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'THE DAYS AFTER' AND 'THE ORDINARY RUN OF HOURS': COUNTERNARRATIVES AND DOUBLE VISION IN DON DELILLO'S *FALLING MAN*

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The publication in 2007 of Don DeLillo's fourteenth novel, *Falling Man*, was keenly anticipated and then indifferently received. As many reviewers observed, DeLillo had already dealt in previous novels with the issues that 9/11 seemed to crystallize: international terrorism, the global impact of American politics and culture, the relationship between the media television—in particular—and the events on which it reports. Citing a number of examples (the Happy Valley Farm Commune in *Great Jones Street* (1973), the Radical Matrix in *Running Dog* (1978), Ta Onómata in *The Names* (1982)), John Leonard points out that terrorist groups are ubiquitous in DeLillo and argues that 'some kind of 9/11 was always implicit' in his work (Leonard, 2007: 1). Similarly, Andrew O'Hagan suggests that DeLillo's 'interest in the conjunction of visual technology and terrorism ... put him on the road to having September 11 as his subject long before the events of that day happened' (O'Hagan, 2007: 1). However, for O'Hagan the arrival of the event itself, rather than giving DeLillo the material he had been waiting for, has rendered him redundant. O'Hagan sees DeLillo as the victim of his own prescience, asking rhetorically: "What is a prophet once his fiery word becomes deed?" What does he have to say? What is left of the paranoid style when all its suspicions come true?' (O'Hagan, 2007: 5, 6). This notion that DeLillo had somehow scooped himself is also implicit in the comments of Toby Litt, who announces that '[i]n *Mao II*, DeLillo had already written his great 9/11 novel, long before the specific date and the event happened to come around' (Litt, 2007: 1) and of David Cowart, who writes that 'DeLillo has already produced, in *Mao II*, the definitive novelistic treatment of terrorism centered in and emanating from the Near or Middle East' (Cowart, 2003: 217).

Unlike the others, Cowart's remarks—in the concluding chapter of his book *Don DeLillo: The Physics of Language* (2003)—were made before the appearance of *Falling Man*. So convinced is Cowart that anything DeLillo publishes after September 11th, 2001, must be a response to the events of that day, that he presses *Cosmopolis* (2003), the predecessor in DeLillo's oeuvre to *Falling Man* and his first book to be published after the attacks on the towers, into service as an oblique 9/11 novel. He refers in his discussion of the novel to its '9/11-tinged atmospherics' (211), claiming that '[a]lthough

the action of *Cosmopolis* takes place in Manhattan a year and a half before the 9/11 terrorist attack, DeLillo depicts a city over which, as he and the reader know, a terrible event looms' (210). Undaunted by the absence of any concrete allusions to 9/11, Cowart discovers in the narrative trajectory of *Cosmopolis* an implicit precognition of 9/11, so that the novel becomes a 'brilliant . . . explor[ation]' of 'a proximate past from the never explicitly stated vantage point of post-9/11', an 'engagement', with 'studied indirection', of 'the anxieties moiling in [the] wake' of the 9/11 attacks' (213, 217). With this weight of expectation, DeLillo was damned if he did write a 9/11 novel and damned if he didn't: if he did, then it was bound to be compared unfavourably—to seem in fact like a belated footnote — to novels like *The Names* and *Mao II*; if he didn't, then its shadow would loom over his fiction, with each new novel likely to be read as a sort of encrypted comment on 9/11 or as the precursor to a future 9/11 magnum opus.

The two short pieces that DeLillo published after 9/11 but before *Cosmopolis* did little to discourage the view that a DeLillo 9/11 novel was probable, if not inevitable. The second of these, a short story called 'Looking at Meinhof', deals elliptically with a chance encounter between two unemployed New Yorkers at an exhibition of paintings depicting members of the notorious German terrorist group the Baader-Meinhof Gang. The subject of the paintings aside, the story seems on the face of it to have no connection with the events of 9/11, but Cowart characteristically sees in it an attempt 'to capture some domestic precipitate of terrorism' (Cowart, 2003: 212) and it does contain two seeds that germinate in *Falling Man*. The first is that the interest in the Baader-Meinhof Gang extends from the story into the novel, in that there is a character in the latter who might have been connected with the terrorist group. The second is that the story ends with the unnamed protagonist, having narrowly averted a potential rape (she escapes by locking herself in her bathroom, after which her assailant masturbates silently on her bed and then leaves), seeing 'everything twice now', with 'a double effect—what it was and the association it carried in her mind' (DeLillo, 2002: 7). This doubling of perception as a response to trauma—what I will refer to as 'double vision'—becomes something of a leitmotif in *Falling Man*.

The other post-9/11 piece, an essay entitled 'In the Ruins of the Future: Reflections on Terror and Loss in the Shadow of September', published three months after the attacks, begins by reiterating the belief first expressed in *Mao II* that 'the world narrative belongs to terrorists', before offering the possibility of resistance: 'The narrative ends in the rubble and it is left to us to create the counternarrative' (DeLillo, 2001: 1, 2). The first-person plural pronoun here is ambiguous (does it refer to all those who are not terrorists, to the world-wide witnesses of the event, Americans, New Yorkers, writers?), but what is clear is that DeLillo feels some sort of response to these events is necessary—and that this response should take narrative form. Later in the piece, DeLillo elaborates, insisting that:

We need them [the smaller objects and more marginal stories sifted in the ruins of the day], even the common tools of the terrorists, to set against the massive spectacle that continues to seem unmanageable, too powerful a thing to set into our frame of practised response. (DeLillo, 2001: 3)



The implication seems to be that the best—perhaps the only—way of responding to the ‘massive spectacle’ that was 9/11 is microcosmically, by constructing a counter-narrative out of small objects and marginal stories, rather than focusing on the towers themselves.

Certainly, this is the approach that DeLillo takes in *Falling Man*. Although it does eventually take us into one of the towers in the aftermath of the impact of the first plane, most of the novel deals with the emotional and psychological fall-out, in the ensuing days, weeks, months and years, on a survivor from one of the Towers, Keith Neudecker, and his estranged wife, Lianne, rather than with the events of 9/11 itself. Indeed, the metonym ‘9/11’ is conspicuous by its absence from the novel and there is no mention either of George Bush, al-Quaida, the ‘War on Terror’, or Osama Bin Laden. Indeed, the novel draws attention to this last omission through the title of its first section, ‘Bill Lawton’, which is the name a group of children (mishearing ‘Bin Laden’) give to the mysterious entity that they ceaselessly scan the skies for in the post-9/11 period. Similarly, the falling man of the novel’s title turns out to be not the iconic image from Richard Drew’s photograph, but a performance artist, David Janiak, who, in the weeks after the collapse of the World Trade Center, stages a number of falls from high buildings with the aid of a safety harness that arrests his descent. As he refuses to be interviewed, Janiak’s motives remain obscure, and his obituary (he dies, mysteriously, of natural causes at the age of thirty-nine) notes that ‘[t]here is some dispute over the issue of [whether Janiak] intended to reflect the body posture of a particular man who was photographed falling from the north tower of the World Trade Center, headfirst, arms at his sides, one leg bent, a man set forever in free fall against the looming background of the column panels in the tower’ (DeLillo, 2007: 221). Whether wittingly or not, however, Janiak’s act provides a series of distorted replays of the men and women who chose to leap from the Towers rather than being burnt or suffocated inside.

It is tempting to view Janiak as a surrogate for DeLillo himself, or at least as a portrait of the artist who, faced with what DeLillo described as an event ‘so vast and terrible that it was outside imagining even as it happened’, can only produce a pale imitation of it (DeLillo 2001: 5). As Alfred Hickling puts it, in a brief, scathing review of the paperback edition of the book, Janiak functions as ‘a convenient metaphor for a writer adding to the heap of unrevealing 9/11 commentary’ (Hickling, 2008: 20). Andrew O’Hagan similarly argues that ‘[t]he Falling Man, the artist, can do no better than constitute some figurative account of the author himself, suspended in freefall, frozen in time, subject to both the threat of gravity and the indwelling disbelief of the spectators below’ (O’Hagan 2007: 8). For O’Hagan, Janiak’s interrupted dives (which must always fall short of the trajectory described by the jumpers from the towers) are a metaphor for DeLillo’s ‘failure . . . to imagine September 11’ (O’Hagan, 2007: 5). There are two problems with this view: firstly, it is unclear whether Hickling and O’Hagan regard the analogy between the author and the performance artist as intentional (a deliberate self-critique) or unintentional (an unconscious self-indictment); secondly, Janiak’s performances, though ethically questionable, are undeniably powerful, so that even if the analogy is valid, it may not be as damning to DeLillo as they suggest.

Near the end of the novel, when Lianne witnesses one of Janiak’s unannounced falls, she is bewildered both by Janiak’s purpose and by her own compulsion to observe

his performance: 'Because what was he doing finally? But why was she standing here watching?' (167). She gets an implicit answer to the second of her questions when she notices someone else—a 'derelict', 'old, threadbare man'—equally enthralled, 'seeing something elaborately different from what he encountered step by step in the ordinary run of hours' (168). Looking at the man looking at Janiak, Lianne intuitively understands that he is trying 'to learn how to see it correctly, find a crack in the world where it might fit' (168). This episode, it seems to me, provides a possible key to what DeLillo is up to in *Falling Man*. For the novel insistently explores how the 'ordinary run of hours' that constitutes daily life after 9/11 both differs radically from, and at the same time closely resembles, the quotidian structure that preceded it, creating a curious double vision like that experienced by the protagonist of 'Looking at Meinhof'; how 9/11 has, as DeLillo put it in 'In the Ruins of the Future', 'changed the grain of the most routine moment' (DeLillo 2001: 6), while at the same time it has been subsumed by a series of such moments; how we have struggled 'to see it [9/11] correctly', while maintaining our focus on the immediate concerns of every day.

It has become a commonplace that 9/11 marked a paradigm shift in global geopolitics. Though radically different in terms of scale, duration and almost every other measure, in this respect it can be compared to the Holocaust. Just as the Holocaust became the defining event of the twentieth century—the watershed that altered perceptions of humanity so fundamentally that the history not only of that century but of Western civilization as a whole became divided into the pre- and post-Holocaust eras—so it has become customary to refer to events in the twenty-first century as having occurred either pre- or post- 9/11. In 'In the Ruins of the Future', DeLillo insists that the attacks on the towers are *sui generis* — 'In its desertion of every basis for comparison, the event asserts its singularity' (DeLillo 2001: 6) — yet this very claim for the unprecedented nature of 9/11 is couched in terms that inevitably recall the heated historical debates over whether or not the Holocaust should be regarded as unique. In *Falling Man*, too, DeLillo at times represents reactions to the trauma of 9/11 that echo those experienced by Holocaust survivors, real and fictional.

In 1987 the Jewish-American author Norma Rosen published an essay, entitled 'The Second Life of Holocaust Imagery', in which she argued that one of the consequences of the Holocaust has been to alter forever, in the sensitized minds of survivors and others, the associations of everyday phenomena:

For a mind engraved with the Holocaust, gas is always *that* gas. Shower means their shower. Ovens are those ovens. A train is a freight car crammed with suffocating children: it arrives at the suburban station in a burst of power and noise, there is a moment of hideous hallucination that is really only remembering, and then one steps onto the train and opens the newspaper. Of course this does not always happen. Some days the sky is simply blue and we do not wonder how a blue sky looked to those on their way to the crematoria. (Rosen, 1992: 52)

Something similar happens in *Falling Man* to those whose minds are engraved with the experience of 9/11. To give three examples: firstly Lianne and Martin, her mother's lover, see the towers in 'two dark objects, too obscure to name' in a Morandi still life painting that hangs in her kitchen (49); secondly, Lianne's and Keith's son, Justin, keeps a constant vigil, together with two friends referred to as 'the sibblings', staring at the



Manhattan skyline, which now shimmers with spectral planes; and thirdly, when Keith has a rendezvous with Florence (a fellow survivor with whom he has a brief affair), in the mattress department at Macy's, where the customers are trying out the beds, it is described suggestively as 'a tryst without whisper or touch, set among strangers falling down' (133). The awed silence of the lovers, and the fact that they are brought together by the events of 9/11, lends the imagery of 'strangers falling down' a second life. To put it another way, for Keith and Florence, even the innocent falls of these customers onto the cushioned mattresses becomes charged with post-9/11 meaning: they view it with the same traumatized 'double vision' with which the protagonist of 'Looking at Meinhof' stares at her soiled bed. Falling post-9/11 is never simply falling and indeed DeLillo's novel plays repeatedly on the multiple meanings of the word 'fall' and its derivatives, meanings that multiply further after the fall of the twin towers.

Falling Man opens with an initially unnamed man (who turns out to be Keith), his body embedded with tiny shards of glass and covered in ash and blood, staggering out of one of the towers into an apocalyptic scene: 'It was not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night' (DeLillo, 2007: 3). In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, it is not simply Keith's physical surroundings that alter radically, but his perception of the world around him. By the time he hears 'the sound of the second [tower's] fall' Keith has 'beg[u]n to see things, somehow, differently' (5). The phrase 'second fall' here has a biblical resonance, partly because the fall of the towers seemed to symbolize the end of an era of American innocence (in the sense of naivety if not of moral purity), and to demonstrate, as surely as the collapse of the Tower of Babel, the essential fragility (if not vanity) of even the most monumental of mortal constructions. More profoundly, in the same way as much of the power of the most famous literary account of the first fall—Milton's *Paradise Lost*—derives from the poignant sense that in the postlapsarian era it is not just the world itself but the words used to describe it that have been denuded, in *Falling Man* too language itself seems to disintegrate, along with the most prominent icons of the Manhattan skyline. Keith feels that '[t]here was something critically missing from the things around him. They were unfinished, whatever that means. They were unseen, whatever that means' (5). The repetition here of the phrase 'whatever that means' draws attention to the fact that Keith's trauma has precipitated a crisis of signification—words no longer seem to make sense—and indeed the novel ends by returning to these post-traumatic moments, with Keith suffering from a kind of aphasia, staring 'into the stunned distance . . . where everything was . . . falling away . . . things he could not name' (246). If there is something literally 'missing from the things around him' (the towers themselves leaving what DeLillo in 'In the Ruins of the Future' calls a 'howling space' (DeLillo, 2001: 6)), then there is also something metaphorically missing from Keith's diction. Familiar words now seem elusive; familiar sights now seem strange, so that when Keith, in a trance-like state, returns briefly to his apartment (where he has been living alone since his separation from Lianne), he 's[ees] the place differently now' (26). It is perhaps in order to try to retrieve the things that seem to be 'falling away'—to recover a literal sense of familiarity—that Keith decides to return to life with Lianne and his children, but in fact this simply reinforces his sense of alienation: 'Nothing seemed familiar, being here, in a family again, and he felt strange to himself, or always had, but it was different now because he was watching' (65).

On the other hand, as this passage makes clear, Keith has always lived a semi-detached existence, so that it is difficult to know how much of his post-9/11 behaviour to attribute to post-traumatic stress. After an initial period of reconciliation and renewed intimacy with Lianne, he begins to drift away from her again, conducting a clandestine affair with Florence, a fellow survivor of the attacks whose briefcase he had absent-mindedly walked away with, and then increasingly spending his time participating in professional poker tournaments in foreign countries. When Lianne seeks clarification about Keith's post-9/11 plans, he tells her that his 'job wasn't much different from the job I had before all this happened. But that was before, this is after' (215). This is a note that is struck repeatedly in the novel, by Keith and by the narrator of the novel (the voices of the two are often conflated in the form of free indirect speech), who is given to portentous declarations such as 'These are the days after. Everything now is measured by after'; (138); 'These were the people he knew ... the ones he could stand with in the days after' (143); 'These three years past, since that day in September, all life had become public' (182). Yet, for all this emphasis on what Keith thinks of as 'these long strange days and still nights, these after-days' (137), there is a powerful counternarrative in the novel that suggests that if life after 9/11 is in some respects extraordinary, in other ways, as the narrator puts it, 'things were ordinary as well. Things were ordinary in all the ways they were always ordinary' (67).

If 'fall', 'falling', 'fallen' and other words connoting change and flux are conspicuous in *Falling Man*, then equally central are two terms that denote stability and equilibrium: 'normal' and 'ordinary'. Early on in the novel, we are told that Lianne 'stepped into the street thinking ordinary thoughts' (22), which, given the context, might seem to have a proleptic irony: she is just going about her daily business, but little does she know that soon her life will be altered irrevocably. However, it soon becomes clear that this episode is taking place after the attacks, as her thoughts turn towards the symbolic sight of Keith, inaccessible as ever, 'standing numbly in the flow [of the shower], a dim figure far away inside plexiglass' (23). At this point we might imagine that Lianne's 'ordinary' thoughts represent a willed effort on her part to continue with her life and to cope with the predicament of having to cohabit once more with her possibly traumatized, certainly emotionally distant former partner; to continue with the routines of life in a context that is anything but routine; to be, as Martin (the possibly erstwhile German terrorist) puts it, 'equal to the situation' (23). In other words, her thoughts may be 'ordinary' only insofar as they distract her from what is really on her mind—the extraordinary events of 9/11. Initially, Lianne is comforted by her conviction that after 9/11 '[w]hat was ordinary was not more ordinary than usual, or less' (105) — a conviction that she actively seeks to reinforce by listening to 'the things everybody said, ordinary things' (61) — but this proves to be a short-lived consolation. As Lianne subjects the term 'ordinary' to intense semantic pressure, it fragments and her earlier sense of security gives way to radical ontological doubts:

But then she might be wrong about what was ordinary. Maybe nothing was. Maybe there was a deep fold in the grain of things, the way things pass through the mind, the way time swings in the mind, which is the only place it meaningfully exists. (105)



If nothing is ordinary, then the implication is that everything is extraordinary, but of course that is a contradiction in terms. This contradiction is one that Keith also encounters as he walks away from ground zero: 'The ordinariness, so normally unnoticeable, fell upon him oddly, with almost dreamlike effect' (51). Struck by the very things that are usually invisible precisely because of their familiarity, the disorientation that Keith experiences here—the sensation that ordinary reality has become surreal—leads to a recognition that ordinariness can, paradoxically, become a sign of peculiarity or even extremity, as in the case of his colleague Rumsey, whose lifeless body he tries in vain to revive after the impact of the first plane: 'He was ordinary in many ways, Rumsey ... but he took his ordinariness to the deep end at times' (121).

Both Keith and Lianne struggle to create a normality that will insulate them against the abnormality of the catastrophe of 9/11, but both come to realize that normality is always relative and contingent. Retreating into a twilight world of poker tournaments for reasons that remain obscure, perhaps even to himself, Keith, surveying the neon lights of Las Vegas through the window of a rented car he drives through the desert, has an epiphany of sorts: 'He hadn't known until now ... how strange a life he was living. But only from here, out away from it. In the thing itself, down close, in the tight eyes around the table, there was nothing that was not normal' (227). There is a kind of double vision operating here — Keith surveys Las Vegas both from the outside, 'away from it', and 'down close', with the 'tight eyes' of the professional poker player — and this dual perspective undermines the stability of the language that defines experience. If there is nothing that is not normal, then there is nothing that is normal either, since normality must always be defined by that which is abnormal or anomalous; if normality becomes strange when viewed from a distance then the foundations of consistency and consensus on which the term rests collapse. Keith's realisation that his solitary life on the poker circuit, strange though it seems from the outside, has become the norm to him, is, by implication, also a realisation that he cannot, after all, become the person 'of clear and distinct definition, husband and father, finally, occupying a room in three dimensions in the manner of his parents' he had briefly believed he might be (157). Lianne, fortified by the 'unremarkable' results of a thorough medical examination which reveals that she has 'normal morphology' (206, 232)—she dwells with satisfaction on these phrases, repeating them to Keith and to herself — comes to the same conclusion, deciding that her post-9/11 reunion with Keith is temporary, and that now she is '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).

The other character in the novel for whom the interpretation of normality becomes a pressing issue is DeLillo's fictional terrorist, Hammad. Whereas Keith and Lianne strive to create a normative physical and psychological space in which to recuperate from the shock, and shelter from the after-shocks, of 9/11, Hammad 'ha[s] to fight against the need to be normal' (83) in order to create the conditions that will allow him to help carry out the 9/11 plot. In 'In the Ruins of the Future', DeLillo marvels at the years prior to 9/11 which the terrorists spent 'making the routine gestures of community and home' (DeLillo, 2001: 2) and in *Falling Man*, in the figure of Hammad, he dramatizes the tension between the imperative to seem unexceptional—to conform outwardly to the normative values of the U.S.—and the necessity for cultivating a hatred for those val-

ues so implacable that it overcomes not only the normal taboo against murder but the fundamental human instinct for self-preservation. DeLillo splices into the main, post-9/11 narrative, sections that track the progress of Hammad towards the culmination of the terrorist plot on that day. In the last of these sections, Hammad, sitting in the cockpit of one of the hijacked planes, the air 'thick with the Mace he'd sprayed and ... his blood, draining through the cuff of his long-sleeved shirt' (237), reassures himself that '[i]f other things were normal, in his understanding of the plan, the aircraft was headed toward the Hudson corridor' (237). Given the context, the word 'normal' here inevitably seems ironic, as well as ambiguous (what are the 'other things' to which Hammad refers? flight plans? environmental conditions? life outside the plane in general?). It also amounts to a confession that the situation that he has brought about on this plane — the things that are not the 'other things'—and, by extension, his own behaviour, is not normal. It is only through constant reiteration of the mantras he has been taught—'Forget the world', 'Recite the sacred words' etc.—that he is able to suppress this recognition that what he is doing is aberrant, perverse, inhuman (238). In other words, Hammad develops a kind of double vision, whereby he views the events of 9/11 and those that precede it from the radical perspective inculcated in him by the ringleader of his cell, Amir, as well as from the 'normal' point of view that he has had to maintain in his everyday routines, his daily interactions with the people around him.

This double vision manifests itself elsewhere in the novel, notably in the recurring sensation—shared by Keith and Lianne—that their lives are being—or will be—(re)enacted on celluloid. On 9/11, when Keith packs his bags in the deserted apartment block before making his way to Lianne, he imagines how this scene might be recreated on film: 'In the movie version, someone would be in the building, an emotionally damaged woman or a homeless old man, and there would be dialogue and close-ups' (27). Later in the novel, Lianne, looking at her reflection, experiences a moment of heightened self-consciousness: 'The moment seemed false to her, a scene in a movie when a character tries to understand what is going on in her life by looking in the mirror' (47), a feeling that recurs when she and Keith find themselves 'in a taxi going downtown and began to clutch each other, kissing and groping' (104). Rather than giving herself up to the moment, she keeps repeating: '*It's a movie, it's a movie*' (104). This sense of two realities co-existing is conspicuous in two related episodes late in the novel, when first Keith and then Lianne become unsure of the temporal status of events they are watching on television. In Lianne's case, she watches coverage of a poker game, not knowing 'where this was taking place, or when', half expecting to see the camera pan over to Keith, who, in present time, is 'in the next room' (213). Just prior to this scene, Keith is sitting in a betting shop, when he realizes that he 'wasn't sure whether he was seeing a fragment of live action or of slow-motion replay' (211). Whereas Lianne feels exposed by her uncertainty, imagining herself 'in cartoon format, a total fool, hurrying into Justin's room, hair flying, and dragging him out of bed ... so he could see his father', Keith is unfazed by his, deciding that it was all 'a matter of false distinctions, fast, slow, now, then' (211).

In one sense, then, the attacks on the towers might be said to have created a radical dislocation of time and space, a sense of impending apocalypse: the collapse of the twin towers has left a 'howling space' in the firmament; the 'ordinary run of hours' has been displaced by 'the days after'; actual events feel recorded and recorded events



seem to be taking place in 'real time'. Keith's lover, Florence, feels compelled to replay the footage of the attacks repeatedly, but reconciling herself to the reality of what happened doesn't seem to get any easier:

Every time she saw a videotape of the planes she moved a finger toward the power button on the remote. Then she kept on watching. The second plane coming out of that ice blue sky, this was the footage that entered the body, that seemed to run beneath her skin, the fleeting sprint that carried lives and histories, theirs and hers, everyone's, into some other distance, out beyond the towers. (134)

The appearance of the second plane (confirming that the impact of the first plane was no accident) seems to mark the beginning of a new epoch, 'carr[ying] lives and histories' into a post-9/11 universe fundamentally different from the one in which the towers stood proud. No matter how many times Florence watches the events unfold, the outcome is the same: 'The narrative ends in the rubble', as DeLillo put it in 'In the Ruins of the Future' (DeLillo, 2001: 1, 2).

However, there is a counternarrative, or rather a number of counternarratives, offered by *Falling Man*: there is the narrative of Keith being reconciled with his wife and son, which is, however, soon compromised by his affair with Florence and eventually fatally undermined by his commitment to poker; there is the series of performances by David Janiak, each one a mini-drama that revives and revises the images of the 'jumpers' of 9/11; and then there are the literal narratives written at Lianne's 'storyline sessions', a weekly 'gathering of five or six or seven men and women in the early stages of Alzheimer's Disease' who, 'strictly for morale', write on topics assigned by Lianne and then read their stories out loud to the assembled company. Ordinarily, they write about their personal experiences and memories, but in the wake of 9/11 '[t]here was one subject the members wanted to write about, insistently ... They wanted to write about the planes' (31). Finally, there is Justin's perverse prophecy, which he claims has been relayed to him by 'Bill Lawton', that 'the planes ... [a]re coming' and 'this time the towers will fall' (102). Lianne is particularly disturbed by Justin's insistence on this version of events:

His repositioning of events frightened her in an unaccountable way. He was making something better than it really was, the towers still standing, but the time reversal, the darkness of the final thrust, how better becomes worse, these were the elements of a failed fairy tale, eerie enough but without coherence. It was the fairy tale children tell, not the one they listen to, devised by adults, and she changed the subject ... (102)

Justin's 'time reversal' is reminiscent of the ending of another 9/11 novel, Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), but whereas Foer's child-prodigy protagonist, Oskar, flicks backwards through a series of photographs of a man (whom he believes to be his father) falling from one of the towers, thereby creating the illusion that 'the man was floating up through the sky' (Foer 2005: 325), as part of a redemptive counternarrative that will reverse the sequence of events leading up to 9/11, thus restoring his own father to him, Justin's inversion of chronology reinstates the towers only in order for them definitively to be destroyed: 'this time the towers will fall ... they'll really come down', he tells Lianne (DeLillo, 2007: 102).

In a sense, this is a trick that the novel itself plays, since it begins at ground zero, moves away from it to explore the days, weeks, months and years after, but then returns to it

in the final pages. The final lines of the novel—‘Then he saw a shirt come down out of the sky. He walked and saw it fall, arms waving like nothing in this life’ (246)—perform their own ‘time reversal’ and again enact a double vision. This actual falling man (or woman—the gender and all other markers of identity are obscured by the use of the synecdoche ‘shirt’ to stand in for the human being who wears the shirt), appearing as he does only at the end of the novel, now recalls the staged falls of the performance artist known as ‘falling man’ that have been narrated earlier in the novel, though of course Janiak’s falls, in terms of conventional chronology, actually re-enact the spectacle of those, like this symbolic figure, who leaped to their deaths from the towers. In this respect, these final lines are a microcosm of the novel as a whole; the description of this anonymous falling figure, like *Falling Man* itself, both directly confronts and subtly averts its gaze from, the horrors of 9/11, providing its readers with a double vision of events that paradoxically articulates their ineffability.

NOTES

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