



# 9/11

## MEDIA CITY

"Events", the historian Fernand Braudel once wrote, "are dust". Braudel's contempt, measuring the event against longer cycles of historical time offers little help in understanding *catastrophe*, when a constellation in time throws into relief death, ruin and the storms of a terrible future.

In this sense when the two aircraft crashed into the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September, we had all the elements of a catastrophic event, marking time and intimating a transition, recalling similar moments: the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914, the Reichstag Fire of 1933, the fall of the Berlin Wall. As *catastrophe*, 9/11 was also *simultaneous*, when the experience of a city on that day was rendered public for the world through the media. The wounds of a global city, the fragility of an empire, were relayed through the Internet, through phone calls, and above all by global television. As *repetition* (how many times were the towers destroyed on the television screen?) overwhelmed the sorrow of the dead, it also rehearsed a new war. "All efforts to render politics aesthetic", wrote Benjamin, "culminate in war".

The essays in this section open up a discussion of the catastrophic event, from a memoir of that Day, to the branding of the Event that followed, and philosophical reflections on issues of war, revenge, mourning and justice. There is also a selection of powerful postings from the reader-list, an electronic discussion forum on media and the city, hosted by Sarai. And as markers of time, the discussions begin with 9/11 and end with 13/12, signalling the opening of a new South Asian crisis.

Memory in the media-city is ephemeral; the experiences of Beirut, Sarajevo and Mogadishu have long vanished. To *remember* is to challenge the overexposed surface of the Media-city.

RAVI SUNDARAM