

## Temporality: Contextualizing Experience in DeLillo's *Falling Man*

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### ABSTRACT

The novel, *Falling Man*, by Don DeLillo examines the experience of a survivor of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and its impact on his everyday life. This article considers the particularity of experience conveyed in the novel and how it is bound up with specific temporal and spatial parameters that suggest 9/11 remains hostage to interpretative modes and to the testimony of its survivors. Keith Neudecker, the chief protagonist in *Falling Man*, embodies this impasse in his roles as a victim and a spectator of the historical moment of 9/11. The impact and subsequent public disavowal of the photograph of a man falling from the twin towers is considered in tandem with the sense of impasse that contradicts the illusion of movement in Keith's life post 9/11. *Falling Man* constructs a narrative of stasis, in which the protagonist remains located in the moment. Consequently, a narrative of past innocence, written reflectively, cannot be adequately formulated. The emphasis on the semantics and temporality of falling in DeLillo's title posits mankind in a state of being that resides between innocence and experience as the essential moment has not been passed. However, if we consider the "fall" in the title as religious, our expectation of this leading to a state of "experience" is frustrated; the fall is arrested and the main narrative of the novel held in stasis, leaving Keith, and by extension America itself, without the possibility of a future to move on to.

**Keywords:** Post-9-11 Fiction, Terrorism, Don DeLillo, *Falling Man*, Islam in the United States, Islam, Trauma, Arabs in Literature.

### Introduction

Experience, it is said, makes a man wise. That is very silly talk. If there were nothing beyond experience it would simply drive him mad.

(The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard)

The initial incredulity created by the sight of the World Trade Center disintegrating on the morning of September 11, 2001, produced in its wake an almost instantaneous stream of writing that illuminated a human need for narratives and interpretive gestures to assuage a sense of tragedy. Yet, it might be argued that the events of 9/11 militate against the possibility of a hermeneutics capable of embodying a collective or an individual insight, as the process of experience that translates prior innocence is circumscribed by the dominant political discourse. The dynamic display of Western might in the

aftermath of 9/11 actually belies the cultural and psychological stasis it perpetuates. Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) is concerned at both the macro and micro levels with how these discursive contexts shape and interpret experience. My reading of the text however demonstrates how time and the ruptured flow from the past to future create a void or sense of denial, that become debilitating both to the protagonist and by implication American society as a whole. The opening scene of *Falling Man* is set in the real time frame between the collapse of the south and north towers, that is between 9.59 and 10.28 a.m. The novel closes by returning to the moments immediately preceding this time. Framed between these portrayals of an immediate present and its past, the narrative depicts protagonist Keith Neudecker's life over a three-year period after 9/11.

As the novel begins and ends with the scenes of falling debris and rubble to the attacks, it conveys both a sense of drama and yet also a feeling of stasis. In the weeks following 9/11 the figure of a "falling man" - later revealed to be a performance artist dressed as a businessman- appears around the city of New York. He is

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to be seen in the weeks following 9/11 jumping from high places as a re-enactment of someone falling from the World Trade Center. Although he is caught by a safety harness and suspended in midair, the bystanders are shocked and confused. This notion of falling resonates through *Falling Man* and it is reinforced in the cyclical plot of the novel. The falling man thread is related to the tragedy/stasis embodied in the personal inability of Keith to move on, and to the larger picture of stasis in the American psyche leading to the War on Terror. We can say the same bind is going on at the micro level - Keith's entrapment in the moment - as at the macro level: America's obfuscation of and refusal to face up to the meaning of 9/11. The fictional falling man, a simulacrum of the real-life falling man captured in the photograph, the negative public reaction to which I shall discuss below, can be considered to have been inserted by DeLillo as the link between the macro and the micro, the real world and his fictional one.

The discussion of temporality, memory and experience that follows is informed by the nineteenth-century German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey. Best known "for the way he distinguished the natural and human sciences", in his middle period, Dilthey lay stress on the reality of experience, feeling and immediacy, and in his later period, turning to hermeneutics posited that "understanding can only be reliable if it proceeds through the interpretation of human objectifications. Thus we understand ourselves not through introspection but through history."

### Falling Worlds

Specific continuities emerge between DeLillo's use of the word 'falling' and a photograph taken by Richard Drew of a man falling from the south tower, which became commonly known as "Falling Man". Drew's photograph was swiftly picked up by the global media, but was widely condemned as an obscene spectacle of a man's death. Although the photograph continued to appear in other contexts—most notably in Junod's 2003 *Esquire* article "The Falling Man" and the 2006 documentary *9/11: The Falling Man*, the image is absent from mainstream media. Although two hundred people are believed to have jumped to their deaths that morning (far more than has been captured in photographs)<sup>(1)</sup> visual images of the horror remain highly sensitive in the 9/11 narrative.

Questions about reporting, representation and

interpretation are brought into relief by the collective reaction to tragic experience and the response of denial. Junod claimed it was not the photographer's role to censor the image that captures the historical moment as its significance cannot be known until it has passed. The objective is to capture the immediacy of the moment: applying ethical considerations must be postponed until later. Interestingly; Junod and the documentary maker use the definite article in their titles, suggestive of a concrete singularity and specificity. For his part, DeLillo uses neither the definite nor indefinite article, thereby evoking the impersonal and infinite and opening up more possibilities for interpretation. However Junod aptly states "the picture of the falling man is the defining image of September 11"<sup>(2)</sup> and questioned why references to those who jumped had been airbrushed from the accounts of the day. The unimaginable experience of the hundreds of people in the towers was in fact brutally communicated to the horror-struck spectators at ground level by the sight of people falling to their death. Junod observed that no matter how many people were seen to jump from the towers "each occasion brought fresh horror, elicited further shock, tested the spirit, and penetrated the psyche of those who watched. Those tumbling through the air remained, by all accounts, eerily silent; those on the ground screamed."<sup>(3)</sup>

The surreal silence and apparent stillness of the falling bodies creates a strangely paradoxical image of action and stasis that contrasts with the debilitating horror of bystanders. The photograph conveyed something "that was everyday about the person who was in it, he looked like any guy who you see in the city, and yet there was something forever remote about him. I mean how could you ever possibly get to that experience. He seems almost perfectly composed, this is impossible, this picture should be - it will go everywhere, I never saw that picture again."<sup>(4)</sup> Over time the idea of falling became a shorthand for the 9/11 attacks; a reminder of a previously unarticulated vulnerability. The hostile reception afforded two commemorative art works, *Tumbling Woman* and *Falling* by Eric Fischl and Sharon Paz respectively, entrenched attitudes towards censorship of the display of poignant but disturbing images of falling people. Perhaps like Drew's photograph such images assaulted public sentiment by forcing it to constantly engage with the visual horror of the day.

DeLillo's fictional representation of a performance artist who repeatedly dramatizes the image of falling man

confronts that cultural censorship and mediates experience. In this way, DeLillo's narrative of falling man creates a dialogue between the fictive and the real, the imagination and experience. The obituary for David Janiak (the performance artist) lists his controversial performances and the carefully planned tactics of shock and awe (Falling Man 218-222). Yet it is symbolic that despite the public outrage the police are powerless to stop him. His only offence is against a public sensibility that prohibits any form of representation that transgresses the conventional interpretive frameworks of 9/11. The impact and subsequent disavowal of the photograph should be considered in tandem with the sense of stasis that contradicts the illusion of movement in DeLillo's *Falling Man*. Yet, where the attempts to locate the identity of the falling man in Drew's photograph failed, DeLillo's concern is perhaps more philosophically focused on the concepts of the fall and falling. As the novel traces particular images of falling in specific contexts my concern is to illustrate how the semantics of falling are inscribed on someone who survived an immediate experience of 9/11.

### **Contextualizing Experience: Experience and Innocence**

A qualified disavowal of the tragic can be discerned in *Falling Man* as it proceeds to define the world of 9/11 as an instantaneous experience of destruction haunted by future horrors. Keith Neudecker is an embodiment of this world as he transcends his roles as victim and spectator of the historical moment of 9/11. The stasis of the novel's world is crucial for our understanding of Keith's subject position as survivor and witness to 'falling' from both within and outside the tower. DeLillo's exploration of this experience extends beyond the scenes of rubble, locating its significance within the experiential constraints of the protagonist. While such an approach must implicitly acknowledge the specific rhetoric produced in the aftermath of the event, it must also engage the literary convention that places texts exploring experience alongside and in opposition to ones projecting innocence. My own engagement with these two interrelated concepts is enriched by many critics and commentators who have referred to 9/11 in terms of the fall. Pankaj Mishra's article on 9/11, for instance, is entitled, perhaps with some irony, "The End of Innocence"<sup>(5)</sup>, while Aaron DeRosa notes how various critical works invoke the postlapsarian or "implicitly claim a violent irruption in an otherwise pristine world".<sup>(6)</sup>

In addition to being a state of consciousness free from guilt and sin, innocence is also without suspicion. A joyous state, informed by wishes and desires, it is nonetheless a questionable one since it also implies a lack of knowledge and vulnerability. On the other hand, experience is concerned with duties and responsibilities and by implication, prohibitions and constraints that are possibly self-imposed, but more generally enforced by an authority outside the self. It is a state of suspicion, mistrust and anxiety. Experience is brought through hardship and mistakes, or new knowledge, and therefore involves some sort of growth. The consequent understanding of good and bad means innocence can only exist in the memory. This knowledge, gained through exposure and involvement, as distinct from a perspective grounded on wishes and desires, suggests the importance of time in constituting these states of being. Innocence seems to be constructed by an illusion of the past, whereas experience builds on the past and looks forward to future possibilities. Yet, the meaning of experience is manifold. It may consist of immediately perceived events which remain mentally unprocessed, or wisdom acquired through reflection and interpretation of such events. Thus, experience may be physical, mental or even emotional – such as falling in love. As literary accounts of innocence are usually written from a position of experience, embedded in the narrative is the anticipation of a more harsh view of life. William Blake's organisation of his poetic work into 'Songs of Innocence' and 'Songs of Experience' long since illustrated how innocence is dependent on a relationship with the 'other'.<sup>(7)</sup> Thus, rather than being contrary states there is in fact a complex interdependence between the two.

Taking this into account the emphasis on the semantics and temporality of falling in DeLillo's title posits mankind in a state of being that resides between innocence and experience, as the essential moment has not been passed. Peter Boxall observes a contradiction whereby DeLillo's "evacuation of the moment, this entry into the suspended non-time of posthistorical mourning, is also a delivery into the very fibrous material of the moment itself".<sup>(8)</sup> *Falling Man* constructs a narrative of stasis, in which the protagonist remains located in the moment. Consequently, a narrative of past innocence, written reflectively, cannot be adequately formulated. A fragmentary third person narrative constrained by the protagonist's point of view supports the thematic exploration of how the articulations of experience may be

understood in a context where the historical moment of 9/11 is continuously extended by the physical and discursively reproduced continuation of the war on terror.

### **Dilthey and the novel's Temporality**

In this section, I intend to discuss DeLillo's incorporation of temporality into *Falling Man* by referring to Dilthey's conceptualisation of time. To begin with, Dilthey writes "when we look at the past we are passive; it cannot be changed and in our attitude to the future we are active and free."<sup>(9)</sup> The entanglements of tense that inform Keith's experience inside the towers, conflating a sense of past, present and future, illustrates the importance of temporality to explications of the novel. Experience in the text radiates from the literal and figural significance of falling. This constructs the present that remains dominant in the lives of the novel's characters. Within this context, Keith's location in the text amounts to restless unsuccessful attempts at progression; he doesn't progress psychologically since he is stuck in the stasis and continual re-articulation of his experience on that day. Time in the novel is inherently bound up with Keith's individual lived experience, one calls into view the horrors of a coming future. Particular episodes in the novel may be said to underpin the significance of Keith's experience in articulating DeLillo's vision of the post 9/11 world. His meetings with Florence Gavins are revelatory as these two characters are witness to tragedy from inside the besieged tower and thus, as survivors, their interaction with one another complicates the theme of experience. The dialogue between Keith and Florence articulates reflections on the relationship between the (immediate) past and future. Dilthey argues that experience "is a temporal flow in which every state changes before it is clearly objectified because the subsequent moment always builds on the previous one and each is past before it is grasped" (150). Yet, Keith's experience also locates him within, and of, the moment. At their first meeting, when Keith returns a bag to Florence, he hears her "saying something about the credit cards in the wallet, that she hadn't cancelled them because, well, everything was gone, she thought everything was buried, it was lost and gone" (*Falling Man* 52). Keith's response to Florence captures the immediacy of the aftermath, and insightfully dramatizes a simultaneous lack of comprehension with an increasing perception of the historical impact: "when I found your name in the briefcase, after I found your name

and checked the phone directory and saw you were listed and I'm actually dialling the number, that's when it occurred to me". He continues, "I thought why am I doing this without checking further because is this person even alive?" (*FM* 52). While the idiolect upholds the realism of the New York setting, here the grammar also conflates an awareness of the past and the future with the present moment.

This admixture of past, present and future is further illustrated when Keith says to Florence "I thought everything was lost and gone. I did not report a lost driver's license. I didn't do anything" (*Falling Man* 54). While Florence was talking to Keith about her experience in the tower "he didn't interrupt. He let her talk and di(did not) try to reassure her. What was there to be reassuring about?" (*FM* 55). A sense of being fixed in a moment of time envelopes considerations of both past and future as Florence "wanted to tell him everything. This was clear to him. Maybe she forgot he was there, in the tower, or maybe he was the one she needed to tell for precisely that reason. He knew she hadn't talked about this, not so intensely, to anyone else" (*Falling Man* 55). The temporality of experience is foregrounded when she describes to Keith how "we just kept going down. Dark, light, dark again. I feel like I'm still on the stairs [...] if I live to be a hundred I'll still be on the stairs. It took so long it was almost normal in a way" (*FM* 57). This paradoxical sense of movement and stasis reiterates Dilthey's assertion that the "present is the filling of a moment of time with reality; it is experience, in contrast to memory [of the past] and ideas of the future occurring in wishes, expectations, hopes, fears and striving." (Dilthey 1985:149). Consequently, "ideas, through which we know the past and the future, exist only for those who are alive in the present". This gestures towards the particular insight to be gained from DeLillo's depiction of the post-9/11 fear of terrorism. While conventional readings of innocence and experience suggest the former is grounded on wishes and desires, and the latter on reflection and interpretation, my reference to Dilthey encourages an understanding in which the past is also perceived as a form of innocence, in the form of nostalgia. The "present is always there and nothing exists except what emerges in it" (*ibid*). Keith's experience on the morning of 9/11 remains a factor in the "reality of a present", but one that stagnates time, thus the temporal becomes intrinsic to, or consequent on, this reality.

The dislocation of the flow from past to future is

synonymous with the search for the interpretive value of experience. Lianne seeks an understanding and explanation of 9/11 that will inform her sense of the present, whereas for Keith it is grounded on the consequence of falling. This relationship between past reality and the present, and the notion that the past is in the present exists as an antinomy in *Falling Man*. This point is consolidated by Dilthey's argument that "reality which emerges from the present is joined by that of possibility. We feel that we have infinite possibilities. Thus, the experience of time in all its dimensions determines the content of our lives" (150). Yet, neither Keith nor his wife possesses those infinite possibilities, as they have been negated by the event of 9/11, which is hostage to its own finite reality. Only the terrorist Hammad is in possession of those infinite possibilities, because he is ready for death. "The end of life is pre-determined", Amir declared, "we are carried toward that day from the minute we are born" (FM 175). This fatalistic creed understands life as a route to a wanted and desired death. Keith survived an attack by men who had selected death as "there is no sacred law against what [they] are going to do" (*Falling Man* 175). The force that mobilizes this determination is grounded on the belief that their action "is not suicide in any meaning or interpretation of the word. It is only something long written. We are finding the way already chosen for us" (*Falling Man* 175). This seems to endorse a mode of experience that is imposed by dogma, and the consequent knowledge might therefore be said to be constructed through illusion.

Existence for Hammad is experienced in willingness for death; his very being is circumscribed by that purpose. It is his desire for death through which the novel most effectively engages with possibility within the discursive frame that produces the fear of terrorism. Yet, death registers infinite possibilities for Hammad in contrast to the finite for Keith. The sense of the finite is conveyed through the seeming lack of process, or progress that becomes inherent in the post 9/11 condition. The historical moment constructs the finite reality for the American nation, and any interpretation or speculation of a future is mediated through this. The continuing war on terror is exemplary here, as the U.S. battles on actual fronts beyond its borders; it also battles on imaginative fronts pursuing elusive terrorists. This constitutes on the macro level an equivalent stasis to Keith's at the micro level. As *Falling Man* intertwines the historical event

with a fictional plot dramatizes this position. Efraim Sicher and Natalia Skradol state: "we are always, when reading narratives, looking forward, in all senses, to the end, but in this case the 'end' precedes our reading of past narratives that imagine the future. Superimposed on our interpretation is the disaster having already happened" and thus "hypermediated image has eclipsed the event and fiction has become lived experience."<sup>10</sup>

### **Experience and Temporality**

Dilthey's understanding of experience as constructed by a temporal flow informs my analysis of DeLillo's narrative strategy and the thematic development of falling. There is a moment towards the end of the novel when Keith notices, "things began to fall, one thing and then another, things singly at first, coming down out of the gap in the ceiling" (FM 242). Keith notices "something outside, going past the window. Something went past the window, then he saw it" (FM 242). Critically, this compression of elements of time is conveyed by Keith's acknowledgement that he "could not stop seeing it, twenty feet away, an instant of something sideways, going past the window, white shirt, hand up, falling before he saw it" (FM 242). This delayed decoding by Keith is reflected in the novel's structure and plot. DeLillo's withholding of the tragedy of the fall until the closing section of the novel illustrates the interdependency between the novel's form and its thematic concerns. A more conventional linear or chronological structure would foreground past experience rather than signifying the immobility of the present.

Therefore, the connections and continuities between the novel's opening and closing scenes create a textual space in which time is determined by and dependent on experience. This places the questions generated in the novel within a particular valence. Speculations by the characters, such as "What is next? Don't you ask yourself? Not only next month .Years to come" (FM 10), emphasise the orbit of time. Criticism of the novel's credentials suggests such expositions of time render narratives of 9/11 as rather banal. Jonathon Yardley, while confessing that DeLillo is a competent writer, complains, "Sept. 11 seems to have paralyzed him stylistically". To support his claim Yardley cites a section of dialogue, which continues this questioning about what comes next.<sup>(10)</sup>

"Nothing is next. There is no next. This was next. Eight years ago they planted a bomb in one of the towers. Nobody said what's next. This was

next. The time to be afraid is when there is no reason to be afraid. Too late now."

Lianne stood by the window.

"But when the towers fell."

"I know."

"When this happened."

"I know."

"I thought he was dead."

"So did I," Nina said. "So many watching."

"Thinking he's dead, she's dead."

"I know."

"Watching those buildings fall."

"First one, then the other. I know," her mother said. (10-11)

Yardley's journalistic observation is perhaps understandable as he writes within the constraints of a particular context for the Washington Post. Even so, his analysis overlooks the deliberately styled staccato dialogue and its inarticulate descriptions to capture the characters' incomplete understandings of the present. The nature of "experience" is shown to be central to the novel through its questioning of "what is next?". In doing so, it suggests that the notion of "post" is non-existent: in particular, the lives of Keith and Florence move forward, yet they are still constrained by their location within a temporality of speculating on, and closing off, a sense of the future. Acknowledgement of this implies DeLillo's novel is misappropriated when placed in a genre of Post-9/11 fiction as the experience of reality extends the narrative time frame as a continuing present.

While Lianne resoundingly claims that there is no next, the novel does in fact offer its own anticipations of the future, but this cannot be formulated within current frames of understanding. The search for narratives of the past which lead to a future are latent in the reference to the previous attacks on the World Trade Centre. The attack, eight years before 9/11, bore the possibility of being "a" 9/11.<sup>(11)</sup> It took place in the same city, and had the same target. Subsequently, the question of "what is next?" and the response that "nothing is next" signifies a collision of past and present, which circumscribes the narration of 9/11 within its own world rather than constituting a reflective process. This notion is echoed in the interconnectedness of time and the perceptions of movement and processes that formulate Keith's experience:

It was Keith as well who was going slow, easing

inward. He used to want to fly out of self-awareness, day and night, a body in raw motion. Now he finds himself drifting into spells of reflection, thinking not in clear units, hard and linked, but only absorbing what comes, drawing things out of time and memory and into some dim space that bears his collected experience. Or he stands and looks. He stands at the window and sees what's happening in the street. Something is always happening, even on the quietest days and deep into night, if you stand a while and look. (FM 66)

Rather than entering the flow of time to create an understanding of experience, Keith is forced into a reflective process through the apparent slowing of time, which places him back in the moment of his experience which constructs his identity as a survivor.

This predicament is exemplified in the novel's opening images, in which Keith's world is (de)constructed by destruction and signified by rubble, conveying two spheres of meaning: the first relates to the actual rubble of the destroyed towers, and the second concerns the sense of falling which resonates through the novel and drives the text to its conclusion. Dilthey writes, "[Experience] appears as a memory which is free to expand." (p.152) Similarly the novel extends into the years following the attacks but it also moves backwards as it returns to dwell on the notion of falling. This temporal constraining of narrative seems to strike a chord within other 9/11 fiction. Frédéric Beigbeder's *Windows on the World* (2004), begins at 8:30am on 9/11 and concludes as the North Tower collapses at 10:28:31. This impulse to structure time is replicated in Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005), a bye-product of 9/11 fiction, which enacts the events of a single day that is both random and historically specific. Accordingly, DeLillo offers the reader a sense of recurring experience by voicing that question about what is to follow. Such speculation is implicit with assumptions about the pending future, while the novelist simultaneously negates any sense of possibility about this future. Accordingly, the novel gestures towards the absence of such reflections by the U.S. administration-- the text outside the text. With unseemly haste American troops were invading Afghanistan and then Iraq. This point bears out my argument that the actual and the rhetorical war on terror constantly reproduce 9/11 as it reaches out to shape the continuing present.

Dilthey's understanding of time and memory asserts that recollection of the past replaces immediate experience (150-51). Whereas Derrida's reading of 9/11 as rupture assumes that 9/11 has no past, as it is constructed by an overarching logic of the present and the future. "When we want to observe time, the very observation destroys it because it fixes our attention; it halts the flow and stays what is the process of becoming." (Dilthey: 151) Nothing then "becomes", and this nothing progresses because, as Baudrillard asserts, "in the terrorist attack the event eclipsed all of our interpretive models."<sup>(12)</sup> DeLillo captures this feeling of stasis through the narrator's description of Keith's sense of being: "These were the days after and now the years, a thousand heaving dreams, the trapped man, the fixed limbs, the dream of paralysis, the gasping man, the dream, of asphyxiation, the dream of helplessness" (FM 230). Here the novel suggests Keith's immobility stems from his own limitations, as he lacked "that edge of unexpected learning" (FM 231). Yet, the use of free indirect discourse determines that the possibility of self-knowledge remains equivocal.

### **Reading in Falling**

The misplaced focus of numerous critics on the novel's opening and closing depictions of 9/11 seeks to emphasise the collective witnessing of 'falling' from outside of the towers. As noted, Keith witnesses the falling from inside as well as outside, and therefore the experiences of 9/11 are navigated by two different routes in the novel. The text interweaves the collective experience gained from the images shown repeatedly on TV screens and conveyed through other media. The common purchase on such images is affirmed by Yardley's observation that the "only emotions in this novel come from outside, from pictures on television".<sup>(13)</sup> As a counterpoint to this public archive, there is the inner narrative of the text which is concerned with articulating Keith's personal and individuated experience. Consequently, the value of Keith's experience upholds the validity of both the novel itself, and the role of fiction in understanding 9/11. Furthermore, this contention refutes Yardley's claim that "this novel never pulls the reader in, never engages the reader with the minds, hearts and lives of its characters, never manages to be what readers most want from fiction [...] there's nothing to be learned from *Falling Man* about September 2001 -- or about anything else -- that you don't already know."<sup>(14)</sup>

Again, while Yardley offers some insight, his reading is reductive and fails to consider the effect of the impersonality of the narrative perspective.

Keith also experiences falling once he has escaped from the tower. What he sees does not only signify falling, but flying or floating which could be described as a process of recurring images producing a continuous present: "A shirt came down out of the high smoke, a shirt lifted and drifting in the scant light and then falling again, down towards the river" (FM 4).<sup>(15)</sup> The sense of continuity is affirmed as the novel's closing sentence re-invokes this image: "Then he saw a shirt come down out of the sky. He walked and saw it fall, arms waking like nothing in his life" (FM 246). The opening and closure of the novel, coupled with the symbolism resonant in the flying and the fall of the shirt, evokes the actuality of falling from a high building. The illusion of slow motion created by the lifting and drifting in the wind makes the fall seemingly unending, as "things kept falling, scorched objects trailing lines of fire" (FM 4).

The descriptions of smoke and dust inside the tower in which Rumsey's face is merged with the images of falling from outside the window. This is also resonant Junod's comment that "falling buildings unleashed their own toxic clouds."<sup>(16)</sup> The suspension of this toxicity formulates the temporality of experience, as "time is there for us through the synthesizing unity of consciousness. Life and the outer objects cropping up in it share the condition of simultaneity, sequence, interval, duration and change" (Dilthey 149). The blurred vision of Rumsey's face amongst dust and smoke is counterpoint to the clarity with which Keith constantly reinvokes the falling. As this point is etched into the narrative at the beginning and ending DeLillo the novel formally and thematically perpetuates falling as a continuing process.

I return to my initial point that reality governs the present, and affirm this by reiterating that the present can be understood as "the filling of a moment of time with reality; it is experience [...] and the present is always there and nothing exists except what emerges in it."<sup>(17)</sup> Richard Drew corroborates this: "I made a photographic record of someone living the last moments of his life. And every time I look at it, I see him alive."<sup>(18)</sup> Existence in the 9/11 novel is inherently mediated through the day of 9/11, and while DeLillo examines the concept of falling, the sense of being alive becomes an allegory of debris and destruction rather than connoting living itself. Attesting to the notion that "9/11 novels have widely

employed allegory to confront the literal as well as figural debris of 9/11".<sup>(19)</sup> Keith witnesses falling when he is confronted with Rumsey's face covered with debris. Furthermore, witness to the "falling" from inside the tower brings another critical dimension. The novel registers not only those standing at ground level outside the towers as horrified spectators, but also the experience of those inside. Therefore, while experience can be differentiated between the spectators outside, and those trapped inside, the conditions of simultaneity, sequence and duration, are clearly reflected within the narrative strategy.

A final brief point concerns the antinomy in *Falling Man* that the past is the present itself. There is no escape from the minutiae of the past for Keith, or even for Hammad. Time is locked within its own temporality. Dilthey explains that even "the smallest part of temporal progress involves the passing of time. There never is a present: what we experience as present always contains memory of what has just been present".<sup>(150)</sup> He expands on this, stating that the past "has a direct affect on, and meaning for, the present and this gives to memories a peculiar character of being present through which they become included in the present". (Dilthey:150) Yet also, the past takes its attributes from the world of 9/11 itself. This is manifest in the opening description, as "the street became a world"(FM 3). This worlding of 9/11 takes place through the textual representation of 9/11 that has created its own cyclical logic of time/space, which is 9/11 itself. The lines of Galway Kinnell's poem 'When The Towers Fell' are resonant of this:

Some burned, their faces caught  
in fire.  
Some were asphyxiated.  
Some broke windows and leaned  
into the sunny day.  
Some were pushed out from  
behind by others in flames.

Some let themselves fall, begging  
gravity to speed them to the  
ground.  
Some leapt hand in hand that their  
fall down the sky might  
happen more lightly.<sup>(20)</sup>

The poet plays on the sense of time in these lines, as the syntax and changes in tense become responsive to the content, and the images of falling create an effect of continuous movement without progress. Likewise, the linguistic relationship between falling and its conjugations embodies the novel's wider themes.

### Conclusion

DeLillo's previous work illustrates his concern with how narratives are produced and understood. Well before 9/11 he wrote the "jihadist is a 'lethal believer' who reduces the world to one plot, in both senses of the word: one story and one conspiracy" (Mao II: 157) Furthermore, in 'In the Ruins of the Future' DeLillo writes that the "Bush Administration was feeling nostalgia for the Cold War. This is over now. Many things are over. The narrative ends in the rubble".<sup>(21)</sup> This implies that catastrophe and fear are usefully called up to prescribe and limit the contexts of understanding. Now, it is the jihadist that determines the present that reduces 9/11 to a narrative which ends in the rubble. The antinomy at the core of the novel becomes evident. Dilthey's argument that there is only a past is convincing: the past tense of falling is 'fell', which carries a strong sense of conclusion, or completeness of action. Yet, *Falling Man* defies this sense of being past. DeLillo also resists the redemptive narrative, as in the novel testimony is not mobilized or complemented by theoretical insight. The time frame of the novel's structure produces a tension between experience and the possibility for understanding. Experience remains locked within the context of the present and forms a barrier to the process of reflection.

### NOTES

- (1) See Dennis Cauchon and Martha Moore, "Desperation Forced a Horrific Decision", USA Today, [http://www.usatoday.com/news/sept11/2002-09-02-jumper\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/sept11/2002-09-02-jumper_x.htm) (01.12.2010).
- (2) "9/11 The Falling Man" a documentary film, Google Videos, <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-1643316699854377441#>.
- (3) Tom Junod, "Falling Man", (12.12.2010).
- (4) Tom Junod interviewed in the Documentary film "9/11: The Falling Man".
- (5) Pankaj Mishra, 'The End of Innocence' The Guardian, Saturday 19.May 2007, (12.04.2011).
- (6) Aaron DeRosa, 'Analyzing Literature After 9/11', Modern Fiction Studies, 57:3 (2011), 607-618, pp.608.
- (7) William Blake, Songs of Innocence and of Experience showing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970, 1967). Poetry from the collection was first published in 1789.
- (8) Peter Boxall, Don DeLillo: The Possibility of Fiction (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2006), p. 217.
- (9) Wilhelm Dilthey, The Hermeneutics of the Human Sciences, in Mueller-Vollmer. Kurt, (Ed.), The Hermeneutics Reader, Continuum, 1985, p. 150.
- (10) Jonathan Yardley, "Survivors of 9/11 Struggle to Live in a Changed World," Washington Post, May 13, 2007. (7.11.2011).
- (11) An attack on the World Trade Centre took place on the 26 February, 1993, when a truck bomb was

detonated under the North Tower.

- (12) Jean Baudrillard, The Spirit of Terrorism (9.9.2011).
- (13) Jonathan Yardley, "Survivors", (7.11.2011).
- (14) Ibid.
- (15) In the documentary film "9/11: The Falling Man", and in Junod's article it is revealed that the falling man, while falling, lost his shirt. It is also clear from the sequence of photographs taken by Richard Drew that he wears an orange T-Shirt underneath his shirt. Thus, reference to what Keith sees is possibly the shirt of the falling man. After realizing that the photograph is taken from a series Junod said in the film: "when I looked at that series- the outtakes, the story became a different story for me, he is clearly falling [...] he is panicking, he is rolling through the air, as he does that, the turbulence pulls his shirt off, and the white shirt he is wearing comes off enough to reveal that underneath that white shirt, he is wearing an orange T-shirt.
- (16) Tom Junod, "The Man who Invented 9/11", (08.06.2011).
- (17) Ibid.
- (18) Richard Drew, "The Horror of 9/11 That's All Too Familiar." Los Angeles Times (September 10, 2003). <http://articles.latimes.com/2003/sep/10/opinion/oe-drew10>.
- (19) Anker Elizabeth S., "Allegories of Falling and the 9/11 Novel", American Literary History, Volume 23, Number 3, Fall 2011, p. 463.
- (20) Galway Kinell, Strong is Your Hold, (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt: 2006).
- (21) Don DeLillo, 'In The Ruins of the Future'.

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## الزمانية: تحديد سياق التجربة في رواية الرجل الساقط لدليلو

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### ملخص

رواية The Fallen Man أو الرجل الساقط للكاتب دون ديليلو تحكي تجربة أحد الناجين من هجمات 9/11 الإرهابية، وأثارها اللاحقة على حياته اليومية. هذا البحث يناقش خصوصية هذه التجربة التي ترويها الرواية ويربطها بأبعاد زمانية ومكانية تشير إلى أن أحداث 9/11 مازالت أسيرة قراءات تأويلية وشهادات الناجين منها. ويجسد بطل الرواية، كيث نويديكير، هذا الطريق المسدود في أدواره سواء كضحية أو كمعائن للحظات التاريخية في 9/11. إن وقع صورة الرجل وهو يسقط من أحد البرجين وما تلا تلك الصورة من إنكار عام، ينظر إليه بمعنى الطريق المسدود الذي يناقض وهم الحركة في حياة كيث ما بعد 9/11. وتبني رواية الرجل الساقط سرداً من الجمود، يظل فيه البطل سجين اللحظة. والنتيجة هي أن صياغة سرد عن البراءة السابقة، بأسلوب تأملي يستحيل مقصداً صعباً. إن التركيز على المعاني والدلالات، وزمانية السقوط في عنوان الرواية يضع البشرية في مكان يقبع بين البراءة والتجربة، مكان لم تمرّ فيه اللحظة الحاسمة بعد. أما إذا قرأنا عبارة السقوط قراءة دينية، فإن توقعنا بأن هذا السقوط سيؤدي إلى "تجربة" هو أمر مثبّط، حيث تتوقف السقطة ويجمد السرد الرئيسي، تاركين كيث، وأمريكا كلها معه، من دون مستقبل يتحركون نحوه.

**الكلمات الدالة:** الارهاب، دون ديليلو، الاسلام في الولايات المتحدة، أحداث 11 سبتمبر، روايات ما بعد أحداث 11 سبتمبر، الادب الانجليزي.

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