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真的沒有其他選擇嗎？
唐・德里羅《墜落的人》的後現代主義筆記
Is There Really No Alternative?
Postmodernist Notes on Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*

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Let the tone stay scattered.
Don DeLillo, *Baader-Meinhof*

Acknowledgements

To ask questions about literature, about the way we live, about the past, the present and the future, about life—basically, it's to ask ourselves what this mystery called human nature is. The answers are the least of our worries when the questions provoke reflections that will haunt us for a lifetime. This project wouldn't be possible without the support of the people who have shaped me with their questions, their reflections, their affection, their mysteries, and their support along the way. To my family, for their loving teachings. To my friends, for their frank and open conversations. To my teachers, for sharing their interests, their obsessions, and their comments. To my advisor, for his time, guidance and support. To NTNU, for providing an academic environment full of possibilities. To MOFA, for the opportunity to pursue a master's degree. To Taiwan, for becoming a second home. To Don Delillo, for his work. To Daniela, for her love, her unconditional support, and for putting up with me. May the questions continue to haunt us, and may we never stop dreaming of reaching answers and futures in which life is always affirmed!

Chinese Abstract

自九一一恐怖襲擊以來，迷失方向、碎片化、混亂，以及記憶與歷史感的喪失等現象日益加劇。我們生活在一個碎形的世界中，沉浸於符號之中，卻面臨資訊過載，且愈發難以理解自身所處的位置。後現代主義可視為試圖掌握此種混亂而破碎現實的理論之一。本文回溯其思想源流，並以弗雷德里克·詹明信（Fredric Jameson）的理論為分析框架，嘗試解讀二十一世紀最具影響力的小說之一：唐·德里羅（Don DeLillo）於2007年出版的《墜落的人》（Falling Man）。該小說聚焦九一一事件的餘波，詰問：在一個事物不再具有意義的世界中，我們該如何繼續前行?

本研究著重於小說的形式與內容，深入剖析其結構安排、敘事聲音，以及各角色如何透過重構世界與自我位置，回應其所面臨的再現危機（crisis of representation）。小說透過「頓悟」（epiphany）的敘事手法，在混亂與絕望的世界中帶來一絲希望之光，並將語言呈現為於廢墟中重建想像力的方式。

關鍵字: 唐·德里羅、後現代主義、頓悟、寓言、認知映射

English Abstract

Disorientation, fragmentation, confusion, loss of memory or historical sense are some of the conditions that have heightened since the terrorist attacks of September 11th. We live in a fractal world, immersed in symbols and yet increasingly unintelligible and overloaded. One of the theoretical attempts to grasp this chaotic and fragmented reality is postmodernism. Returning to one of its primary sources, this paper uses the work of Fredric Jameson as a framework to attempt a reading of one of the most consequential novels of the 21st century: *Falling Man* (2007) by Don DeLillo. The novel, which focuses on the aftermath of 9/11, asks how we can continue in a world where nothing makes sense anymore.

Focusing on both form and content, this work looks into unraveling the structure of the novel, analyzing the narrative voice, as well as the crisis of representation that each of the characters suffer, which is why their main struggle consists of finding a way to represent the world and their position in it. Finally, the novel, through the device of epiphany, proposes an alternative to so much confusion and despair, which is why this work presents language as a way to begin to rebuild imagination amidst the ruins.

Keywords: Don DeLillo, Postmodernism, Epiphany, Allegory, Cognitive Mapping

Table of Contents

Introduction

I. Background and Motivation

Back in 2001, Don DeLillo published his op-ed essay about the September 11 attacks entitled "In The Ruins of the Future." In it he refers to the coverage of the event as "unstintingly". The attacks were broadcasted uncut, with no restrictions, pure and raw. He continues: "[t]he event dominated the medium. It was bright and totalising and some of us said it was unreal. When we say a thing is unreal, we mean it is too real, a phenomenon so unaccountable and yet so bound to the power of objective fact that we can't tilt it to the slant of our perceptions" (*The Guardian*). This failure to absorb what the coverage conveyed may indicate a more subtle and pervasive problem, one that has permeated the 21st century.

In the introduction of his book *The Seeds of Time*, Fredric Jameson states that perhaps due to some weakness of our imagination "[i]t seems to be easier for us today to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism" (xii). Today, more than thirty years after the publication of Jameson's book and twenty four years after the September 11 attacks, it seems as if our imagination has been hijacked by consumerism, social media, business culture, terrorism, streaming services, illiteracy, milleniarism, climate change, memes, fundamentalism, high-rise architecture, FOMO, among other things. These categories, fueled by an endless stream of events, launches, ads, lives, attacks, have entered an ouroboros cycle that repeats itself over and over again daily. And as time has gone by, that cycle

—that system—has been moving faster and faster, carving an image and a sentiment that is not concerned in offering any alternatives.

Therefore, it is in this context that I'd like to explore how Don DeLillo's post-millennial novel, *Falling Man* (2007), represents the tension of a present captured by the excesses of late capitalism versus the (im)possibility of imagining an alternative beyond. In this project I would like to ask: what is the novel saying about the excesses of late capitalism? How do the characters deal with those conditions? Is the novel offering an alternative? Is DeLillo suggesting an aesthetic way of resisting or at least be aware of this never-ending tension? I believe that by asking these questions in the context of our current times, we can find plausible answers (or more questions), not only to satisfy our intellectual concerns or literary interests, but also to learn how to cope with our warping and ubiquitous cultural logic.

II. Author and Plot Summary

Don DeLillo (b. 1936) is an American novelist, short story writer and playwright. As one of the few living writers with several editions of his work collected by the Library of America and a career that spans more than 60 years, DeLillo has been awarded with the National Book Award, PEN/Faulkner Award, Jerusalem Prize, PEN/Saul Bellow Award, Library of Congress Prize for American Fiction, among many others. To date, he has published seventeen novels, a collection of short stories, and ten plays. What is usually named his early period, from 1971 to 1982, comprises novels such as *Americana* (1971), *End Zone* (1972), *Great Jones Street* (1973), *Ratner's Star* (1976), *Players* (1977), *Running Dog* (1978), *Amazons* (1980) and *The Names*

(1982). These novels have often been considered part of his apprenticeship. However, many of the themes he will develop in his middle and late period are already in gestation. His middle period, from 1982 to 1997, is perhaps his most widely celebrated, since it was during that time that DeLillo attained critical and commercial success. The novels of that period are *White Noise* (1985), *Libra* (1988), *Mao II* (1991) and *Underworld* (1997). In what has been deemed his late period, from 2000 to the present, his fiction has been characterized by a minimalistic style and scale, contrasting with his previous period. The novels that are to be found in this period are *The Body Artist* (2001), *Cosmopolis* (2003), *Falling Man* (2007), *Point Omega* (2010), *Zero K* (2016) and *The Silence* (2020). Throughout his oeuvre, some of the themes that have been depicted in his work are mass media, isolation, history, grief, finance, terrorism, art, celebrity and the American identity.

Falling Man (2007) is the fourteenth novel by DeLillo. The novel deals with the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, as experienced by the dysfunctional Neudecker family—Keith, his estranged wife Lianne and their son Justin. It is divided into three sections, each with a coda, comprising a total of 14 chapters. At the time of publication, the American literary scene was eagerly waiting for one of its major authors to address directly the event of 9/11. *Falling Man* conveys a sense of impasse. It seems as if time is in an endless "free fall" for the protagonists. Keith, a survivor of the attacks, returns home on an unknown impulse right after the falling of the Twin Towers, covered in dust, debris and blood. Lianne doesn't recognize him and, after his sudden return, tries to deal with the atmosphere of fear and tension that captures the city while helping Alzheimer's patients recollect their lives and the attacks. Justin plays and plots with his school friends, watching the sky for more planes to come. The attacks have left their

marks on the characters, and they try to make sense of the new reconfiguration of the world and their positions in it. They seem to search for the purpose as individuals and as a family, while the narrator contrasts these reconfigurations with the codas, where we follow Hammad, one of the hijackers of the planes up until the moment of the attacks.

Falling Man leaves the reader asking questions regarding our relationship with a fragmented past and a precarious future, the boundaries of language, life and death, and the possibility of overcoming traumatic events and history, something that can also be explored in the work of Frederic Jameson. Below I will turn to his work to tease out the theoretical framework of the project.

III. Theoretical Framework

Nowadays, the term postmodernism has become a catch-all term for various states such as moral relativism, artificiality, rupture, nihilism, decadence, technological progress, progressive discourse, among others. The lighthearted use of the term has hollowed its substance, leaving us only with a superficial usage of it. In "Revisiting Postmodernism" (2016), an interview made on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the publication of the essay "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" (1984) that would become the first chapter of his seminal book, Fredric Jameson discusses how one of his most known works stands today and if the terminology still seems applicable in the twenty-first century. For Jameson, even though the period that he ascribes as postmodernity has been named over and again from different ends of the critical theory spectrum, postmodernity as a term still retains its significance

since it's not a historical period that has ended. According to him, we still live the consequences of the economic and cultural shift that took place in the 1980's to varying degrees. He explains his point by referring how in the '80s there still was a socialist block that stood in opposition to capitalism but, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, capitalism became omnipresent in the world. With this backdrop as a setting, back in 1991, he embarked on a task to define this term and describe its theoretical field, resulting in the publication of his book *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. In it he dives into the atmosphere that allowed the term to come up to the mainstream, the elusiveness of the concept, the features it has and, by analyzing different aesthetic forms, he also suggested how it could be used to provide a reading of contemporary times.

According to Jameson, postmodernism is an attempt to think the present in historical terms, in an age that has forgotten how to think historically (4). Postmodernity or postmodernist consciousness is focused on breaks, shifts, changes, events, rather than outcomes. Unlike modernism, which focused on the "new world," postmodernism focuses on "[w]hen-it-all-changed" (4). This change of focus entails an erasure of the past when an observation about the present becomes the search for the present, leaving us disconnected from our sense of history. In this new inhabited space, the past disappears in the midst of images that reconfigure/cement our conception of it. Therefore, postmodernism is an attempt to deal with the uncertainty and lack of coherence of our times, starting by recognizing that uncertainty and lack of coherence.

The ambiguity and resistance of the term to be defined allows us to rewrite familiar things in new terms proposing modifications, reshuffling canonical feelings and values (9). One of those familiar things is the phrase "late capitalism." By late capitalism Jameson means a

“sense that something has changed, that things are different, that we have gone through a transformation of the life world which is somehow decisive but incomparable with the older convulsions of modernization and industrialization, less perceptible and dramatic, somehow, but more permanent precisely because more thoroughgoing and all-pervasive” (16). This sense of change, subtle yet unnerving, widespread yet slinking, has come to dominate the cultural climate of our century. Despite knowing something is off, the difficulty of pointing it out is stupefying, as if we couldn’t separate ourselves from it to take a look at a distance.

From this, Jameson arrives at his definition of cultural dominant or cultural logic, which refers to a “conception which allows for the presence and coexistence of a range of very different, yet subordinate, features” (20). Therefore, he argues that postmodernism is more than just a style or an aesthetic, since it also includes social and economic features. The aesthetic production has been integrated into the commodity production. Now the market has taken over the role of culture, and culture has become just another product in the infinite range of options. This shift can be explicitly perceived in how a modernist painting, say one of Van Gogh’s, is reproduced in t-shirts, copycats, memes, tote bags, puzzles, cups, etc., implying not only an effacement of high and low culture, which transforms into aesthetic populism, but also a process of the means of production and acquisition, from design to manufacture to shipping to marketing to shopping. The coexistence of all these complex and apparent disconnected traits is what makes postmodernism the cultural logic of late capitalism, according to Jameson.

Taking that into account, Jameson sets out to identify and describe the key features of postmodernism. First, he focuses on the new depthlessness of the image, which means a break from the hermeneutic model of interpretation. According to Jameson, the work of art used to

represent or hint to “a vaster reality” (24). That representation, or that expression, used to deal with the dialectical movement between inside vs. outside, essence vs. appearance, signified vs. signifier. Jameson states this is no longer attainable, since the work of art has fallen into a flatness, a superficiality, derived from its reproduction, which leaves the work isolated, in an endless present, as a simulacrum displacing the original object. This depthlessness demands us to take things as is, literal, parting ways with its knowable life world, meaning that we are no longer able to grasp the situation of the original object, only to attempt to understand it through references. This has bred a waning of affect. Jameson suggests that since the disappearance of the individual subject, there’s no chance of a personal and unique mode of expression, only of intensities. By intensities he doesn’t mean that feelings and emotions have been wiped clean, but that they can no longer be registered and reflected upon. They are only bursts, reactions, toward any stimuli the environment throws at us.

Which leads us to the second feature: the weakening of historicity. By this, Jameson suggests that the erosion of our perception of the present as history has come to affect us in the sense that we no longer see the present as a continuation of the past (302). Instead, we are reduced to the here and now, without the ability to reflect on the past in order to think critically about the present (and hence the future). Jameson uses the concept of pastiche, which is the imitation of a particular style without a purpose, to explain how this only reproduces and reinforces our stereotyped vision of the past. The past serves as a mere ornament to talk about the present, leaving us in a present world of simulacra.

This brings us to the third feature identified by Jameson: a new emotional ground tone. The concept that the author employs to describe this feature is the hysterical sublime. Tracing

back from Edward Burke and Immanuel Kant, the sublime is understood as the object that exceeds our categories, that which is unrepresentable. Traditionally it was understood as Nature, but ever since Nature was tamed by progress, Jameson proposes that now it is the vast communicational and computer network, which is impossible to represent, that stands as technology (54). The hysterical quality stands there because it asks what it wants from me. The third feature is deeply embedded with the fourth one inasmuch as it correlates to our new relation to technology. In this feature, Jameson calls for a geopolitical aesthetic. Aesthetic in the sense that it represents a network of power and control that is difficult for our minds and imaginations to grasp. In other words, highways that look like microchips, buildings like cassettes, city as a massive communicational network. This representation can only be theorized in terms of that "enormous and threatening, yet only dimly perceivable, other reality of economic and social institutions" (55). It can be understood with the example of the chip. We ignore how it works, but at the same time we are holding the whole system of late capitalism in the palm of our hand.

The last feature that Jameson describes is the mutation in built space. The author asks how we can locate ourselves in relation to our environment if we cannot represent the world to ourselves. According to him, the incapacity of our minds to represent or map the network or the totality in which we find ourselves has left us adrift. He defines cognitive mapping as a procedure "which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system" (64). Later on, he discusses cognitive mapping as a new interpretation of class consciousness. However, it's important to notice how the ways in which cognitive mapping works can also be understood in terms of other categories such as religion, partisan politics, ethnicity, gender, among others.

Some of these traits are already outlined in his essay "Language and Conspiracy in DeLillo and Yurick" reprinted in his book *Inventions of a Present* (2024), an analysis he makes of DeLillo's novel *The Names* (1982). Jameson opens his essay by pointing out the dilemma that is embedded in postmodernism. He names it "the spatial dilemma" (57). This dilemma consists in the "increasing incompatibility (…) between individual experience (…) and structural meaning" (57). By that Jameson means that for the individual subject it is now impossible to grasp the totality of the world system. According to the author, the world system of late capitalism "operates on a tonal or perceptual level beyond the capacity of the individual human body" (58) to experience. There's a schism between the individual private experience and the "'scientific' explanation of the world" (58). This dilemma has been tackled in fiction, which is why Jameson is writing about DeLillo and Yurick as examples of two different ways of approaching that same issue. In these next paragraphs I'll focus on unpacking Jameson's methodology that allows us to comprehend his interpretative lens and then I'll concentrate on his particular discussion of DeLillo's novel *The Names*.

As we stated earlier, Jameson sees both the novels of DeLillo and Yurick as two different instances of how to approach the spatial dilemma. Taking into account that tension, he asks if it might be useful to analyze novels, plots, that deal with this dilemma in a more straightforward way, say, "are they means-rational or end-rational" (61). He comes by this distinction arguing how "all forms of commodifications tend now to break apart into means and ends" (61). Which means that everything is driven in a two-way perspective: that of the method or actions that help us achieve something, and that of the goal or the aim per se. In a way, he is atomizing the way of reading this type of plots by giving two symmetrical lines of attack with different outcomes.

According to this line of thought, by means-rational Jameson is referring to "the proliferation of the episodes themselves" (61). Which posits value in the apparent fragmentary and disconnected events that are occurring in the novels. Whereas, by end-rational he means the solution or the surfacing of the tying up the dots at a certain point making everything clearer, showing a resolution.

In *The Names*, specifically, Jameson states that there's a "tension between the fragment, the writing on any given page (…), and the overall drifting plot curiosity" (61). There are different motifs that appear throughout the novel, playing with the reader, but to Jameson this only highlights the statement that the novel is making in relation to Language. It "looks metaphysical and profound [like a modernist work] but is bound to end up remaindered among all the other ideologies of language for sale" (62). Since it's a novel about expats living in the East, the juxtaposition of the American language versus Greek, Arabic, Hindi and even archeological inscriptions of dead languages translates, according to Jameson, to the experience of space, of social relations. The hollowness of American English is contrasted with the apparent sacredness of the other languages. For Jameson that hollowness has something to do with consumer society, meanwhile the sacredness of those traditional languages has to do with religion. However, the novel is not concerned with axiomatic judgments. Its focus is in emphasizing that "if a totalized world is finally unavailable for perception, then it seems best to hold to the fragments of space, but to mark those with a peculiar structural absence (66). Since in this way we might be able to stress the experiential emptiness, the suspension, of the postmodern subject.

This Jamesonian reading of a DeLillo novel is relevant in the sense that it deals with several of the characteristics he later on defines in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. The use of genres and motifs as the expat novel, the thriller, the doomed couple, the exotic setting; the big theme; and the structure, are all vehicles for pastiche, global aesthetic, depthlessness and cognitive mapping. The novel was already dealing with the tension of how to represent the totality of late capitalism, before Jameson published his book in the early 1990's. This can offer a point of entry into the oeuvre of one of the minds that has been preoccupied with this issue since before it was defined, which makes an attractive case of how DeLillo addressed this issue in his postmillennial novels, twenty years later after *The Names*.

In short, Jameson's effort to describe the cultural logic of late capitalism gives us a wide array of theoretical tools to try and grasp the totality of the system. What at first glance may seem incoherent or contradictory, Jameson manages to see beyond showing how different features can coexist in a subtle and pervasive way. This pervasiness is key to understanding how theory has lost its vantage point, its critical distance. The weakening of historicity plays a central role in that sense. Pastiche has become the dominant form of this century, emptying the meaning, the content, of the texts. Nostalgia of the present can be best seen in the endless remakes, reboots, remixes, samples, vintage products that we are targeted to buy daily. Living in an endless present can wear out. Which is something DeLillo's protagonists experience. In the novel, the characters are confronted with an obliteration of the past, being the September 11 attacks. This obliteration has left them without a sense of relating to the world, without understanding their new position in it. The world, or the system, is something ineffable, impossible to describe, to attain. And they, like us, are trying to make sense of it all, while being

submerged in it. Perhaps, through a Jamesonian reading of DeLillo's novels, we can attempt to recognize the network that has invaded the most remote places of the human spirit and see if DeLillo, through *Falling Man*, is offering a way of devising an alternative.

Besides the valuable framework outlined above, it is important to acknowledge the up-to-date scholarship regarding DeLillo's works. Below is the literature review of the selected novel.

IV. Literature Review

In "Inverse Apocalypse in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man,*" Fadia Fayez Suyoufie and Abdullah M. al-Dagamseh argue that the novel inverses the traditional notion of what an apocalypse entails, which is an explanation and an order of the world, while during the process it constructs a secular version with the aim to unmask the threats that a global world posit in the individual and its community. This resistance to explain and give order to the chaos allows the characters to speculate and reflect upon their fear and, also, allows them to attempt to understand the mood of Islamophobia that permeates Western media. Suyoufie and al-Dagamseh argue that this resistance can be viewed as a self-critique with the aim of self-understanding. Despite all the imagery of doom and decay, the novel is interested in exploring the responses that are provoked by this apocalyptic fear. They state that this apocalyptic fear arises from repetition of the view of "the terrorists (…) as destroyers of the fantasies promulgated by capital and media" (268). The figure of the terrorist has come to the Western world to obliterate the global expansion, democracy, consumerism, secularism, the rationalization that has been at the forefront of Western thought since the Enlightenment. Suyoufie and al-Dagamseh argue that this juxtaposition

between Western values and the threat of terrorism serves as the framework for Falling Man, portrayed by Keith and Hammad in the last chapter (275).

However, the majority of the scholarship surrounding *Falling Man* links the novel to trauma studies in the post 9/11 world. Two examples that reinforce that argument are "Writing The Precarious Self in *Falling Man*" by Aliette Ventéjoux and "*Falling Man* and the Intericonicity of 9/11 Pictures" by Luigi Marfè. In "Writing The Precarious Self in *Falling Man*", Ventéjoux argues that the 9/11 attacks represent the collapse of the sovereign self. There is no more sovereign self, only a self subjected to terrorism. Hence, novels like *Falling Man* function as "a representative of the significance of memory to overcome the loss of the sovereign self" (373). Through the use of a fragmented narrative and the depiction of a physical and psychological demise, *Falling Man* aims to depict how to deal with the terror and trauma that invaded American domesticity. Ventéjoux builds her point arguing how the performance artist named Falling Man and Lianne's work with Alzheimer become fixations throughout the novel that serve to remind the citizens of New York about the trauma and the patients about their fleeting memory, respectively. The image of the performer and the effects of the illness embody the condition with which the American people gaze at themselves after the attacks, a condition which is "condemned to a kind of weightlessness or a constant fall" (377).

Likewise, in "*Falling Man* and the Intericonicity of 9/11 Pictures," Marfè explores the intertextual relations between the attacks, its iconography, the novel and trauma. The author argues that the media coverage of the attacks didn't provide any understandability of the event, but rather replicated its imagery, ultimately neutralizing it by offering it for consumption (111). In that sense 9/11 iconography, videos, photographs, became hauntings because of their highly

ambiguous role in consuming and absorbing the event, thus rendering it ineffable. Marfè argues that one of the few anchor points around the chaos is the figure of falling, since it "is a predictable movement, and yet falls are often unforeseen" (113). He continues to add that DeLillo's novel links traumatic violence with the irreversibility of falling through the Falling Man artist, since his aim is to represent the irrationality of what happened through repeated acts of suspension. Suspension becomes a key term for Marfé since it doesn't involve a termination, but rather an ongoing state, always in flux, which echoes the trauma that haunts the characters throughout the novel. This prolongation seeks to face trauma without overcoming it, since the task of understanding it is impossible. But through constantly remembering it, repeating it, we can yearn to live and deal with it.

In *Don DeLillo: Critical Contemporary Perspectives* (2019), the editors Katherine Da Cunha Lewin and Kiron Ward argue in their introduction, entitled "A trick of the light: Don DeLillo in the twenty-first century," that their contribution is to understand DeLillo's oeuvre "beyond postmodernism" (13). They also argue that a common theme regarding the works of DeLillo is the problem and translation of perception and its apprehension of reality. Lewin and Ward write that at "its most elemental, DeLillo's fiction makes visible the fleeting nature of reality as captured by an imperfect recorder" (15). The technological breakthroughs of the twentieth century regarding vision, more specifically film, have brought a set of concerns towards the construction (private) and projection (public) of the self. A new way of seeing has been cast upon us. The editors state that DeLillo's fiction has moved from dealing with issues of understanding the self to the (im)possibility of really knowing anything about the self.

Whereas his earlier work was concerned in capturing the sense of self in the midst of consumer society, his postmillennial work shifted to deal with the tension of evading, moving beyond or countering the dominant narratives that engulf contemporary—consumer life. Lewin and Ward reinforce the central stage that film takes in DeLillo's works since the scrutiny it facilitates not only shapes reality but also reveals it (22). They argue that his fiction is dealing with an "exploration of the limits of spectatorship" and that the collected essays in the book help us in the task of unpacking the "complicated forms of time and space" that DeLillo is tackling through his fiction in an attempt to "make visible new ways of seeing reality beyond our immediate experience" (22). One of the essays in the edited volume concerns specifically *Falling Man*, which I will detail in the following paragraphs.

In his book chapter, "Staging the Counter-Narrative in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*," Ronan McKinney reads DeLillo's *Falling Man* as a novel deeply concerned with the ethics of spectatorship. He argues that the novel offers a counter-narrative "of subjectivity as deeply embedded in what exceeds it, and therefore subject to a primary vulnerability which cannot be eradicated and which demands an ethics of care for the other" (119). Fragility and vulnerability are key conditions to the constitution of selfhood. McKinney's approach, framed by psychoanalysis, asks how can art can mediate "that disposition [vulnerability] as something other than trauma?" (123). He argues that throughout the novel Lianne is confronted with images that awaken deeply rooted fears and traumas that she can't manage to control. Not only the 9/11 attacks have let her a deeply impression in her (un)consciousness, but as the novel develops, she is constantly rewatching paintings by Giorgio Morandi, an Italian artist famous for his "still life" depictions, and the fictional performance artist known as the Falling Man, who performs the act

of falling from a tall structure at random in New York City, reenacting the act of the victims who, under the chaos and despair of the attacks, threw themselves from the windows of the World Trade Center. In the viewing of both of these art mediums, Lianne asks herself questions regarding the mortality of her mother, who dies years after the attacks; the suicide of her father, years before the attacks; the fear of terrorism in domestic life, all of which leading to a self-understanding of a before and after of her condition of fragility that seems to constitute as a core element of herself. McKinney states that the "performances dramatize what we might call Lianne's subjection to history—the fact that as an embodied subject she is embedded within, and subject to, a world which she cannot control—and her frightening vulnerability to its violence. In staging this vulnerability, the performed falls open up the possibility of coming to terms with it, rather in the way the psychoanalytic process exorcises the symptom by integrating it within a narrative" (128).

While she loses herself contemplating these art forms, meditating about the nature of the paintings and/or the performance, she returns to her self-consciousness, being aware that her private life is intertwined and inseparable from the public sphere, that her vulnerability is integrated into daily life. This new reading "of vulnerability" allows the means of looking at it not as a crisis but as a fundamental condition in the conformation of the self. According to McKinney, DeLillo's *Falling Man* proposes a counter-narrative against the *status quo* demarcation between "us" and "others," since by acknowledging the centrality of vulnerability we can recognize ourselves as part and apart from the world, challenging reductionist approaches that breach the gap wider between culture, religion, politics, etc.

V. Chapter Outline

These contemporary criticisms raise valid points toward the discussion of the novel. However, what they lack is a framework all the more encompassing that puts the novel in a wider conversation. By theorizing and returning to the postmodern, instead of "moving beyond" like the editors stated, we are able to attempt to grasp the cultural logic of the system. In a society dominated by synchronic time, where everything happens live and simultaneously, postmodernism offers a way of describing the uncertainties and incoherent features that coexist and challenge us. The depthlessness of the image, the weakening of historicity, the new emotional ground tone, our new relation with technology and the mutation of built space are characteristics that have become more acute and invasive in our daily lives. The pervasiveness of late capitalism looms so subtle that it's almost impossible to acknowledge, describe and apprehend.

In retrospect, Jameson's task was formidable. Thanks to that monumental effort we can try to undertake this project and still have some sense of relevance during the enterprise. Which allows us to return to literature, to the novel as a medium, to intend to unravel the characteristics of the system, to describe it and attempt to imagine alternatives outside the network. Therefore, the novel was not chosen at random. In retrospect, the September 11 attacks can function as a glitch to perceive where we are and where we might be going. Terrorism and fanaticism might offer distorted visions of a totality, one that marks a deep contrast between *them* and *us*. The characters of the novel try to face the violent consequences of those visions pushed upon them. Like us, they struggle and make choices. Like us, they sometimes fail before succeeding. But

what's important is that they try and perhaps that is the suggestion that DeLillo is making in the novel, perhaps the proposition he's suggesting is that there's an alternative through language. That is the aim of this project: to find out how one of the most prominent figures in American literature addresses the question of whether it's easier to imagine the end of the world rather than the end of late capitalism.

In Chapter One, "**Falling and Fragmenting: Narration in *Falling Man,*"** I will be examining the novel's structure while, at the same time, tying together the knots between it and the postmodern condition. The narrator's position offers us an insight into the disoriented and detached voice of our times. Through it, we can piece together a mosaic of breaks and differences that help us see how some of the key traits of postmodernism, such as the weakening of historicity and the waning of affect, develop. These traits suggest, among other things, that the postmodern subject finds itself in an ever-present limbo, and this novel intensifies this situation by taking the aftermath of the attacks as its canvas.

In Chapter Two, "**The Crises of Representation in *Falling Man,*"** I will explore perhaps the biggest issue of the postmodern condition: that of representing its position in the world. Through the examples of Keith, Lianne and Hammad, I will discuss the crises in which they found themselves and the attempts they make to find their place in a world that doesn't make any sense. Jameson's framework of cognitive mapping will be useful to offer an alternative reading of the novel's characters.

And in Chapter Three, "**The Possibility of Epiphany,"** I will suggest that the novel's proposal to address and process an alternative to the bleakness of the postmodern condition is through the possibility of epiphany. Focusing on Lianne, I will delve in how the author and the

novel treat language and how epiphany as a device can offer us a moment of realization and a way to keep going, amidst the noisiness of the world.

It is in this light that I expect to answer some of the questions that have motivated this project, more specifically: what is the novel saying about the excesses of late capitalism? How do the characters deal with the postmodern condition? Is the novel offering an alternative? Is DeLillo suggesting an aesthetic way of resisting or at least being aware of this never-ending tension? The aim, as stated above, is to be able to come up with an analysis of *Falling Man*, or at least an attempt, that can offer some clarity regarding the murky relationship between ourselves and the immense network that we inhabit.

Chapter One

Falling and Fragmenting: Narration in *Falling Man*

> Two of the taller items were dark and somber, with smokey marks and smudges, and one of them was partly concealed by a long-necked bottle. The bottle was a bottle, white. The two dark objects, too obscure to name, were the things that Martin was referring to.
>
> "What do you see?" he said.
>
> She saw what he saw. She saw the towers. (49)

Whenever the date September 11 comes into conversation a series of questions surface: where were you when it happened, do you remember it, how old were you, do you think it was an inside job, did you see the memorials, did you watch the testimonies, etc. It is unquestionably that the world changed after that day. The attacks produced a mix of awe and shock, pure disbelief, and the images have stayed around long enough to haunt us. The towers are no longer there, but they appear everywhere.

Since it's live broadcast that fatidical morning, we lost the original event behind a rabbit's hole of references, camera angles, commentators and speeches. Twenty four years after the fact we've grown used to seeing those images and video recordings as an everyday pop-up into our endless internet doom scrolling. The images have turned into memes, movie allegories, AI slop. However, as DeLillo writes in his op-ed piece about the subject titled "In the Ruins of the Future," the "writer wants to understand what this day has done to us" (*The Guardian*).

Back in 1993, *The Paris Review* published an interview with Don DeLillo where he stated one of his most quoted phrases: “Writing is a concentrated form of thinking” (*The Paris Review*). He elaborates on the phrase and says that it is until he sits down and starts typing that he finds out what he thinks about particular subjects. This “concentrated form of thinking” helps him understand or at least learn to think about the topics that resonate with him. Taking his word, we can suggest that under this lens *Falling Man* is his attempt to understand, to think deeply, about the September 11 attacks and their aftermath.

Falling Man tells the story of the Neudecker family, Keith, Lianne and Justin, trying to cope with their lives after the attacks. Through the intimate portrait of domesticity, DeLillo asks how the force of history can shape and dismantle personal lives, how fear can become the new ground emotion, how relationships navigate an uncertain present and an unthinkable future. Aside from the Neudecker family knot, each section of the book is accompanied by a coda where the reader meets Hammad, a young muslim who’s lured into a terrorist cell, eventually becoming one of the planes’ hijackers. Both narratives serve as counterpoints to each other, posing the question: when one life ends, do others begin?

Right from the start, we can ask: how do these two narratives are interwoven in the novel? Despite knowing that they conflate at one point, the attacks on the towers, how is the story’s structure crafted? DeLillo is known for having non-linear structures in his novels. This one is no exception. The book is divided into three parts: Bill Lawton, Ernst Hechinger and David Janiak. In total these parts have 14 chapters and 3 codas: On Marienstrasse, In Nokomis, In The Hudson Corridor, respectively. Does its fragmented structure have anything to do with what the book is trying to convey? Does its structure have anything to do with a “concentrated

form of thinking" that can help us understand or at least learn to think deeply about these topics? What's the profound relation between its form and its content?

These series of questions can be useful in developing an ethos of the novel and perhaps of the cultural logic it describes. The genre of the novel, its motifs, the exposition of the characters and their interests, the narration, its language and its pacing, can offer us an angle to discuss the complicated tension between the aftermath of the attacks and the memory of it. The still life motif can help us rethink the moments the novel captures as a picture frozen in time, as if we're still in free falling. We can find that this state has a deep resonance with Fredric Jameson's description of the cultural logic of late capitalism, which is why in this chapter we'll be exploring the entanglement between the form of the novel and postmodernism. Through the narrator we'll see how the traits of the postmodern condition are embodied, leading the reader to consider and question the never-ending representation of the 9/11 attacks, which still haunts us today. By means of the tone, the structure, the distance, among others, we'll take a deep dive into the contradictory state of detachment and frenzy that characterizes our time.

In *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jameson argues that the difference between modernism and postmodernism lies in that the former was concerned with the development of technology and its outcome, whereas the latter focuses on breaks, shifts, events, "Where-It-All-Changed," rather than progress and the notion of it (4). This makes postmodernism an attempt to deal with the uncertainty and lack of coherence of our times, starting by recognizing that uncertainty and lack of coherence. Before delving into the themes and topics discussed in *Falling Man*, it's important to linger at this apparent formal issue in order to understand the framework behind the novel. Despite being divided into three parts and having

its chapters numbered, the narrative in *Falling Man* is deeply fragmented. Our sense of chronological time is elusive, and even though sometimes the narrator states how much time has passed after the attacks, the jumpiness, the apparent disconnection between scenes, the dreamlike memories, the actual action and the narcotic tone of the narration give the reader a sense of impasse, of being stuck in a limbo.

At a first instance, we'll try to unpack who is narrating the story. The voice, the focalization, the distance and its reliability can serve as aesthetic keys to understanding the inner workings of the novel. We'll focus on H. Porter Abbot's definitions of those terms to clarify what DeLillo's narrator is doing in formal terms. Then, we'll see how these devices enter in contact with Jameson's own ideas about postmodernity, particularly the depthlessness of the time and its fragmentation. Through that discussion, we'll be revising how the narrative devices, along with the theoretical ones, can suggest a reading of the novel that in its first instance we can call it, as this chapter states, falling and fragmenting.

In a world dominated by narratives and counternarratives, by the very use of narrative terminology to refer to, explain, dismiss, engage, disregard, events, decisions, stories, news that warp us into what we call reality, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* by Abbot offers a detailed and comprehensive explanation of those devices and terms in plain and neutral language. When approaching a narrative, one of the first issues that can come up is what exactly is a narrative. This word, which has been thrown around that much, should be understood unanimously, because our common understanding that a narrative is a story can be problematic.

As Abbot explains, by defining narrative merely as the representation of a story, which implies that there's someone that tells the story, we are excluding other media such as drama or

film (262). Instead, he proposes to show the two units that make a narrative: story and narrative discourse. By story, Abbot means "the chronological sequence of events involving entities" (265). This sequence of events is composed of beginning, middle and ending. Those events can be acts or happenings. By the term "entities" he refers to characters and non-characters. The acts are the events caused by a character, whereas happenings "occur without the specific agency of a character" (258). If the entity has agency, it is a character. So, following this logic, it's pretty straightforward what a story is. However, the other component, narrative discourse, sometimes can be confused with story and therein lies the complication. Narrative discourse, as is understood by Abbot, means "the story as narrated" (262). As Abbot says, this can be further problematized because it implies "that stories exist independently of narrative presentation" (262).

To understand better both story and narrative discourse, Abbot refers to the distinction the Russian formalists used more than a hundred years ago. Still valid today, *fabula* and *szujet* are used to refer to story, the chronological sequence of events, and narrative discourse, the order in which those events are narrated (266). This distinction is important because it gives us our first glimpse into trying to unveil the narrator and its intentions. Why did s/he is telling us this story? Why did s/he is telling it in a certain order, in a certain tone, in a certain language? Why is it in the past tense and not in the present tense? All these questions are part of the crux of what makes a narrator the narrator and also about what it's trying to convey in its own telling of the story.

After clarifying the two units of a narrative, we need to deal with voice. "Voice in narration is a question of who it is we "hear" doing the narrating" (86). When Abbot employs the term "hear", he means which grammatical person is telling the story. Despite the common

understanding of first, second and third-person narrators, Abbot states that what appears obvious is more complex at a second look. A great deal of our understanding of a narrative depends on who's doing the telling and in doing so what is s/he highlighting, retaining, obscuring or stressing out. This voice can be neutral or not, and in that sense it colors how we perceive the events that are happening. It can sometimes take a central role or a more detached one. It can be inside the story itself and act as a major character of those events, or it can also be outside of the events, doing the telling from a distance.

For our purpose in this project, it is important to understand how the notion of the third-person narrator can be inexact and not thorough when analyzing a narrative. Often, third-person narration is used interchangeably or refers to omniscient narration (267). According to Abbot, this usage is misleading. What is conventionally meant by omniscient narration is a narration that knows everything. However, every narration has gaps, or voids that the reader has to fill up with his or her imagination (258). Thus, the association between third-person and omniscience becomes problematic. However, there are other terms that can be more satisfying for our purposes.

As Abbot points out, if we anchor our understanding toward the term diegesis, it can help us come up with a clearer definition in relation to the different types of narrators, particularly the commonly referred to as third-person. Taken from the Ancient Greek tradition, diegesis is defined as "the world of the story – that "reality" in which the events are presumed to take place" (91). This narrative world can be narrated from the inside or the outside. Abbot states that Gerrard Gennet, borrowing from the concept of diegesis, comes up with a useful distinction and coins the terms homodiegetic, heterodiegetic and extradiegetic (91). Homodiegetic concerns a

narrator that is inside the story world, that takes part in the events that happen in that reality. On the other hand, heterodiegetic and extradiegetic are narrators that can be found outside that reality. However, there's a distinction of position between both narrators. Heterodiegetic refers to a hybrid narrator, someone that can be part of a larger narrative but frames the story that is telling us, in order to make it seem outside the grand scheme of things. In contrast, extradiegetic is the narrator that is "outside any of the diegetic levels of a narrative" (255). By being outside, he means merely the voice that has no stakes involved in the story world that narrates without positing their emotions, comments, thoughts, in and around the narrative. Nevertheless, this doesn't mean that it can't be thoroughly unpacked. There are other useful features that can help us come up with a characterization of an extradiegetic narrator, which is the one we'll focus on.

One of those features is focalization. Abbot stresses that despite focalization being an "awkward coinage" (89), it's more advantageous than using point of view. By focalization he means the specific "lens through which we see characters and events in the narrative" (89). The key to understanding this concept in the way Abbot uses it is in highlighting the word "see". While in terms of voice we focus on what we hear, in focalization we are focusing on what we see. Usually the narrator is doing our focalization for us, mediating what we are seeing throughout the narrative. But it can change from sentence to sentence, introducing the device of free indirect style and complicating, if we are not paying attention closely, our understanding of what perspective we are seeing the events through. Free indirect style, or the "character's thoughts or expressions (…) presented in the character's voice" (258), can sometimes obfuscate and blur the lines between what the extradiegetic narrator and a character sees and conveys. This sensibility can be helpful when we are reflecting on the setting, the quirks of certain characters,

mood swings, their routines, objects in a scene, etc. But it is necessary to remember that it is a lens and that it provides a certain vision and certain assumptions about the particularities of the world that is being described to us as readers.

The other important feature is distance. For Abbot this "refers to the narrator's degree of involvement in the story she tells" (91). This degree of involvement has a role in the evaluation the readers make about the information we are receiving. The distance between the narrator, the characters and the events of a story can show us if there's an emotional depth in what is being narrated and, in turn, in the way in which we need to absorb that information or if it's an apparent impartial representation of what we are getting in the way the story is presented. Hence, the distance affects our perception of reliability and unreliability towards the narrative. It can show us if the way the story is told can be trusted or not, since the distance will help us judge the moral and emotional tones in which the narrative is being described.

Taking this into account, our first task will be to lay out how we can characterize the extradiegetic narrator from *Falling Man* through an analysis of its focalization, its distance and its voice, in order to try and find a correlative with the fragmentariness, depthlessness and waning of affect of Jameson's postmodernist condition, so that then we can have a clear picture of how the events and the actions are represented in the novel.

> It was not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night. He was walking north through rubble and mud and there were people running past holding towels to their faces or jackets over their heads. They had handkerchiefs pressed to their mouths. They had shoes in their hands, a woman with a shoe in each hand, running past

him. They ran and fell, some of them, confused and ungainly, with debris coming down around them, and there were people taking shelter under cars. (3)

Right on from the opening paragraph we can see at work the voice, the distance and the focalization that is going to characterize the narrator of the novel. The composed tone, the few restrained adjectives, the past tense, add up to attempt a precise narration, one of a clinical quality. It seems from the first sentence as if the extradiegetic narrator is summoning up the muses, as if there's a certain air of mystery, of pre-worldliness, when it all changed, when it all became different. Equalizing a street for a world lets us into a portal where nothing was ever the same.

The novel opens *in media res*, minutes or seconds after the south tower of the World Trade Center had just collapsed. The narration is done using the past tense, taking us out from the urgent and immediate danger of the attack, which we are constantly reminded from video footage, into a more contemplative detachment. Through the voice, we are hearing the sequence of events as if it has happened long ago. The voice is putting a distance between the reader's present and the attacks. The description of the chaos surrounding the man who's walking is not chaotic. Despite those moments of confusion, urgency and fear, the voice is guiding us, giving us a certain stillness throughout the scene. The directness of each sentence, with its sparse use of adjectives, just "confused" and "ungainly," serves to give us a smooth sense of flow that can even be numbing, as if we heard a loud crash and we are still recuperating our ringing in the ears. At the same time it sets a tone of not overstating what can't be overstated.

The narrator knows that everyone has seen the footage, that the falling of the towers loom in the post 9/11 world, by which he emphasizes how it "was not a street anymore but a world,"

so in that sense that directness helps the narrator in attempting to convey the event in its bare bones, as is. Now, with its use of *and* as a conjunction it gives us just the right amount of movement to get a clear picture of what is going on around the walking man, the survivor, amidst the debris and the hysteria that we usually find in the recordings. Like in a campfire, when everyone is sitting around still, listening to the voice of experience tell the stories of the days long gone, of the days when it all changed, the novel's narrator is giving back to us the event in an elegiac manner, stressing how this new world became a "time and space of falling ash and near night."

The voice in this first opening paragraph is also helping us to focus on the mundane aspect of the situation. The narration doesn't have any bombastic wording, we don't get the extremeness and absurdity of the whole event. Instead, the focalizing of the narration concerns ordinary objects: shoes, jackets, handkerchiefs, mud, rubble and cars. We are seeing office people at its most elemental, in an eerie setting of "near night," as if a grand curse hangs over their souls. Stripped of technology, with only the bare essentials, these people are fear stricken, fleeing for their lives and taking refuge under cars.

Finally, the distance we have between the events and the telling of the story is all the more evident from its use of the past tense. We are getting a description of an action and a time that has already ended. It's as if we were looking at a painting or a photograph in a museum gallery and we were being recounted what happened. Like a freeze frame of long ago. This distance, along with the focalization of the ordinary and the sparseness of the voice, contributes to making the narration somewhat haunted. Despite the clear picture which we're been

presented, there's a notion of anesthetizing quality to it; it's not loud or flamboyant, but rather deafening because of its stillness.

It's interesting to see this phenomenon take place in the narration, because we are so used to associating the attacks with frenzy, chaos and loudness. The sound of ambulances and fire trucks, the crash of the planes, the cries for help, the debris falling and the rumbling down of the towers, are nonexistent in their sound quality. It's as if we were watching an apocalyptic movie or a documentary about the attacks with no soundtrack, just a detached voice over. All of these elements start to give us a glimpse of the characterization of the narrator situated outside the events. It starts to become clear that it's an extradiegetic narrator. Thus, moving away from the attacks, the narrator presents a scene of longing and domesticity in this way:

> He was in bed now and watched her, a few feet away, begin to button her shirt. They slept in the same bed because she could not tell him to use the sofa and because she liked having him here next to her. He didn't seem to sleep. He lay on his back and talked but mostly listened and this was all right. She didn't need to know a man's feelings about everything, not anymore and not this man. She liked the spaces he made. She liked dressing in front of him. She knew the time was coming when he'd press her to the wall before she finished dressing. He'd get out of bed and look at her and she'd stop what she was doing and wait for him to come and press her to the wall. (18)

As with the narration of the attacks, this scene which is taking place in a bedroom, between a man and a woman, Keith and Lianne, is full of subtleties, intimacies and stillness, despite Lianne's desire to have sex. The narrator doesn't give free rein to the rollercoaster of desire. Also, it doesn't indulge in creating a fantasy or a wild dream of that bodily encounter. Instead,

we have an ordinary setting of one person dressing up while the other watches. The narrator focuses on Lianne's thoughts and appreciation of Keith's newly found presence in her bed and in her life. We don't even have any adjectives in the description of the scene. And in that way, without the extra flare that could color excessively a moment of longing, we are left with her awareness of what she's liking of this relinking, what she doesn't need anymore from him, and the build-up that is rising between them. With this sparse voice we have a more profound understanding of the reconnection they're having, at least from Lianne's perspective since she's the focus of the scene, and how all this longing, all the spaces between them, can be translated into a desire of being safe, of having him next to her.

It's also interesting to notice how, in brief moments during the narration, we enter the territory of the free indirect style. When the second sentence ends in "and because she liked having him here next to her," we get the queue from the word "here." Why would the narrator not use the word "there" and instead change it for "here"? The rest of the sentences seem to follow suit, as if we entered her memories: "He didn't seem to sleep. He lay on his back and talked but mostly listened and this was all right. She didn't need to know a man's feelings about everything, not anymore and not this man." The subtleness in which the embodiment of her consciousness is done can be initially overlooked. However, it lets us build a more complete image of the character, her fears and longings, her solitude, her newfound situation, her eagerness to make sense, to see the situation from a rational point of view contrasting it with her desire to be in close proximity through sex. The construction of the sentences also adds to the intensity of her feelings. The short declarative sentences help build a certain rhythm of excitement that ends up cascading in the yearning she spells in the last sentence, full of

conjunctions, binding together the act she looks forward to. In that way, the smooth flow between the extradiegetic narrator and the free indirect style allows us to inhabit that scene of domesticity in a more personal and intimate way.

The understanding of the distance, the tone, the focalization, and also the free indirect style of the extradiegetic narrator gives us a clear view of how the story is being told and to what effect. The detachment, the rhythm, the stillness and the sparseness of the language contribute to forming a bleak picture into the intimacy of domesticity. The narrative terms allow us to have a more grounded view in which we can draw the boundaries that define the story that is being told, so that within that narrative framework we can find the points of convergence that it shares with the traits of the postmodern condition that Jameson describes.

As we've explored previously in our discussion of *Falling Man*'s narrator, the smooth transitions and the still imagery can lead us to a certain detached and unnerving quality in the narration. This quality can, at times, become disorienting, since we jump from an extradiegetic narrator to free indirect style, from scene to scene, from time and space, which is something closely related to the disorienting perception of our present that Jameson calls the weakening of historicity. One of the key postmodern features, the weakening of historicity entails that our notion of the present as history, as dialogue with the past, has eroded leaving us in an endless present, with a past transformed into images and references that reinforce certain stereotypes and that doesn't let us think critically about our here and now. According to him, this perception tends to give us a disorienting sense of our present, since we've been disconnected from the past.

> Her mind drifted in and out of this, the early times, eight years ago, of the eventual extended grimness called their marriage. The day's mail was in her lap. There were

matters to attend to and there were events that crowded out such matters but she was looking past the lamp into the wall, where they seemed to be projected, the man and woman, bodies incomplete but bright and real.

It was the postcard that snapped her back, on top of the cluster of bills and other mail. She glanced at the message, a standard scrawled greeting, sent by a friend staying in Rome, then looked again at the face of the card. It was a reproduction of the cover of Shelley's poem in twelve cantos, first edition, called *Revolt of Islam* (…). It was a matter of simple coincidence, or not so simple, that a card might arrive at this particular time bearing the title of that specific book.

This was all, a lost moment on the Friday of that lifelong week, three days after the planes. (7-8)

In the opening of Chapter 2, the narrator presents us with Lianne reminiscing the early stages of her marriage, when every gesture, breath, phrase between her and Keith was sex. She's thinking about it while knowing that he has come back from the dead, that he's a survivor of the attacks. The spell of the reminiscing is broken by an uncanny coincidence, making the whole situation even more weird and disorienting than at first may appear. The mail that she has in her lap contains a postcard from a friend, sent one or two weeks earlier, but the fact that it arrived or she encountered it until that day, framed by the events that happened earlier that week, gives the whole situation an eerie impression. In that "lifelong week," this instant of reflection of who they were, of that "grimness called their marriage," seems more real than the surreal events that have brought them together yet again. However, that real instant of reflection was just a "lost moment" from the bizarre new reality they are now inhabiting and still trying to make sense of.

It's interesting to see the movement between the immediate, the recent and the distant past, all while the narrator uses the same verb tense. It's as if the present is nowhere to be found, so we are offered different layers of the past in order to try and make sense where Lianne actually is. The distant past is crystalized, "bright and real," like a projection behind the lamp that's in front of her. She's lost in thought and memory, despite the grim marriage, everything was easy, and was visceral. The immediate past is that postcard, with its classical design full of detail and flourishes, that snaps her back from the distant past, but that despite its design and innocent greeting, now has taken a different dimension thanks to the recent past, "three days after the planes," which works as a threshold between distant memories and the memories that are going to be forged after the attacks. The use of "lost moment" serves to accentuate that instability, that disorientation, in the forging of memories after the event, since the attacks loom and influence the new perception of reality. Nothing was the same and nothing will never be the same.

The narrator of the novel situates us in an ambiguous past. The use of the past tense heightens this disorienting sense, even though we know that the moment of reflection happened three days after the planes hit the World Trade Center. However, we are left adrift asking ourselves where is the now, where is the present. As we begin to see from the first two chapters, this characteristic starts operating all along the novel and finds an echo in the fragmentary organization of its scenes, becoming one of its particular traits.

> No one came to the door. The music did not stop, a slowly circling figure of reeds and drums. They looked at each other and laughed, hard and loud, husband and wife, walking down the stairs and out the front door.

> The poker games were at Keith's place, where the poker table was. There were six players, the regulars, Wednesday nights, the business writer, the adman, the mortgage broker and so on, men rolling their shoulders, hoisting their balls, ready to sit and play, game-faced, testing the forces that govern events. (96)

Each chapter contains several scenes that usually jump in the recent past, which takes place after the attacks. Having said that, we don't have a clear-cut chronologically time frame. The recent past feels like a nebulous time, as if the acts and events that have happened after the falling of the towers are all foggy, as if the cloud of ash has descended over memory. However, there are occasions when the narrator leads us to a distant past, like in the example above. The jump between scenes occurs from a situation that happened after the attacks to a situation before the attacks. We are going deeper into the past and the relation between both situations is of total disconnection. This fragmentariness is one of the novel's motifs.

At a first glance it is difficult to make sense of the action surrounding the novel. Like we explained previously, it starts *in media res*, amidst the towers and their downfall, but later we are left with scenes from the aftermath. We see the actions of each member of the family, but we don't know if they happened at the same time, if they are sequential or if we need to situate each scene in isolation, without worrying about their concatenation. And, on top of that, we have events from before the attacks.

One of the features of postmodernist consciousness is that its focused on breaks, shifts, changes, and events, rather than outcomes. We could argue that this novel is the epitome of those breaks and shifts, of non-linearity. The narrator is not interested in the outcome, in the end in itself. Instead, it's interested in how the characters navigate those changes. In the paragraph cited

above it's important to highlight how we move from a scene of shared domesticity, marriage, to a scene also of a shared domesticity of sorts, grounded on friendship. However, the spontaneousness and light-air of one scene is contrasted with the rigid enumeration and sheer seriousness of the other. A marriage having a good laugh and a friendship that means business.

This movement between different layers of the past is also indicative of something more puzzling. In our attempt to deal with the uncertainty and lack of coherence of our times, the narrator resorts to defining moments of the past, clinging to them, looking if they might offer an answer or a sense of direction. Marriage and poker become an institution, a set of rules, that amidst an unruly breaking moment that defied their sense of order, might offer them a chance to get back on track again. However, what we find out gradually in the novel is that both options tend to be mutually exclusive. And in that revelation is where the fragmentary motif plays its part, because we learn only cautiously that what binds them eventually will destroy them at the same time. The isolation of the scenes, the apparent disconnection, is a reflection of the pieces they now have become. And even though they would long to be together, the longing is not enough, it takes more than that to attempt to reconstruct the pieces of oneself after a world-shattering event. In a way, the fragmentary structure alludes to the dispersed pieces of memory, of identity, that have been blown away and that are falling like debris, leaving them with either the task of picking up the pieces or withdrawing totally from them.

The fragmentary nature of the narration also suggests a characterization of the extradiegetic narrator. It's difficult not to get emotional or baroque when describing world events and their aftermath. Although the essence and the expectation of the event might call for it, *Falling Man* resists to fall into an aggrandizing tone. Previously, when we described the voice as

elegiac, focused on ordinary things and at a distance we started to see the soberness and stillness quality of its narration. The fragmentary structure calls attention to the turmoil and uncertainties of the moment, giving it an edge of suspense and confusion, but it also gives way to other themes such as identity, trauma, domesticity, memory, relationships and time. This formal device not only plays its part in our understanding and appreciation of the novel, but also in the way in which we address those themes, asking us how we approach experience when we've lost our sense of progress, when we've lost the apparent straight path and we are left with scattered pieces of ourselves here and there. And it is in that sense that we can suggest that the extradiegetic narrator, despite being outside the events that are being narrated, can be considered a character inside the novel. As if the spirit of the towers, looming all over New York, is telling us the story of this particular family, outside of time, watching from a heightened distance, how the people that survived, that are trying to make sense of it all, are coping with the aftermath. The fugue quality of the narration, in which at times has a certain eeriness, detachment and numbness, reflects the intensities of feelings it can accommodate. Something so grand is simply beyond words, something so disastrous takes any emotionality aback. This austerity in the way the story is told, refrained from any expressive capacity to convey the shock, instability, and disorientation resulting from the event, opens the way to another key feature of the postmodern condition, which Jameson calls the waning of affect.

When Fredric Jameson discusses the waning of affect as a trait of postmodernism, he is not saying that feelings and emotions have disappeared from the postmodern condition. Instead, he is highlighting how in the context of late capitalism our emotions are mere outbursts, reactions, to whatever action is happening in front of us. Emotions are no longer put into

perspective or are the object of reflection. Those bursts don't lead to any type of musing or thought, they're mere stimuli that the environment is demanding from us. They become isolated outbursts in a continuous present, with no sense of why or for what. In the novel, the stillness of the voice suggests a certain refrain from those outbursts. And if an outburst happens, we find out that it was unnecessary, like in the example below, where Lianne confronts her neighbor, Elena, over the loud Middle Eastern music playing day and night, that gets under her skin.

> "The music. All the time, day and night. And loud."
>
> (…)
>
> "What is it? Music, that's all. I like it. It's beautiful. It gives me peace. I like it, I play it."
>
> (…)
>
> "The whole city is ultrasensitive right now. Where have you been hiding?"
>
> (…)
>
> Lianne put her hand in the woman's face.
>
> "It gives you peace," she said.
>
> She twisted her open hand in Elena's face, under the left eye, and pushed her back into the entranceway.
>
> "It gives you peace," she said.
>
> Marko backed into the apartment, barking. Lianne mashed the hand into the eye and the woman took a swing at her, a blind right that caught the edge of the door. Lianne knew she was going crazy even as she turned and walked out, slamming the door behind her and hearing the dog bark over the sound of a solo lute from Turkey or Egypt or Kurdistan. (119-120)

Lianne's outburst is a reaction to the events that have happened before. We are not dealing with panic or hysteria, even conspiracy or coincidence. The need to hit back to the Other seems to be what informs her outburst to confront and attack. Previously in the novel, we've learned that the characters are aware that the planes' hijackers were muslims and that the attack has been attributed to Osama bin Laden. So, every time Lianne hears the music, she gets triggered, subtle but steady, until she gets fed up and decides to take action. However, when she retells the episode to Keith, it seems as if the feeling is in a faraway place, as if what she needed was actually to vent.

Keith watched her across the table.

"When did it happen?"

"About an hour ago."

(…)

"Hate to say it but when I came up the stairs just now."

"You don't have to say it."

"The music was playing," he said.

"I guess that means she wins."

"No louder, no softer."

(…)

"I wake up at some point every night. Mind running non-stop. Can't stop it."

"Forget the music."

"Thoughts I can't identify, thoughts I can't claim as mine." (123-125)

What could've been narrated in an upbeat, suspenseful way, is treated with detachment. We look at how the emotions got played out in a distance of sorts. The reader doesn't get involved in the middle of the action. The narration doesn't let us. We know that it's an important moment, not because Lianne's rage is about to burst, but because even though it bursted it disappeared in a whim and showed us the stimuli behind it, which really prompted her reaction. "Thoughts I can't identify, thoughts I can't claim as mine" is a perfect sentence in that way. From the previous chapters the narrator has been telling us about the different ways in which the characters are coping with the aftermath. Keith is having an affair, Justin and his friends are searching for more planes in the sky, and Lianne's been reading and watching the news non-stop. Everyone deals with the aftermath in terms of their longing. Keith wants to connect with somebody, Justin wants the secrecy and power of myths, and Lianne wants a rational, matter-of-fact, answer to the chaos around her. However, in her search for answers she's taking everything in. There's no critical distance between her and the news. And all the bias, prejudices, stereotypes, start to settle in her mind. The thoughts that she can't identify have found a nest in her. It took her a reaction, a violent one, to notice that she can't claim these thoughts as hers. The music was a trigger that lets her indulge in all those thoughts that she was absorbing from other sources. At the end of that dialogue with Keith, he recommends Lianne to talk to her mom since she takes some pills to help her sleep, but we find out that she doesn't want to succumb to that. She tells Keith: "I have a history with the things people take. They make me crazier. They make me stupid, make me forget" (125). We learn through those three sentences that what's been really lurking behind reaction and her anger is the fear of forgetting. So, it doesn't matter that she's been having

thoughts that are not hers, even if they're not hers, she doesn't want to find herself in a position where she doesn't recollects what's happening.

At the end of the novel, we know that the music hasn't stopped playing, that both Lianne and Elena shared a moment together doing laundry, which doesn't feel as tense as it should've had, and that Lianne manages to sleep not because of sleeping pills. That violent episode between them was just an intensity burst. The narrator's distance and detachment when that episode occurs signals that there's no opportunity any more to express oneself in an individual way, our mode of expression is mediated by, in Lianne's case, the news she consumes. And if one day the culprit is A and on the other day it's B, her feelings and thoughts towards both communities are going to shift and grow, depending on the agendas, the events, the public and private spheres, that influence her perception of her reality. Nor will she be able to identify the thoughts she's having or claim that they're hers. The focalizing eye in which we are seeing the outburst and the dialogue that follows, the detached voice and tone in which everything is narrated, even the restrained voices of the characters, sets apart from a moment of hysteria suggesting us if amidst all the chaos of the event and its aftermath what we're really going to remember is going to be the misty ordinary moments that were passing by after the rumble.

These fragmented and distant brushstrokes in which the narrative is constructed offer us a way of reading and re-apprehend the larger-than-life events through the ordinariness of daily life. The post 9/11 condition is a fuzzy one. But the narration leads us to question the inner functioning of our reactions and feelings, our sense of the present through our memories, the relationship between what we consume and what we do, the stillness amidst all the rush and chaos surrounding us. What at first may appear numbing or anesthetized is also a commentary

about how we approach experience after something so catastrophic has happened. The attempts to represent, to start putting into words something indescribable, are a way also of trying to make sense of and find our position in relation to the world. It is through that position that we may find the possibility of moving beyond fear and trauma. This position, in Jameson's terms called cognitive mapping, may offer a path toward rebuilding not only the individual but also the collective ethos. But in order to do that we have to have the time to digest, reflect and find different forms of expression. In the novel, the characterization of the narrator gives us a hint, because it mediates the story it is telling and gives us time to reflect about it, while we know that outside the book everything and everyone is confabulating in order that we don’t have enough time to think about it.

Chapter Two

The Crises of Representation in *Falling Man*

> In time he heard the sound of the second fall. He crossed Canal Street and began to see things, somehow, differently. Things did not seem charged in the usual ways, the cobbled street, the cast-iron buildings. There was something critically missing from the things around him. They were unfinished, whatever that means. They were unseen, whatever that means, shop windows, loading platforms, paint-sprayed walls. Maybe this is what things look like when there is no one here to see them. (5)

In the Introduction, we mentioned that one of the key features of the postmodern condition delineated by Jameson was the mutation in built space. Along with his construction and description of the common traits of late capitalism, Jameson worked tirelessly in coming up with a coherent answer towards what the issue of the mutation in built space really is. He defined the problem as the impossibility of thinking about the more complex global network we are caught in (131). What this entails is that although everything around us has mutated or evolved, we haven't. For Jameson, late capitalism has permeated every aspect of the human experience and we have no way of thinking coherently about it or outside it, no matter how abstractly we try in our mind. He goes on saying that this mutation in space "has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world"

(55). We are unable to represent the totality of reality, because we are unable to apprehend our position in relation to the world. According to him, we lack the proper perceptual ability to do it.

One of the most famous characterizations of this matter is Jameson's description of his experience wandering in the Westin Bonaventure Hotel in downtown Los Angeles, which has come to be seen as an iconic example of the postmodern condition, from architecture to life in general. The marginal rooms, the dark corridors, the opposition between escalator and elevator, the revolving lounge on the top, the distorted reflection of the outside from its panel windows, the lack of inner view, the hesitation if it's a hotel or a mall, the lack of a center or the loss of the lobby, all of this, amount to Jameson's coinage of the postmodern hyperspace, in which "you are [...] up to your eyes and your body" (54). There's a saturation of space and a suppression of distance that provoke a complete immersion which is equally disturbing. Jameson, amidst his disorientation, connects his experience in the hotel to that of the postmodern subject's experience against the totality of the system. He argues that this disorientation, which comes from a lack of depth, provokes an inability to position ourselves in relation to the space we inhabit. This inability is directly linked to the impossibility of representing, of imagining, of mapping, the totality, the space, in other words, of the late capitalist system. Thus, the world has become unrepresentable. However, he suggests an approach to deal with this issue: cognitive mapping.

Despite taking the form of various questions, names, and proposing different alternatives throughout his career, the scholar Robert E. Tally mentions that the central question in Jameson's work is: "[h]ow does the physically enclosed, subjective individual relate to the socially dispersed, objective totality?" (405). And time and again, Jameson's proposal is cognitive mapping, whether under that name, or as geopolitical aesthetics or, later on, as allegory.

As defined by Jameson, cognitive mapping is the strategy of providing an enhanced sense of place in the global world (64). It attempts to map the unity within the difference, in order to aim for a representation of late capitalism. In *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jameson tackles these issues, but doesn't come up with a plausible procedure to outline an answer. It is until 2019, almost 30 years after the publication of his seminal book, that he delineates how this process of cognitive mapping can come to fruition through the literary device of allegory. In his book *Allegory and Ideology,* Jameson stresses that the main obstacle of grasping and analyzing ideology (another code name for totality) today is that there's "the conviction that there are areas of life, areas of activity as well as of thought, which are nonideological" (6). This conviction is nonetheless an illusion, since even the units of meaning, which he refers to syntax and sentence, are bound at the intersection "between the biological individual and the collective which is at stake in thinking" (9). Every time we thrust meaning into the world, by means of an action or language, we are taking a stance or grounding ourselves in the territory of ideology, it's inseparable from us. However, Jameson highlights that the topic is up for analysis if we are keen to look into it. One of the ways in which ideology, or the cultural logic, travels is through narratives. He states that the "subject is somehow defined by its narratives of itself; and narrative in turn seems always to be wedded in one way or another to the presence of the subject, even when it is a question of the succession of "mere" objective facts" (8). It is from this angle that Jameson offers an answer to the crisis of representation.

In *Allegory and Ideology*, Jameson goes back to the medieval theologians to formulate an analytical structure that can offer the basis for cognitive mapping. He argues that allegory is "a fundamental mechanism in that process, in a project that on the one hand deals with

representation as such, and on the other with History" (8). In the Western tradition, when analyzing the Scripture, those early theologians devised a four-level structure of allegory to establish the relationship between the religious truth and the human destiny. The first level was the literal analysis of the Scripture or the story; the second was the mysticism or the revelation concealed in the story; the third one was the moral teaching behind the story and the fourth was called the anagogical level, which meant the story's allusions to the afterlife. Jameson adapts those categories in accordance with the secularization of the world. For him, the levels stand as this: the first level is the thing at hand that demands our initial attention, "whether historical event (as in the Scriptures), text, idea, political debate, personality, ethical problem (11)"; the second level, which he calls an enlargement of the text, is concerned with the commentary or reflection and its concerned with "the secret or hidden meaning of that initial text" (11); the third one deals with the individual experience. What for theologians was the salvation of the soul, for Jameson is the "existential experience, the construction of subjectivity" (11). And last, but not least, the fourth level is concerned with History, what Jameson deems as "a collective and political narrative always latent in conceptions of our own personal destinies" (12).

The groundwork Jameson lays out has a twofold function. First, it gives us the necessary tools to unpack any type of text and second its final goal is to allow us to have a notion of representation regarding our position in the world. In this project, we'll use Jameson's proposal to tackle how the issue of representation and cognitive mapping work in *Falling Man*. The four level analytical structure will help us navigate the event and its implications, if and how the narrator and some of the characters find their place in the world, the strategies they use to

attempt an approach to represent the world and the claims that the novel is making regarding the wider context.

> The roar was still in the air, the buckling rumble of the fall. This was the world now. Smoke and ash came rolling down streets and turning corners, busting around corners, seismic tides of smoke, with office paper flashing past, standard sheets with cutting edge, skimming, whipping past, otherworldly things in the morning pall. (3)

In the novel's opening, the narrator is situating the reader amidst the chaos and debris of the event. The resourcefulness of opening *in media res* adds to the confusion, disorientation and fragmentation that the novel conveys from beginning to ending. On a first level, we have the sheer force of the event in its bare bones since the first sentence: "[t]he roar was still in the air, the buckling rumble of the fall." The apocalyptic stage has been set and is reaffirmed in the second sentence: "[t]his was the world now." No chance of escaping it, nor ignoring it. The "now" also tells us that there's been a change of pace, that nothing will ever be the same, that we are going to judge everything in terms of before and after. In the third sentence we find out how the event presses itself, engulfing reality, invading every corner and street and, eventually, becoming the new reality. The "otherworldly things in the morning pall," with its poetic touches of mystery and revelation, gives us our cue into the second level. The poignant description of office paper, of "standard sheets with cutting edge," is interesting because it endows a domestic object with an eerie air of being out of place and time. This domestic object can be seen as the commentary, the enlargement of the event, the novel makes around the scenes of domesticity and marriage later on. By associating these sheets as "otherworldly things" a world of revelation comes upon us, as stated above. That revelation being that the ordinary has taken a sombre tone.

The word choice “morning pall” comes up as no surprise since *pall* can stand for funeral cloth and also a dark cloud or veil. Then, on a third level, coming as an offspring of the previous two it’s compelling to see how the literal and the enlargement unite to give us an existential reflection. Besides the paragraph’s distressing description, the affirmative character of the second sentence helps us get in touch with a new reality we must confront. “This was the world now” forces the reader to come in contact with this new world and the consequences it may have over its own mortality. It is speaking directly and urgently, and it makes the reader reckon what possible doomed implications it may have this sombre tone. And last, the fourth level comes up echoing the third one, by making us consider not only the individual implications, but also the collective ones. We certainly see how the event, with its ash and smoke, has invaded even the most remote corners of the archetypal city of our time par excellence, New York. And it is in that sense that the fourth level asks us how the event resonates in our future, what clues we might get from the past, and how we are going to confront this new scenario, as individuals and as a collective, when a fanatical movement is antagonistic with the cultural logic of the system that was believed to be invincible. This process can be further dissected, since despite the fragmentary character of the novel, this apparent disconnected movement between levels comes up more vividly precisely because of its fragmented quality.

Ever since the secularization of the Western tradition, the allegorical process stopped being hierarchical and dogmatic. Thus, Jameson states that in this process

> the levels can change places, and the text shift position into that of its own commentary, while the commentary then becomes a kind of text in its own right—that is also to be expected in a secular society in which nothing is endowed with indisputable centrality,

and a multiplicity of interpretive options is virtually guaranteed in advance, depending on what counts as an event, a reality, or a text. (13)

This changing of places allows us to explore parallel and implicit narratives in surprising ways, enriching the reading experience and opening unexpected cross-overs that may help us tackle the issue of representability in a more compelling manner. The dethronement of the text frees the interpretative analysis, which is something crucial in the cultural logic of late capitalism because it gives room to imagine and ask, to provoke.

The malleability of this analytical structure allows us to break down the main characters of *Falling Man*. Keith, Lianne and Hammad, each one of them, embodies a different attempt of representing their place in the world. Their disorientation comes as no surprise, since they're subjects of their time. However, the manner in which they deal with it may provide a clue into their ways of confronting or apprehending their position in the postmodern space. In the upcoming section we'll unpack each of those characters using Jameson's allegorical model and we'll compare the strategies they use to find meaning amidst an unrepresentable world.

I

He stood at the National Rent-A-Fence barrier and looked into the haze, seeing the strands of bent filigree that were the last standing things, a skeletal remnant of the tower where he'd worked for ten years. The dead were everywhere, in the air, in the rubble, on rooftops nearby, in the breezes that carried from the river. They were settled in ash and drizzled on windows all along the streets, in his hair and on his clothes. (25)

Perhaps the character that most encapsulates the notion of mortality throughout the novel is Keith. He is someone who's supposed to be dead. Instead, call it miracle, chance or instinct, he is alive. However, throughout the whole novel his behavior, his acts, his language, make it seem as if he's a ghost, even though there are several episodes where his full flesh form comes alive. His confusion, his detachment, his apathy or inertia, perhaps can be better understood if we reverse our order of analysis, going instead from the collective level, down to the literal one.

Following that trail, the ultimate realm we are facing is death. The novel's description of death seems taken out of a painting of Hieronymus Bosch: "The dead were everywhere, in the air, in the rubble, on rooftops nearby, in the breezes that carried from the river. They were settled in ash and drizzled on windows all along the streets, in his hair and on his clothes." The imagery of the dead as this collective crowd that's settled everywhere, from the streets to his hair to the particles that make up the air gives us the sense of inevitability. Death is the ultimate step, individual and collective, and in this case it's already here. This scene encompasses one of the greatest apocalyptic tropes: the last man. It seems as if the dead were waiting for him, inviting him, even permeating him, since they're settling in his hair and on his clothes. The collective destiny is death and they're waiting for him to join the crowd. The Biblical resonance, which we can find in words like death and ash, reminds us of God's declaration upon man in Genesis: *for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return*. So, in a way, this passage from the novel is speaking in existential terms from the collective and individual levels. The dead as a collective encompassing everything and the individual, alone, surmising his destiny. Both levels are intertwined, since each can go back and forth in asking from the general to the specific and vice-versa. The movement of the existential dread in this passage goes from the image of a man alone,

watching the ruins and reminiscing his time there, to the summoning of the dead, precisely to the image of "[t]hey were settled." They have arrived and are not going anywhere. However, this sense of a predetermined ending, of inescapability, is countered by Keith developing a close relationship with chance. If he already knows what's to come, if he already escaped once from that destiny, why then not live in the margins, being as not an agent of destiny, but an agent of chance?

This leads us to Keith's participation in professional poker games, leaving his family behind once again and slowly receding from social interactions, with the intention of vanishing altogether. Poker used to play a central role in his life before the event. It was the palliative to his separation, his weekly antidote to a wandering senseless corporate life.

> They enjoyed doing this, most of them. They liked creating a structure out of willful trivia. But not Terry Cheng, who played the sweetest game of poker, who played online at times for twenty hours straight. Terry Cheng said they were shallow people leading giddy lives. (98)

The enjoyment they found in playing the game before the event was as if it were a child's game. It was a joyful entertainment, a distracting way of living. Terry Cheng acts as a foreshadower to Keith, before the event, in the sense that he criticizes the rest of the group for not taking the game seriously. His idea of seriousness, however, doesn't come from playing the game with certain rules, for example. It comes from summoning the forces of chance. Terry Cheng is, in a way, a priest of chance, devoting himself to the game, which we can see from his discipline of playing twenty hours straight. This devotion to chance is something that Keith finds after surviving the attacks. What were the odds of him surviving? Why him and not his friend? He

struggles to name these issues, but we can find that his actions are ways of ventilating, of trying to find answers, of surrendering himself to chance. When he embraces this, he figures out his place in relation to the world.

> He was fitting into something that was made to his shape. He was never more himself than in these rooms, with a dealer crying out a vacancy at table seventeen. He was looking at pocket tens, waiting for the turn. These were the times when there was nothing outside, no flash of history or memory that he might unknowingly summon in the routine run of cards. (225)

Poker, then, becomes the bar he wants to measure himself against. During a poker game, chance lives in an endless present. He wants to become that, to escape history and memory, and live in the moment away from compromises, away from his story. That urge to be so present in the moment, akin to the deep focus athletes need to have during crunch time, is Keith's way of dealing with his new reality. He intentionally puts himself in that place to escape everything that surrounds him and haunts him. For Keith it is a matter of life or death; it takes an existential toll. He surrenders himself to chance, he gets serious to the degree that he embraces it as if it demanded the monk's life. He lives for it, because in its routine and rituals it gives him at least a position of centrality within his own life, despite knowing that everything that happens is random. He fights his mortality by surrendering to chance. With this urge, of course, he aims to cover what's eating him alive.

When Keith left the towers in the opening scene of the novel, he was carrying a briefcase that wasn't his. As the novel advances, we find out that he finds the owner of the briefcase and eventually returns it to its owner, but it elicits a series of episodes where an extra marital affair

takes place. It is in this regard where the revelation takes place. The briefcase serves as a device, self-contained, allegorical, of the weight he is actually carrying. At first, he doesn't know what takes on upon him:

> The road bent west and three girls wearing headsets went rollerblading past. The ordinariness, so normally unnoticeable, fell upon him oddly, with almost dreamlike effect. He was carrying the briefcase and wanted to turn back. (51)

This impulse of turning back amidst the ordinariness is, in a way, a manner of resisting to get back to normality. The appearance that nothing has happened becomes surreal to him taking a dreamlike effect. The fact that he notices something so "normally unnoticeable" and that it "fell upon him oddly" makes us wonder if he'll be able to reintegrate back to society. The briefcase is something that needs to be open in order for him to glimpse a possibility of his relation to the world. In that scene, he finally doesn't give in to his wishes and continues walking to the place where he is going to return the briefcase. He meets Florence Givens, the owner of the briefcase, who also worked in the World Trade Center. In a revelatory passage, taking place during the second visit:

> He knew why he was here but could not have explained it to someone and did not have to explain it to her. It didn't matter whether they spoke or not. It would be fine, not speaking, breathing the same air, or she speaks, he listens, or day is night. (89)

Florence tells her experience during the attacks and they start bonding over their shared story. For Keith, Florence's story helps him return to the north tower. He tries to find himself in her story, amidst the chaos and confusion. The relationship they begin is to some degree a way of saying we survived, we are alive, we are not ghosts. What were the odds of both of them

surviving, of Keith returning the briefcase, of having shared the same space and time and finding themselves after it? However, the relationship takes a revelatory nature when Keith breaks it up, because he comes to a certain epiphany where he realizes that it doesn't matter if they share the same story and if they find solace through their bodies, he is still falling from the towers, his stillness is just an endless undoing that goes beyond whatever relationship he may strive for.

Perhaps he can comfort others, he can give a sense of security or balance, but inside he's just rumble and debris and the dead are still everywhere and they are not going anywhere: "[h]e was the still figure, watching, ever attentive, saying little" (158). Which takes us to the literal level of who Keith is as a character: he is a survivor. And as a survivor "[e]verything now is measured by after" (138). Keith struggles to find his place in a world that he doesn't understand anymore. He tries to lead his life with a detached attitude only to find himself running from history and memory. He surrenders to chance, only to keep on falling. His stasis is stillness. He is never landing, nor he wants to. And in that endless falling, after discussing with Lianne what she thinks he wants out of his life:

> He looked at her and nodded as if he agreed and then kept nodding, taking the gesture to another level, a kind of deep sleep, a narcolepsy, eyes open, mind shut down. (216)

Even though he is present, he is not, because he can't stop and doesn't want to get out of that state of narcolepsy. Despite the turmoil, everyone around him is finding a sense of carrying on, of touching ground, but not him. The survivor, Keith, is the falling man. Things will never be the same and, regardless of what he does, either have an affair, surrender to chance or live among the dead, he is going to be in an ever present limbo, because he is still alive, haunted by that defining event. He finds his place in the world in relation to the aftermath, but tries to reject that position

by becoming detached and by putting distance, literal miles and cities, between him and everyone. We find out through Keith that the cognitive mapping of the survivor is one of resistance against the world, because to his eyes nothing makes sense anymore. And this resistance seems to be his ultimate stronghold against the postmodern experience.

Because he knows he shouldn't be here and he doesn't believe it, Keith is the ultimate embodiment of one of the major tensions of the postmodern experience: disorientation. Throughout the novel, the movie-like and dreamlike effect of several of his scenes only heightens this feeling, leaving the reader to wonder if there really is an escape. The fact that his story is circular reminds us that he lives immersed in the event and its aftermath, he can't run away from it; the attacks have become his Westin Bonaventure Hotel; whatever life he may lead after will be haunted by the corridors full of people, screams and darkness; his view of others will be distorted without an ability to see him interact with them; his lobby, his self, is void, nowhere to be found. And in that disorientation he seeks to withdraw from every meaningful relationship, just as before the attacks, but this time more aware. This bittersweet mix of withdrawal and awareness leaves the reader wondering if there's hope in that bleak coping strategy.

II

Lianne's arc is perhaps the most detailed in the novel. If we frame the centrality of the event in the character's lives, she has a peripheral position, one of spectator. Nonetheless, her spectatorship has left her in shock and has given her something out of the past that she has to deal with: Keith and the memory of her father. Among these two factors, her way of dealing with

her position in the world echoes the tension between the secular and the religious, finding mystery in the ordinary.

Starting from a literal level, Lianne is a mother, a daughter and an estranged wife. The event has brought to her an unexpected situation: Keith, her husband, survived the attacks and is on her doorstep, having walked from Ground Zero to the family house. She doesn't know how to deal with his presence, since she imagined the worst, that Keith had died in the attacks. Now, she has to deal with his insertion back to their family, without knowing how her son is going to take it in. Also, her feeling of safety has been completely shattered and she hopes to find some relief first with her ailing mother and then with his presence back in the house. However, she discovers that not only is she worried about her physical safety, but also about the implications this will have in her memory. There's an intertwining between her position as mother, daughter and wife, and her memory of her father. The event has come to blast her sense of safety, just as her father's suicide did when she was a young adult. The literal and the allegorical level are knit together, which is why she is reminiscing about her father constantly, perhaps seeking for some answers to her current state after the attacks.

> She read everything they wrote about the attacks.
>
> She thought of her father. She saw him coming down an escalator, in an airport maybe.
>
> Keith stopped shaving for a time, whatever that means. Everything seemed to mean something. Their lives were in transition and she looked for signs. Even when she was barely aware of an incident it came to mind later, with meaning attached, in sleepless episodes that lasted minutes or hours, she wasn't sure. (67)

One of the great revelations in this passage is that “she looked for signs.” The association between the two traumatic events has left her in a transitional stage, where her safety is compromised. She resorts to look for meaning in everything. The suicide and the attacks, as her life experience, seem to be in dialogue, telling her something amidst her insomnia, something that is veiled. That search for meaning among the chaos is what fuels her, what makes her ask and reflect, what makes her remember. This obsessiveness with memory, which is not new but takes a central part of her life now, is the main drive behind her storyline sessions with a group of men and women who have an early stage of Alzheimer’s disease.

These sessions stand as a crux in her life. They consist in getting the group to write about their daily life and then share it with everyone. The sessions are “strictly for morale” (29), since they allow the last moments of clarity before the illness takes over them, leaving them without the ability to recognize reality. Also, these sessions are her way of looking straight into the eyes at the black hole that took her father’s life. We learned that her father, after finding out he was diagnosed with Alzheimer, decided to take his own life. So, in a way, her conduction of these group sessions aspires to be cathartic, because she wants to grasp the decision her father took and the will of these men and women to resist until the last moment.

Also, these group sessions are a way for her to confront what she thinks will happen to her. The trauma of her father’s suicide has left a deep scar in her. She believes that she’s going to be diagnosed as well. Therefore, conducting and attending those sessions are her way of “crossing points of insight and memory” (30), allowing a sense of order and coherence, amidst the chaos, that would help her make sense of her individual and global situation. Throughout the novel, the sessions function as an ancient and tragic Greek chorus that unveils the mind state in

which the citizens of the Western world are coming to terms with this disorienting world. This mind state that tends toward oblivion is what haunts Lianne: “the breathless moment when things fall away, streets, names, all sense of direction and location, every fixed grid of memory” (156). It is revealed to us that her real fear is an existential one and that, despite her best efforts to continue the sessions, all the group members are gradually going to stop meeting, because time doesn’t wait for nobody. Thus, she tries to find her way of relating to the world through two larger spheres: art and religion. The first sphere is represented in the novel by her interest in art, described through her contemplation of the paintings of Giorgio Morandi (1890-1964).

According to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Morandi’s works are “invariably small-scale and contemplative, and despite their apparent uniformity of subject—primarily landscapes and still lifes of commonplace, banal objects—they are exceedingly complex in organization and subtle in execution” (MET). The contrast between the “apparent uniformity” and the complexity in organization has led the critics to describe him as an “insiders painter” (*MET*). Morandi’s work has been celebrated because of its metaphysical stillness that can be found in ordinary objects. This is more evident in the novel’s poetic description of Lianne observing a painting by Morandi:

> What she loved most were the two still lifes on the north wall, by Giorgio Morandi, a painter her mother had studied and written about. These were groupings of bottles, jugs, biscuit tins, that was all, but there was something in the brushstrokes that held a mystery she could not name, or in the irregular edges of vases and jars, some reconnoiter inward, human and obscure, away from the very light and color of the paintings. (12)

Several times, throughout the novel, Lianne finds herself in contact with Morandi's work. The moments of reflection that accompany these episodes reveal a deeper preoccupation with her inner state. As we've seen from before, she's looking for signs, for meaning. In Morandi's paintings, she finds "a mystery she could not name," which is "human and obscure." The ordinariness motif takes a different edge when it leads to a "reconnoiter inward." When Lianne stops to think about the Italian term for still life, she realizes the existential significance that is driving her and that is behind the paintings. *Natura morta* conveys a stronger meaning, one more metaphysical, than just "still life." In the term and in the irregularity of edges and shapes, she finds that, behind the apparent stillness, the ordinariness, there's something lurking "away from the very light." Something ominous, indescribable, is inwardly present in the paintings and in her.

First, she associates the figures, in all their complex arrangement, with the towers: "[t]wo of the taller items were dark and somber, with smoky marks and smudges, and one of them was partly concealed by a long-necked bottle" (49). The symbolic silhouette of the towers becomes inescapable. Their presence is everywhere. However, when looked upon closely, she gets the vacuum suction, the inwardness, that the paintings really convey. Voiced through Lianne's ailing mother, she recognizes that the paintings are all about mortality, since it "takes you inward, down and in. That's what I see there, half buried, something deeper than things or shapes of things" (111). Perhaps because her mother is in the final years of her life, this revelation gets freezed in time and Lianne, when reflecting back while seeing once again Morandi's paintings several years later in an exhibition, is taken aback by the association between her mother's last days and the term *Natura Morta*, because that meaning beyond things is encapsulated in the only thing she

still has about her mother: her memory. So, the question that strikes her is how do we come to terms with our fleeting existence and the risk of oblivion, when our only strategy is memory (while dreading that she'll lose also that)? In her musings, she resorts to the ultimate collective strategy to confront her existential drama: religion.

> There was religion, then there was God. Lianne wanted to disbelieve. Disbelief was the line of travel that led to clarity of thought and purpose. Or was this simply another form of superstition? She wanted to trust in the forces and processes of the natural world, this only, perceptible reality and scientific endeavor, men and women alone on earth. (65)

The recent events in her life have left her with the tension between believing in something greater, in God, or not. Throughout the novel, she looks for meaning in the attacks, in her husband, in art, but what that search really reveals is that she's looking for solace, for a feeling of safety that can appease her solitude. She doesn't want to cave in to religion and to the idea of God, because it makes her uneasy given the context of the attacks. She wants to have a clear cut understanding, away from superstition, that will help her make sense, but not even science can comfort her uneasiness. In a world that does not make sense anymore, she can't free herself of doubts.

> Doubters created this work, and ardent believers, and those who'd doubted and then believed, and she was free to think and doubt and believe simultaneously. But she didn't want to. God would crowd her, make her weaker. God would be a presence that remained unimaginable. (65)

The fact that she didn't want to and the resistance she shows, speaks to us of her initial view towards religion. The word choice in the third sentence reaffirms her conviction that religion,

that God, will abolish her individuality, that it would control her, make her part of some larger plan where her tininess would be excruciating, thus making her weaker and dependent. However, this has been one of the ways she'd known during her whole life of finding a place and meaning in the world.

This internal struggle represents a wider context, which is how to believe in God after everything that has happened. Where was God, why did He spared some and not others, why didn't He stop it? These questions echo the sentiment that several members from the Alzheimer's group session have, revealing the collective state of mind of a population trying to make sense of it all. Lianne seeks through her memory and, later on, through her attendance at mass to reconnect with the world and to frame her existence among Others. She wants to be part of a grand scheme of things that will allow her to be comfortable in her own skin. She wants to get out into the world and find comfort in Others dealing with the same situation. Her closure in the novel takes a revelatory turn, when she comes to the realization that after all those years of struggle she is ready to wander, once again, just with her son and face the challenges and her position in a new world, more uncertain and unsafe, on her own terms.

III

Amidst the domestic tropes, the novel doesn't shy away from dealing with the narrative of one of the hijackers. The named codas from each section, On Marienstrasse, In Nokomis and In The Hudson Corridor, deal with Hammad's arc. From a young person studying in the West while getting indoctrinated by a group of fervent muslims, to preparing for the attacks in Florida, to the final moments before the planes hit the towers. Despite not being the main storyline in the

novel, Hammad's story manages to serve as a contrast especially to Lianne's one, because it deals with similar undertones that touch religion, doubt and surrender, among others.

In the first of these codas, we find Hammad living in Germany, studying engineering, while spending his spare time in between the mosque, a small flat where fervent believers gather and the apartment of Leyla, his love interest. The flat on Marienstrasse serves as the key location during that time of his life. There he finds himself surrounded by others like him, studying abroad and others with more radical ideas talking about how "[e]verything here was twisted, hypocrite, the West corrupt mind and body, determined to shiver Islam down to bread crumbs for birds" (79). This tension, this feeling of Western hypocrisy, of being left out, and also this feeling of being under attack, starts to dig deep into Hammad's soul. Their status as displaced, migrants, their loneliness and their Otherness is met with a brotherhood only they can be a part of, with a discourse that toys with ideas of a more committed way of life, of settling accounts with history, of jihad. During his visits to this flat, Hammad doesn't know if they're joking or not, but the passion of their discussions lights up something in him, a feeling of destiny. He starts to realize that among those persons, his newfound brothers, his life starts to actually mean something. He discovers that this new meaning puts him in contact with something larger than himself and gives him purpose.

> The beard would look better if he trimmed it. But there were rules now and he was determined to follow them. His life had structure. Things were clearly defined. He was becoming one of them now, learning to look like them and think like them. This was inseparable from jihad. He prayed with them to be with them. They were becoming total brothers. (83)

On a literal level, Hammad's search for belonging makes him imitate the others around him. They start to grow beards and his sense of normality kicks in during the first sentence. But, through the rules and structure that kinship gives him, his first instinct is suppressed. The fact that those rules were "clearly defined" give his life a sense of order that he hadn't found before. The closeness between them, the fact that he was "learning to look like them and think like them," makes him feel less lonely. They're becoming inseparable, they're merging into one. The common enemy they found in the West unites them and gives them a sense of meaning. They find out that the struggle binds them together. And it is in that sense that the allegorical shows itself, because it's not just a matter of looking the same and having certain rules, it's also a matter of becoming ardent followers. They are isolated from others, even from other adherents. They are the ones that know the way, know the rules, that can carry the mission that history and their own interpretation of the Prophet's word has set them out to do. Despite being in love with Leyla, and even fantasizing that he would like to have children with her, his soul belongs to history. They know their mission and can't be distracted by the mundane things of the world. They travel to Florida because they are on the path that has chosen them. They are becoming martyrs to free their people from injustice.

> He wanted to do this one thing right, of all the things he'd ever done. Here they were in the midst of unbelief, in the bloodstream of the *kufr*. They felt things together, he and his brothers. They felt the claim of danger and isolation. They felt the magnetic effect of plot. Plot drew them together more tightly than ever. Plot closed the world to the slenderest line of sight, where everything converges to a point. There was the claim of fate, that they were born to do this. There was the claim of being chosen, out there, in the wind and sky

of Islam. There was the statement that death made, the strongest claim of all, the highest jihad (174)

In Hammad's construction of subjectivity, this journey from becoming a brother to discovering his greater call as a martyr, enters a dialogue with destiny, which means that it enters an existential plane. As his path takes a more serious course, Hammad starts doubting less, feeling more conviction than ever, feeling closer to God. He finds out that this life of rules and structure takes him out of time, which makes it easier for him to cut contact with his family and to lead a monastic life. The unraveling of plotting with his brothers takes a life of its own. The common goals crowd them and in the case of Hammad gives him a way of representing his position regarding the world. The "claim of fate," the "claim of being chosen," serves as a cue for the reader to understand how his way of interpreting the world, and the Western influence upon his world, is influencing his perception of reality.

This passage is of particular interest because we have a detailed and clear description of what Jameson's cognitive mapping really is. The first few sentences give us the general context and Hammad's individual drive. Seeing his life as a failure, he wanted to do "this one thing right." He realizes his possibility to redeem himself by being part of a greater struggle. The word *kufr* encompasses his view about it. *Kufr* can be translated literally as disbelief, but it is also important to notice the historic and religious implications that this word has had in the development of Islamic thought. According to the Oxford Reference, the Islamic modern reform gave the concept the connotation that the current beliefs and practices are corrupted from true Islam, leading some reformers to associate the "pervasive influence of the West as a cause of kufr." The overtone of this word lights up Hammad's conception of the world in the paragraph,

because his view of Western corruption, of feeling under siege, aligns with his desire to do "this one thing right," which means getting their plans come to fruition. All the things he has heard and seen from the flat on Marienstrasse start taking shape and form when he goes to the Meca of corruption, the United States. His struggle is more defined, his line of sight "converges to a point." The contrast between what he believes is the true way of living and what he sees as the decadent place that influences even the air that we breathe, brings him to believe in being one of the chosen ones. He has a hidden meaning among disbelievers, he sees the one and only way and he is the one to show others the truth even if it means his death.

This brings us to the collective level. We know that Hammad is not alone. He has his brothers, his comrades, his fellow martyrs. He also has the war cries of his ancestors, who self-immolated to demonstrate their purity in a world in which they found no meaning. When we meet Hammad for the first time, an old exile baker is telling him a story that still haunts him from the Iraq-Iran war. In the story, at the Shatt al Arab frontline, the martyrs of the Ayatollah army are running in a human wave attack, poorly armed, against Saddam Hussein's army who are gunning down hundreds of them. He tells Hammad that he still feels desolate after seeing so many young boys die thinking they were winning. He feels the weight of history rallying through those cries, like something from forever. That story comes to the surface again when Hammad and his brothers have taken control of the airplane that's going to hit the north tower. Hammad finds an echo between those martyrs and his own martyrdom. He feels connected to history, he feels his destiny finally being fulfilled.

> He thought of the Shia boys on the battlefield in the Shatt al Arab. He saw them coming out of trenches and redoubts and running across mudflats toward enemy positions,

> mouths open in mortal cry. He took strength from this, seeing them cut down in waves by machine guns, boys in the hundreds, then the thousands, suicide brigades, wearing red bandannas around their necks and plastic keys underneath, to open the door to paradise. (238)

This image of the suicide brigades gives him comfort and solace. He finds a resonance, a common sense of fate. His struggle is not just individual. He is not alone in history. The struggle is collective. The struggle decides who gets to enter paradise. He sees himself as an instrument of truth amidst a world of lies. He knows his place is secure before impacting the towers. He is one with the crowd, with the true followers. He embodies the collective.

IV

Jameson's four-level allegorical analysis gives us a useful way to make a reading of *Falling Man*'s characters and its event. The flexibility of not accommodating to a hierarchical reading helps unpack the many nuances the subject of study may have. The literal, the allegorical, the subjective and the collective, not only speaks in correlation to the work itself, but also to the meaning beyond the work, showing us how individual decisions can become collective actions and how collective actions can have repercussions in the stillness of individual domesticity. Keith, Lianne and Hammad, serve as prime examples of how an event can shape people's lives in totally different ways. Jameson's proposal offers a reading of cognitive mapping in more concrete terms, helping us reflect and represent our own conditions in an inescapable and more connected world.

The strategies the characters use, be it their surrendering to faith, doubt or chance, show us that despite the aims of the late capitalist system to explain everything in terms of cause-effect or cost-benefit, humans are far more intricate and mysterious when it comes to making decisions for themselves, even if those decisions end up influencing larger than life or domestic events. Our response to loneliness, to trauma, to insecurity, is far more complex than whatever overly simplistic narrative is trying to tell us. *Falling Man*'s characters in their descriptions, their dialogues, their silences, offer us a second chance to judge the 9/11 attacks in a more humane way. The inexorable weight of history makes itself evident even if we don't understand it anymore. History has never been a straight line. So, it is all the more precise to read this fragmented novel and to let it speak to us in its apparent unconnected and aleatory way. We think it's the event that acts as the focal point around which everything revolves, but in reality, each life has its own solar system, revolving, trying to escape history, knowing that life is increasingly historical.

Chapter 3

The Possibility of Epiphany

In the previous chapters we've dealt with the aesthetics behind *Falling Man*'s narration and how the four-level allegorical analysis can suggest the strategies of cognitive mapping that the characters use to deal with their position in a changing world. Returning to the original conundrum that Jameson articulates, that maybe it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism, it is also important to bring back, at least briefly, his thoughts concerning this statement. Ten years after uttering this paradox, Jameson returns to it in an essay titled "Future City" (2003). In it, he argues that perhaps one way of overcoming this weakness of imagination can be through a writing capable of "jumpstart[ing] the sense of history so that it begins again to transmit feeble signals of time, of otherness, of change" (76). In this chapter we will deal with the language strategies the novel is proposing to the reader. It seems as if language and our way of dealing with language is the solution the novel proposes toward the main issue of our times: that of representing the world. Through the process of writing and the possibility of achieving an epiphany, *Falling Man* offers a plausible alternative to counter the depthlessnes of our era, thus providing a meditation on how the power of language can help us find our position in relation to the world and how we can represent that tension.

The Schizophrenic Condition

Taking inspiration from the famous allegory of Plato's cave, Jameson argues that we "can no longer gaze directly on some putative real world" (39). Our reconstruction of the past is now filled with images and simulacra, with stereotypes and depthlessness. Now, we only see the wall from the cave and reality is forever out of reach. This has left us without the possibility of experiencing time in a coherent manner, with the consequences of the past and without the hopes of the future, leading us to a state that Jameson deems schizophrenic.

This schizophrenic condition is to be understood merely in descriptive, not clinical, terms. For Jameson, the value of using this term lies in how it frames the complete breakdown of the signifying chain. When describing the condition, he states that there's a linguistic and identity malfunction that is correlated in a temporal sense. Our personal identity is formed by the union of past and future converging in a present point. However, for that to function, we need to be able to articulate time in a coherent manner, which is a manner of language. Since we cannot do that anymore, we "are similarly unable to unify the past, present, and future of our own biographical experience or psychic life" (41). Which consequently leads us to an experience of fragmented and unconnected presents. This nexus between language and identity sheds light to how intricate and embroiled we are with language and thus with history, stories and narratives. This, argues Jameson, becomes "something closer to a sentence in free-standing isolation (42). Which means that it is deprived of past and future, becoming extremely difficult, if not impossible, to interpret or compare, becoming just a blip in the now.

Jameson returns to this condition in his interview "Revisiting Postmodernism" and stresses that the impact of finance and communication in a connected world have accentuated life to a reduction of the present and that this accentuation has brought on an attitude of resignation

and/or cynicism since there's nothing surprising about capitalism and "everything seems subsumed [to commodification]" (144). He emphasizes how today is even more pervading by pointing out how every experience, from going to museums to political rallies or protests, is ephemeral. These experiences don't have enduring consequences, since they're reduced to a mere outburst and stand in isolation, unconnected from the past or the future.

Jameson's description of the schizophrenic condition can be positioned as a counterpoint to what DeLillo suggests in *Falling Man*. Since we are dealing with language and its issues, it's worth revisiting what the author thinks and what the novel conveys about language and the act of writing, in order to grasp an alternative to such a gloomy view as the schizophrenic condition.

Language and Writing

> Anna wrote about the revelation of writing itself, how she hadn't known she could write ten words and now look what comes pouring out. (31)

Back in 1993, in its famous series titled *The Art of Fiction*, *The Paris Review* published an interview with Don DeLillo where he states that when he was working in his novel *The Names* (1982) he came up with a different writing approach compared to his previous novels: "When I finished a paragraph, even a three-line paragraph, I automatically went to a fresh page to start the new paragraph. No crowded pages. This enabled me to see a given set of sentences more clearly" (*The Paris Review*). This method not only allows him to concentrate better and more efficiently in his rewriting process as he states in that interview, but it also can suggest to the reader how his

books have been constructed ever since, perhaps more obvious in his late work and particularly in *Falling Man*.

This meditation on language, which we can trace from DeLillo's process when he was writing *The Names* to an interview he gave to Mark Binelli for Guernica Magazine about *Falling Man*, is also something that finds its way into the narrative of the story, playing a key part of it. The novel in all its quiet domesticity is filled with epiphanies and with reflections about the power of writing, of language. From a childish mistake turned into a mythical prefiguration with the name of Bill Lawton, a misnomer from bin Laden, to the "crossing point of insight and memory that the act of writing allows" (30). These reflections on language serve as a counterpoint to the detachment and disorientation that plagues the characters' world.

Throughout the novel, we have several instances where we see how language can bridge the gap between the present, the past and the future. These instances are illustrated by the Alzheimer's writing group sessions and Justin's eerie playfulness with language. It's interesting that the novel suggests that the two opposite poles in the age spectrum have a more intimate relation with language, than the middle-age group that is composed by Keith and Lianne, who are lost in the looming presentness of the attacks and its aftermath. For Justin, it all starts with the name Bill Lawton. He and his friends, the Siblings, are locking themselves up in a room, standing in front of the window talking strangely. The Siblings' mother is worried and she says to Lianne that their talk "has something to do with this man" (17). She doesn't know the name and is telling Lianne in a pushy way, as if she were trying to get answers from her. The apparent normal conversation between two mothers takes a mysterious tone, when she tells Lianne that her kids don't want to talk about it at all with her.

In their second encounter, Lianne, a bit annoyed by her presence, senses a false camaraderie between the two of them. Then, the Sibling's mother tells Lianne that she's more worried than before, because they keep saying the name Bill Lawton, while at the same time they are looking at the sky with binoculars. Whenever she brings up the topic with her kids, they take a secrecy stance. Lianne is taken aback when the Sibling's mother reveals that it's actually Justin the one who provides the binoculars whenever they meet up. This is accompanied by the vow of silence Justin takes when questioned about the matter. However, as the episodes between parents and son progress, we see that Justin has also taken a particular stance on language; when he speaks, he only expresses himself in monosyllables.

His monosyllabic expression aims to help him measure each word, not only noting the syllable count, but also thinking more slowly, being aware of what he is saying. This naïveté is contrasted with secrecy. As time goes by, his discipline becomes a "solemn obstinacy" (160). As if a penance he must atone, the ritualistic practice influences his way of interacting with others and with the world. It begins to take form as a cultish argot. His argot functions as a mechanism to include some, like his friends and excludes others, as in the case of his parents. It brings news of events that have not happened yet, paves the way to belief and superstition, and changes the way he sees the world. In a revealing scene, Keith and Lianne tease Justin saying that he has gone from monosyllabic expression to a complete vow of silence. He, then, answers in an eerie way by telling them that maybe the reason he talks in monosyllables is because maybe Bill Lawton also does (101). When they push him to talk more, he leaves them with two lingering answers in their head that take on a completely opposite dimension to the notion of innocence that the language game originally had. First, he says that the only persons that know what Bill

Lawton actually says are the Siblings and him. Second, he adds that the big revelation concerns the towers and that "[t]his time coming, he says, they'll really come down" (102). The answer leaves them puzzled and shocked. And it is in this sense that Justin's position is unveiled. DeLillo, through the figure of Justin, is suggesting the power of language in terms of exclusion and world-building. Only a few are chosen to follow and only a few have access to the revelation. Part of the success of channeling this through Justin is that it takes a weird and humorous sense to actually process the commentary it carries. We build myths all around us. The discipline of belief and the conviction of revelation transform our way of perceiving the world. Looking at it through a child's play is funny and eerie enough to make us question our own beliefs, our own myths. How successful or failed are the fairy tales that we tell to ourselves, how (in)coherent? Do they make something better than it really is or does that better become worse? And that seems to be the major reflection about language, that it has the power of reconfiguring everything around us and we need to stay alert when it happens, because if we are not on our guard someone else will come to reconfigure our world and we are just going to be pawns on the chess table.

This is paired up with what the ultimate stronghold for language seems to be: writing. Throughout the novel, writing comes up as this fragile tension between inner and outer world. Experience, insight, memory, expression form an "adhesive friction that makes an individual possible" (30). Either by the media, by the monotonous routine, by trauma and paranoia, by the feeling of insecurity, by global events, by sickness, writing and thus the individual are under siege. The complicated nature behind the spark that provokes the possibility of writing seems so inexplicable, yet so precious and delicate. The novel brings this out in subtle terms through

Justin's pencil hoard, Lianne's job as an editor, Keith's obsession with correcting his name on correspondence and the Alzheimer's group's writing sessions. However, despite the perils, writing, the telling of stories, allows one to manage the impending danger more at ease and gracefully, enabling the characters to pave their own way amidst the messiness around them. Perhaps the Alzheimer's group is the best example of this.

In the sessions, Lianne observes how Alzheimer's patients come to terms with the realization that each day is one day less in the long and unsuccessful battle against the disease. The sessions thus become a quest to lift their spirits and recognize that even though the battle is lost, there are still moments to be lived, and each time they meet is a defiant cry in the face of the inevitable outcome. For them, writing becomes the ultimate weapon against mortality. Through their use of words, craft, storytelling, they "approached what was impending, each of them, with a little space remaining, to stand and watch it happen" (94). This impending condition is a drowning man's cry, not only of mortality and oblivion, but also of saturation, of being lost among signs.

As a result, writing becomes a way of appropriating those signs and making them personal, intimate, of knowing "what they knew, here in the last clear minute before it all closed down" (30). The revelation of writing was not in the degree of success they had in terms of syntax or coherence or locating the perfect word, but in "finding narratives that rolled and tumbled" (30). Telling stories about themselves becomes a protective shield, at least for a moment, against the gradual failings of the mind that slips into a state of no return. The reflection around them comes from Lianne's corner, asking herself how can we slow down that process, even though we know that it's coming, without falling into superstition or extreme

rationalization. And there lies the point, while Lianne dwells on these issues she finds herself confronting her own story, her fears and lost hopes, while at the same time ascertains that writing and memory stand as beacons against the "last bare state, where even the deepest moan may not be grief but only a moan" (156). A moan of resistance, of testimony, of having lived.

Language and writing seem to be the novel's spearhead for countering both the fragmentary condition of the individual and the question of representation, addressed in the previous chapters. The inability to unify past, present, and future in the present, as well as the disorientation this inability brings, form the crux of each character's stories. Whether through the use of argot and the development of myths or through the act of writing and the summoning of acuity and memory, the novel suggests that both approaches can offer a way to make coherent and less disorienting an increasingly unintelligible and chaotic world. In a way, language is posed as that "adhesive friction" (30) that makes the breaks, the interruptions, the fragmentariness of the postmodern condition mentioned by Jameson, make sense. However, this attempt to make sense remains shrouded in mystery.

Mystery in the Form of Epiphany

In that same *The Paris Review* interview, DeLillo tinges his conception of language with an aura of mystery: "before everything, there's language. Before history and politics, there's language" (*The Paris Review*). The emphasis and repetition help to show that language takes a primal position in DeLillo's view. The domain of language extends beyond any cultural category that seeks a unifying discourse. For DeLillo, this primal position of language means that it moves

in all directions, without restraints, and that any attempt to subjugate it must be questioned, because from language comes everything else. This is one of the reasons why he mentions that we need the "the writer in opposition, the novelist who writes against power, who writes against the corporation or the state or the whole apparatus of assimilation" (*The Paris Review*). This opposition leads the writer to create a counterhistory. It leads him to delve deeper into language and become a messenger of the signals it sends back. And these signals may be beneficial, but they must be taken with caution. The origin of these fleeting signals, which the characters, which people, take as a token of something greater than ourselves, is something that DeLillo perhaps denies us or prefers not to answer, neither in his books nor in interviews. However, it is the power they have in our lives and the realizations they may help us reach what DeLillo seeks to highlight, leaving in the reader the opportunity to offer a response. These signals, which were originally appreciated solely as religious but can also be secular or mixed, are what we call epiphany.

From the religious undertones of manifestation, in the apparition of a divine being, to the moment of disclosure or realization in its most mundane sense, epiphany comes from a long tradition of trying to name that fleeting moment of revelation that is based on something ordinary, casual, and that makes a deep impression on the subject, even if s/he forgets it later on. This attempt to name something transient, to capture with words a revelation that goes beyond words, is at its most basic, beyond spiritual or personal implications, a purely linguistic issue. Thus, we could argue that it is only through language that we and/or the character will reach an unveiling in all the other categories. Since we've seen that language is at the center of DeLillo

and his oeuvre, we can suggest that epiphany, that attempt to name the mysterious revelation, plays a key role in his novels, its characters and in what he proposes to the reader.

In *Falling Man*, each of the characters gets an epiphany that gives them a revelation about their personal situation. In the case of Hammad, that epiphany, which can also be understood as *kashf* according to the Oxford Dictionary of Islam, transforms into a belief that uncovers the veil "from what is hidden, such as the secret or hidden meaning of the Quran" (167). In Keith's case, it transforms into helplessness, and in Lianne's it becomes a more aware sense of self. The novel shows us what happens to the first two. In Hammad's case, that belief leads him to end up hijacking a plane. In Keith's, that helplessness makes him succumb to chance and leave everything behind. But in Lianne the case is different and it seems that what the novel proposes in terms of coping with our fragmented and disorienting time takes form in how her character handles herself. Which is why it seems only logical that the last moment we encounter her in the book is when she reaches her epiphany.

Throughout the novel, Lianne has been struggling with the memory of her late father, who died by suicide; she's struggled not only with that memory, but because the reason why he did it terrifies her. Her father was diagnosed with Alzheimer and he decided to put an end to it before he became impaired. When we meet her in the novel, we find Lianne in her late thirties. The suicide of her father took place more than fifteen years before. She is aging and she fears that she might also get diagnosed with the same illness. Not only that, but her estranged husband shows like a ghost in her doorstep, amidst the attack that shattered any sense of safety and exceptionalism that Americans had. It's safe to say that she has a lot on her plate. But, on the other hand, she is also raising a kid, caring for her ailing mother and conducting writing group

sessions for elderly people with Alzheimer's. We could suggest that in a sense she's affirming the future, taking care of the past and understanding the illness up close.

As we've quoted previously, she's searching for meaning in the tide of signs, among the ruins, memory, parenthood, marriage, religion, illness, mortality. And this search sometimes leads her to take action and sometimes makes her reflective, and it is in those reflective moments where language comes pouring, because she questions herself, her feelings, her bias and doubts. She makes an inner journey into her self, trying to find some kind of unity in her fragmentation. And that unity that makes her feel less disoriented comes from being aware. Her epiphanic moment starts when "[s]he was arguing with herself but it wasn't argument, just the noise the brain makes" (236). In the most ordinary of moments her revelation starts to build-up, like a growing wave that ends up sweeping the shore, leaving everything calmer.

> Then one late night, undressing, she yanked a clean green T-shirt over her head and it wasn't sweat she smelled or maybe just a faint trace but not the sour reek of the morning run. (…). It wasn't even something she smelled so much as knew. It was something she'd always known. The child was in it, the girl who wanted to be other people, and obscure things she could not name. It was a small moment, already passing, the kind of moment that is always only seconds from forgetting. (236)

Amidst the numbing chaos, the shock and awe, the consumer frenzy, the paranoia and fear, the death and mourning, how are we able to transcend or to make peace with our own fragmented and disoriented existence? In *Falling Man* it is suggested that through epiphany or self-realization. Using a modernist device, it seems that the novel and DeLillo are telling us that in this era, through language, epiphany can offer us the possibility of seeing beyond our mundane

and routine circumstances, since it will allow us to see more clearly, although briefly, how every rupture, difference, fragment, can dialogue and interact with each other, no matter how equidistant they are, providing a picture of our relationship with the world. Throughout the novel, the characters repeatedly question the meaning of moving forward after the attacks have allowed them a pause from the torpor of late capitalism. And it seems that in this pause, everything becomes a question worthy of reflection. Interpersonal relationships, the United States' position in the world, the value of art, the religious call, the existence of God, memory and its loss, suicide, writing and language, cultural sensibilities, childhood—these are topics that, had they not had that pause, the characters probably would not have questioned. And even though there are no concrete answers to help make sense of, give direction, or comfort, the possibility of some unnameable knowledge or realization is there, in that gap between memory and insight. Sometimes it's not even named, perhaps because that realization eludes being confined to a flesh-and-blood word, but the feeling persists despite its fleeting nature, and it's in those moments that the characters manage to make peace with their circumstances, even if they don't quite know why.

Lianne, Hammad and Keith, in their own way, learn to live with trauma, accept their fate, and surrender to powerlessness. Beyond moralistic judgments, the novel also seeks to show us how that personal realization can take on self-destructive overtones, as in the case of Hammad and Keith. Both of them come to terms with the revelation that ultimately wipes them off the map and hands them over to the crowd, whether it's a religious *kashf* or a secular epiphany. With Lianne, however, the epiphany revolves around her. Despite not being a direct victim of the attacks, the collateral damage she suffers ultimately undermines her physical, social, and spiritual

security. Nevertheless, her epiphany restores her a sense of agency and control, despite the world and others, which leads her to start over and stand up for her own self at the end of the novel.

> She was ready to be alone, in reliable calm, she and the kid, the way they were before the planes appeared that day, silver crossing blue. (236)

And as Lianne reaches her epiphany, the reader also finds a sense of narrative closure and an endless internal dialogue. The epiphany, with all its power and mystery, comes in the poetic form of the sentence, of language. This seems to be where the novel revolves, how after an unprecedented event, which damaged so many people physically and mentally, we find a way to move forward. Perhaps not in the way of imagining a future specifically, but in the possibility of beginning to recognize things about ourselves, about others, about the aspirations of the world, about the borders that divide us, and that from this we have the opportunity to build anew, wiser, with better intentions, more aware that we are not alone and that every action we take resonates in an unexpected place. Through Lianne's example, we learn how epiphany can be transformational, how when we start being aware something mysterious happens inside of us, away from all the external buzz, and somehow, even if it's unspoken, we get the sense that perhaps everything will be alright.

Thus, the importance of telling stories, of narrating our lives, however fragmented and seemingly incoherent and/or mundane they may be, is suggested as the palliative of our era, because they offer the possibility of epiphany, of self-realization, which is something we can see time and again in *Falling Man*. And it is in this possibility that lies the awareness, understanding, empathy, and imagination necessary, which can only come from the power of language, to move forward in the midst of disorienting times.

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