and Waldman suggest – the connection of planes striking the Twin Towers to American intervention and wars abroad, to global capitalism, to the offshore torture of suspicious foreigners, to human rights violations – is nowhere to be found at the new World Trade Center. Even the September 11 Memorial Museum has opted for a narrative that focuses largely on New York, and potentially "disturbing" material is set off in alcoves with warnings: "The architectural design includes 'early exits' along the museum route, enabling distressed visitors to duck out without having to pass through the entire exhibition. Disturbing material will be sectioned off with partitions or put in alcoves" (P. Cohen). Early exit: a fitting metaphor for the architectural solution to Ground Zero.

The Future of Post-9/11 Fiction

In 2004, the audio tour company Soundwalk released the "Ground Zero Sonic Memorial" narrated by Paul Auster, one of New York's most beloved – and New York-centric – novelists. In the introduction to the tour, which begins on the periphery of the old World Trade Center site, Auster explains, "Most of our monuments are mute, but this is a sonic memorial, a walking memorial." Between stops, the soundwalk features music from the Radio Row era and more recent compositions along with phone calls recorded on September 11, 2001, and other oral testimony about that day. Listening to the recording today, in 2014, one is most struck by how the landscape that Auster describes has altered. Yet he anticipates this change: "This neighborhood is in a state of flux as it's being rebuilt. If a gate is locked or a landmark I mention has changed, check your map and meet me at the next stop." It's a striking accommodation of contingency, evolution, and transformation that points the way to the future.

I will close with a fiction that is written in a similar spirit of fluidity. Jennifer Egan's collection of interlinked stories, *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010), incorporates New York architecture as an index of cultural trauma, but also casts architecture more metaphorically, embedding it in a supple temporality and spatiality in order to move beyond an insular understanding of 9/11. *Goon Squad* is polyphonic and nonlinear, moving backward and forward in time between San Francisco in the 1970s and Manhattan in the 2020s and many points in between, with brief detours through Italy and Africa. Egan gathers a large group of characters with both intimate and peripheral connections to one another and sets them in 13 short chapters, each of which is narrated from a different point of view. Despite its peripatetic structure, the book does have a center of narrative gravity – New York – as well as a subtle center of temporality around which the collection pivots: 9/11. *Goon Squad* does not represent 9/11 directly or extensively; no characters have lost family members or friends in the attack. Egan is also not concerned with many of the issues that have preoccupied earlier writers, such as the discourse of heroism or the treatment of bodies. In *Goon Squad*, 9/11 is less a singular event than an index of temporal and spatial change against which the characters measure their lives.

In the first chapter of *Goon Squad*, set around 2006, 35-year-old Sasha, formerly the assistant of the music producer Bennie Salazar, is on a date with Alex, a man she has met through the Internet. Sasha feels isolated and directionless, longing for "[f]ledgling, transformation – God how she wanted these things" (18). The chapter has a weary, defeated quality that is underscored by the post-9/11 landscape. After their drink "Sasha and Alex left the hotel and stepped into desolate, windy Tribeca. [...] She hated the neighborhood at night without the World Trade Center, whose blazing freeways of light had always filled her with hope" (12). By contrast, Alex is a new arrival to the city, as Sasha had once been; he is fascinated with what he calls "old New York," represented by Sasha's bohemian Lower East Side apartment with

a bathtub in the kitchen. Sasha intuitively senses the ephemerality of Alex's impressions: "It jarred Sasha to think of herself as a glint in the hazy memories that Alex would struggle to organize a year or two from now: Where was that place with the bathtub? Who was that girl?" (14). Sasha correlates lost buildings with a better stage of her life, her own "old New York."

The absent Twin Towers register again as a manifestation of lost time in the second chapter, set shortly before the previous one. Sasha and Bennie drive home from a scouting trip outside the city. As they return to Manhattan on the West Side Highway, Sasha remarks, "It's incredible ... how there's just nothing there." She finds herself

looking downtown, and he followed her eyes to the empty space where the Twin Towers had been. "There should be something, you know?" she said, not looking at Bennie. "I like an echo. Or an outline."

Bennie sighed. "They'll put something up," he said, "when they're finally done squabbling."

"I know." But she kept looking south, as if it were a problem her mind couldn't solve. (36–7)

The characters in *Goon Squad* struggle to reconcile their younger selves, full of promise, with a present that does not quite measure up. In the "empty space" of the absent Twin Towers, Sasha sees her collapsed dreams.

However, *Goon Squad* also constantly warns about nostalgic idealization. In the middle chapter, "A to B," Jules, a journalist, has been released from jail, where he "edited a weekly prison newspaper, and his coverage of the impact of 9/11 on the lives of inmates won him a special citation from the PEN Prison Writing Program" (119). While driving into Manhattan, he remarks, "I go away for a few years and the whole fucking world is upside down. Buildings are missing. You get strip-searched every time you go to someone's office." He "stare[s] at the glittering skyline of Manhattan without recognition" and says, "I'm like America. [...] Our hands are dirty" (124). The missing Twin Towers are noticed throughout *Goon Squad*, but not as "trauma architecture." The towers do not represent bodies or even the specific events of 9/11. Egan's characters respond to buildings and their traces as bittersweet mnemonic prompts. For Jules, architectural changes render visible lost time – time lost while he was doing time. Significantly, the missing towers also prompt Jules's meditation on America's political complicity ("our hands are dirty"). Egan uses architecture to dematerialize the landscape of Manhattan after 9/11, showing the city from a new and more expansive angle. Egan herself, when interviewed by the *Wall Street Journal* and asked about how 9/11 changed her experience of living in New York ten years later, highlighted two architectural/spatial observations:

For me, the moment that really stands out was hitting those barricades along Canal Street. It looked like a war zone, and that's not something

we're used to encountering on American soil. It looked like New York, but it was completely different. There was a huge conceptual shift that occurred for me, which is that we can have these experiences, this catastrophic violence, right here in New York. [...] Every single day, I ride over the Manhattan Bridge on the subway, I look at Lower Manhattan and I think, I can't believe those buildings aren't there. (Orden)

Disengaging the persistent analogy between the Twin Towers and physical bodies, Egan instead approaches September 11 through the lens of time- and space-consciousness to note estrangement and a "conceptual shift" that could be traced well beyond the immediate events at the World Trade Center.

Goon Squad concludes, like *The Submission*, with a visit to the future. The book's final chapter is set around the year 2020, a time of fearsome global warming and invasive technology; "two generations of war and surveillance" have resulted in constant "unease" (254). The characters converge on the World Trade Center site, which is now known as "the Footprint." Alex, Sasha's Internet date in Chapter 1, is helping Bennie organize a comeback concert for Scotty, a character from the book's early chapters. Thanks to ever-present social media, people surge downtown:

Before them, the new buildings spiraled gorgeously against the sky, so much nicer than the old ones (which Alex had only seen in pictures), more like sculptures than buildings, because they were empty. Approaching them, the crowd began to slow, backing up as those in front entered the space around the reflecting pools, the density of police and security agents [...]. The weight of what had happened here more than twenty years ago was still faintly present for Alex, as it always was when he came to the Footprint. (331)

While the heavily patrolled site is still charged with foreboding, it becomes an occasion for a collective aesthetic experience. The new buildings are "empty," as if they have recuperated the "empty space where the Twin Towers had been" (36), suggesting that memory can exist both in negative space – the void – and built environments. After Scotty's triumphant performance at the Footprint, Bennie and Alex discover that they both knew Sasha, and they walk to her old apartment in the hope of seeing her again. Hence, Sasha's fears about time's painful effacement of memory are answered by scenes of connection and transformation. In *Goon Squad*, architecture is one more technology of memory; it can mark trauma and gesture toward the future, but it is not a full summing up. Leaving readers with a future dominated by surveillance, war, and anxiety that is only a slightly exaggerated version of the present, Egan invites us

to think about 9/11 in terms of interconnectivity and mobility, as a narrative that works both forward and backward in time, that is emplotted both locally and globally.

If there was a widely shared desire immediately after September 11 to repair the site of the World Trade Center and to commemorate 9/11 as a singular, temporally and spatially fixed point, there is an ever stronger demand now, more than ten years later, to think about September 11 in a global sense and as a series of events in points past, present, and future. At the new World Trade Center, in a space and at a time when security and economic issues have largely eclipsed aesthetic concerns, features such as fluidity, flexibility, and evolving interpretation are needed. Fiction has the latitude – formally, institutionally – to take risks, experiment, and construct provisional, imaginative structures through which to understand history in just this fluid way.

To return to the 9/11 Memorial's "In Darkness We Shine Brightest" logo, with its columns of light beaming in the Manhattan sky, the starkest retort to this monumental architecture of heroic visibility may be the US practice of maintaining "black sites," the CIA's secret locations for interrogating terrorism suspects, or "ghost detainees." These covert operations render bodies invisible and untraceable precisely because they are not just beyond the boundaries of the nation and the law, but also because they are literally not on the map. Yet these moments too are part of 9/11, and they are becoming increasingly significant. Despite the realization of the new World Trade Center buildings and memorial structures, with their implied narrative of security, stability, and fortitude, the reverberations of September 11, 2001, continue to be felt in contexts that are anything but fixed. By not anchoring 9/11 to a set of buildings on a particular site any more than it is anchored to a single day, literature and other supple forms of narrative are creating a field that can accommodate the shifting consequences of what we might, following DeLillo, characterize most accurately not as a place, a space, a time, or an event, but rather as a condition. Fifty years from now, the best answer to the question, "Where is 9/11?" may not be a several-block area of Manhattan but a shifting body of texts, works, and conversations that together reflect upon the world.

Notes

1. Philip Nobel recalls a similar experience with a tourist who asked him, "How do we get to nine-eleven?" ("Memory").
2. For differing accounts of the politics of this period, see Goldberger (*Tip From Zero*), Nobel (*Sixteen Acres*), and Filler.
3. George Black, for example, the husband of Anne Nelson, whose play, *The Gays*, was a hagiography of firefighters after 9/11, published a pointed critique of *American Ground*. See Carr.

4. See also Vidler, "Designing 'Defensible Space.'"
5. As Gray points out, "[I]mages of buildings operate ironically throughout this remarkable story [...] to suggest the vulnerability of human structures and plans" (*After the Fall* 55).
6. See J. Young, who describes in "Counterfactual" how the members of the 9/11 memorial jury responded to Waldman's novel.

12

The New Grotesque in Jess Walter's *The Zero*

A Commentary and Interview

Anthony Flinn

As Jess Walter's *The Zero* opens, former NYPD detective Brian Remy has apparently tried to shoot himself in the head (4). We say "apparently" because Remy is not entirely sure. He has been having periods of lost awareness, blots in his memory like the floaters that impair his vision. At his return to self-awareness, he finds his hair matted with "syrupy" blood and his gun nearby, perhaps because he had been cleaning it. All he can surmise with any certainty is that he has delivered himself a head wound with his own gun. What forms the context for that gunshot and subsequent wound is an opening image of the towers' descent, the debris first imagined as birds and then as an explosion of paper fragments: "Fluttering and circling and growing bigger, falling bits and frantic sheets, some smoking, corners scorched, flaring in the open air until there was nothing left but a fine black edge ... and then gone, a hole and nothing but the faint memory of smoke" (3).

These opening pages offer us the entire novel: Remy's condition is identified with the nation's physical, political, and emotional condition in the aftermath of the attacks – which is to have been left in fragments. Remy's quest, to the extent that he is able to formulate one, is to reassemble his consciousness, to regain access to memories of his actions and their motives. That is, from Remy's perspective, he's being jolted in and out of a succession of disjointed circumstances from moment to moment and day to day, with no sense of how he arrived there or what he has been up to prior to each arrival. It is as if his life is being channel-surfed (240), or pages have been ripped out of the novel, obscuring its action and destroying continuity. In *The Zero*, all efforts to reconnect consciousness to memory, cause to effect, problem to solution, fragment to whole, and heart to heart, are invariably made grotesque.

"Grotesque," though essential for understanding Walter's vision of our post-9/11 world, is an unfortunately problematic term. In conventional usage, it more typically describes an effect on the reader or viewer than the structure of its objective causes in the text or visual. However, over the centuries of its use in Western art, the term has acquired a firm theoretical base. For the purposes of this brief commentary, of course, I have no hopes