

Psychosis and Capture: Lacanian Individuation in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*

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ABSTRACT: This essay explores mechanisms of individuation in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, placing it in conversation with Jacques Lacan's ideas of ego-formation. It argues that the difference in *Falling Man*'s two protagonists' individuations holds the key to understanding *Falling Man*'s critique of the post-9/11 subject condition.

KEYWORDS: *Falling Man*; Don DeLillo; Individuation; Jacques Lacan; September 11

Introduction

Writing "In the Ruins of the Future: Reflections on Terror and Loss in the Shadow of September" for *Harper's Magazine* in December 2001, Don DeLillo proclaims that "[t]he terrorists of September 11 want to bring back the past" (34). This proclamation occurred—or, was received by DeLillean reviewers—in DeLillo's expository mode.¹ The reception of and reaction to the large-scale catastrophic event of September 11 had been pre-figured, for DeLillo's readers by his previous work and status as a prophet of future catastrophes, as a DeLillean event. In this mode, DeLillo produces an "us," the modern Western (neo)liberal subjects, and a "them," the imagined out-of-time hordes, attempting to interrupt our teleological progression with their barbarous presence. DeLillo defines the nature of the terrorists, what drove them, and what they wanted to accomplish:

The World Trade towers were not only an emblem of advanced technology but a justification, in a sense, for technology's irresistible will to realize in solid form whatever becomes theoretically allowable. . . . Now a small group of men have literally altered our skyline. We have fallen back in time and space They see something innately destructive in the nature of technology. It brings death to their customs and beliefs. Use it as what it is, a thing that kills. ("Ruins of the Future" 38)

¹ Henry Veggian, in his recent monograph *Understanding Don DeLillo*, comments that DeLillo's pre-9/11 work was received as prophetic after the events of 9/11, how "reviewers increasingly turned DeLillo into a prophet of sorts, an artist who had since *White Noise* best described how we react to terror, disaster, and genocide" (Veggian 94). His readers and reviewers expected his post-9/11 work to be a continuation of the earlier work; "they expected it to conform to an earlier pattern by which DeLillo would again summon the spectacular metafiction of his mid-career success and that he would direct that arsenal against the attack so as to expose the media, terrorists, plots, and jargon that largely shaped our response to it" (Veggian 110).

These descriptions constitute what Linda S. Kauffman calls “thumbnail sketches of the terrorists” (355), which accompany and imply sketches of the perpetually threatened non-terrorists. DeLillo addresses the latter directly and individually in the *Harper’s* essay, asking them to think of themselves in relation to what threatened them: “Now think of people in countless thousands massing in anger and vowing revenge. Enlarged photos of martyrs and holy men dangle from balconies, and the largest images are those of a terrorist leader. Two forces in the world, past and future” (40). He fleshes out portraits of these three categories of individuals—the terrorists, the potential terrorists, and the threatened—as they exist for each other in this web of terror. This kind of individuation is uncharacteristic for DeLillo, having previously linked and compared (but not equated) writing to terrorism and artists to terrorists.² He returns to such a characteristic non-binarism³ and revises his first take on the 9/11-terror attacks in *Falling Man* (2007).

Falling Man begins and ends in relating Keith Neudecker’s proprioceptive individuation to the gradual collapse of the North Tower when Keith finds himself *in* feeling it coming down: “That was him coming down, the north tower” (5). The building’s collapse *is* a point of individuation for Keith. “He saw himself” in the collapse, in “the size of it, the sheer physical dimensions . . . the mass and scale, and the way the thing swayed, the slow and ghostly lean” (244). Having escaped the collapse, he finds himself in a place that is “not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night” (3). He sees a new world—a new world, composed of a new ground, a new skyline, a new island, which is made

² One of *Mao II’s* (1991) central characters, Bill Gray, a novelist, comments, “There’s a curious knot that binds novelists and terrorists. In the West we become famous effigies as our books lose the power to shape and influence. Do you ask your writers how they feel about this? Years ago I used to think it was possible for a novelist to alter the inner life of the culture. Now bomb-makers and gunmen have taken that territory. They make raids on human consciousness. What writers used to do before we were all incorporated” (*Mao II* 41). Such an opinion, tempered not by 9/11 but perhaps by the fatwah on Salman Rushdie (Veggian), was repeated in other interviews.

³ Comparing artists and terrorists in DeLillo’s *Players* (1977) and *Falling Man*, Leif Grössinger finds that DeLillo’s artists and terrorists “are in constant interaction with their environment (although they might not be aware of it), drawing on, engaging with, and modifying a symbolic world, a language, and images that they share with their audiences . . . [They] try to provoke their audiences into actively reexamining the world around them, to question the system they live in” (91). While artists embrace the “heterogeneous” nature of their audience and allow for a diversity of interpretive acts, “terrorists treat their audience as one uniform mass,” which leads to a more uniform narration (91).

exceptional through the loss of the structural integrity that the North Tower of the World Trade Center had afforded it.

In this article, I address how alienation and individuation work to produce the protagonists of *Falling Man*, Keith Neudecker and his wife Lianne. This will help move the conversation away from earlier characterizations of “post-9/11”-subjecthood⁴ that treated the subject as one half of an oppositional binary between the past and the present, the civilized and the barbarous. These new characterizations emerge out of the conversation with the Lacanian model of analysis of psychosexual development and, to a lesser extent, Brian Massumi’s discussion of perception. Keith’s individuation involves a peculiar mirror stage in the image of the man falling down the North Tower, and leads to his limited progress towards becoming a “normal” neurotic subject that can interact with and know the external world in a limited fashion as a second-rate travelling gambler. Lianne’s individuation also moves her towards regaining a “normality” based on her ability to know her world, but without the limitations of Keith’s minor paralysis. This conversation between Lacan and DeLillo turns attention to the ways in which such a traumatized household may reassemble itself in relation to the threat of continuous loss.

September 11, Exceptionality, and the Individual in DeLillo’s Fiction

DeLillo’s claim that 9/11 is an exceptional event is problematic. Although one may claim that the world is now in a unique “post-9/11” condition and that the event of 9/11 has fundamentally changed the world, what specifically such change entails and produces is debatable. World-changing events, critic Richard Gray argues, “generate new forms of consciousness . . . requiring new structures of ideology and the imagination to assimilate and express them” (133-34). However, surprisingly enough, in his analysis of contemporary (or rather, “post-9/11”) American writing, he found that such fiction lacked what he saw as a

⁴ Such characterizations feature in both popular fiction and the Bush administration: in John Updike’s *The Terrorist* (2006) and three of Frederick Forsyth’s four post-9/11 novels: *Avenger* (2003), *The Afghan* (2006), and *The Kill List* (2013). On September 20, 2001, President Bush urged the people of the world into action, reinforcing the gravity of the situation time and time again: “Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists” (Bush).

necessary “alteration of imaginative structures” that “post-9/11”-fiction did not successfully perform an “enactment of difference,” which would account for a characteristically “post-9/11 condition” (134). Expressing his dissatisfaction at *Falling Man*’s failure to differ from DeLillo’s earlier work, Gray writes, “the structure is too clearly foregrounded, the style excessively mannered, and the characters fall into postures of survival after 9/11 that are too familiar to invite much more than a gesture of recognition from the reader” (Gray 132). Gray seems to want DeLillo’s readers to experience something beyond “recognition” of the familiar, an alienation equal perhaps to the alienation from the familiar forced on the world by the events of September 11. What, however, if the world has not actually changed significantly after 9/11?

Alan Marshall comments, “[t]he wish to commemorate an event is not the same thing as insisting on the exceptional nature of that event” (628). These two desires—the desire to commemorate and the desire to declare an event as socially/culturally/globally exceptional—are often causally linked, but do not necessarily have to be linked. In Marshall’s reading, *Falling Man* does not reinforce the exceptionality of the events of 9/11, instead the novel treats the need to memorize the loss caused by 9/11 as a symptom of some greater malaise; the novel presents a sustained examination of all loss in and through the lens of 9/11 as it is experienced by a small group. *Falling Man* explores “what happens when all memory of . . . the event which is the occasion of our loss has disappeared, leaving behind perhaps only a feeling of loss—or of the loss of loss. The novel simultaneously explores and resists the temptation to see 9/11 as *raison d’être*” (634). Much like a psychoanalyst, DeLillo reads and analyses the conversation of 9/11’s global political exceptionality through the exceptionality that it assumes for the small Neudecker family.

What are these characteristically DeLillean features, whose unexceptional repetition in *Falling Man*, as Gray claims, fail DeLillo’s readers? A comparison of *Falling Man* with DeLillo’s earlier work will provide helpful clues. Mikko Keskinen argues that in DeLillo’s *Mao II*’s featuring a mass wedding of 6,500 couples produces a multiplication that reverses “marriage’s cultural and biological significance,” and gender and other individualizing aspects disappear (69). Henry Veggian comments that in *Underworld* and *Mao II*, “crowds are afforded an extraordinary complexity in a manner that suggests a sentience independent

of the individuals who compose them, . . . [that they] express comedy and terror, become locations of intrigue and surprise, and function as engines of art and history” (102). In *Falling Man*, however, Veggian finds that “crowds have lost their wondrous vitality and their capacity to function as the imaginative witnesses (and substitutes) to historical events. Crowds have fallen silent” (103). Instead, Keskinen suggests that “fatalities and survivors of the 9/11 attack . . . [are always portrayed] through synecdoche,” through the individual casualty standing in for the unmentioned whole (71). Paying careful attention to such individuation is required because the individual becomes the focal point of inquiry into characteristically DeLilleian concerns in his three “post-9/11” novels: *Cosmopolis* in 2003, *Falling Man* in 2007, and *Point Omega* in 2010.

There is a continuity in DeLillo’s spectacular and “prophetic” quality in his treatment of large scale crises in these three novels. Veggian comments, “Many of DeLillo’s signature narrative techniques appear throughout [*Falling Man*], [but] . . . are often stripped of any comic or absurdist pretense” (102). Instead of the crowds and their multiplication that featured earlier in his career, these three novels are structured by DeLillo’s elaboration of individuation and individualizing processes. *Cosmopolis* follows a young billionaire investment manager, Eric Packer, in his white stretch limousine during the course of a single day in April 2000 in his repeatedly frustrated quest to get a haircut in Manhattan: a city grid-locked with a day of anti-capitalism protests, a rap star’s funeral, and the president’s motorcade get in his way. As a reflection on the economic crisis of 2000, it offers no direct comment on the events of 9/11, but explores the durational and paradoxical individuation of such affluent subjects. Many of Packer’s real-world counterparts would later be affected by the events of 9/11, while functioning as the imaginary targets of the real attacks. *Point Omega* mainly engages with Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s concept of the “Omega point”—the end-point and cause of the ever-increasing complexity of consciousness of the universe. By slowing down its three characters placed in a geographically-unspecific desert, a former Iraq-war advisor, his daughter, and a filmmaker, the novel offers reflections on time, duration, and speed. Such a continuity of subject matter and its treatment suggests not an exceptional but a differently renewed interest in what have remained DeLillo’s concerns throughout his career.

Falling Man begins in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attack with Keith rushing out of the North Tower; the opening scene of the book recalls how DeLillo himself processed the attack. Shortly after 9/11, DeLillo expresses the urgency to narrate and make sense of the event:

The event itself has no purchase on the mercies of analogy or simile . . . The writer wants to understand what this day has done to us. Is it too soon? We seem pressed for time, all of us. Time is scarcer now. There is a sense of compression, plans made hurriedly time forced and distorted. But language is inseparable from the world that provokes it. The writer begins in the towers, trying to imagine the moment, desperately. (“Ruins of the Future” 39)

Both DeLillo and Keith find themselves in a space that resists easy assimilation and narration (or re-narration). It is not that the event itself is unconditionally exceptional for everyone in the sense that Gray argues. It is conditionally exceptional for Keith, as someone escaping from the collapsing building; and it is conditionally exceptional for DeLillo as a writer living in New York, whose characters in *Players* and *Mao II* encounter the towers and “typically remain at a loss to express what the twin towers signify” (Olster 117). As such, DeLillo’s narration of the Towers’ collapse in *Falling Man* is a continuation of his conversation about the ambiguous representational quality of the Towers themselves.

Falling Man does not foreclose any meaning of 9/11, but instead, as its beginning indicates, it brings back the event in all of its unintelligibility. Commenting on the generalizing commonplace usage of the term “September 11,” Jacques Derrida argues that “we do not in fact know what we are saying or naming” when we say “September 11”; instead we are already referring to a closed set of pre-defined definitions of what the term could possibly mean (qtd. in Borradori 85). In opposition to these commonplace and continuous narrations of the event, *Falling Man* sets up in the opening section what is “not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night” (3). In this set-up, what is produced “in the space of representation, in which the street has become a world, is *absence*” (Carroll 115, my emphasis). Keith’s escape out into this world of the street, is not only the beginning of *Falling Man*; it is also repeated as the end(ing) of *Falling Man*. There is an unwillingness to move beyond this event, to subsume it into simple narratives and easy narrativization. Carroll adds, “[s]pace and time are created for reflection and the event is held in abeyance, thereby interrupting any telegraphic narrative momentum . . . [and] the events of

September 11 are placed on hold and the novel produces a narrative lacuna in which meaning is suspended as DeLillo grapples with the question of how to represent the unrepresentable” (111, 112). This is a new space, a conditionally exceptional space where new meaning and a new narrative can be created: “This was the world now . . . otherworldly things in the morning pall” (*Falling Man* 3). This world is held apart and open and made affective by *Falling Man*’s first and last pages.

Keith’s Individuation

Keith owes his presence entirely to the “absence” of meaning produced by the collapse of the Towers, to witnessing the space that is freshly made unrepresentable. He is defined by this function of sight, of substantiating the absence. His sight brings into focus the absence: “There was something critically missing from the things around him . . . Maybe this is what things look like when there’s no one here to see them” (*Falling Man* 5). The witnessing is not limited to sight alone but affects all senses:

The world was this as well, figures in windows a thousand feet up, dropping into free space, and the stink of fuel fire, and the steady rip of sirens in the air. The noise lay everywhere they ran, stratified sound collecting around them, and he walked away from it and into it at the same time. (4)

This synesthetic bleeding of the senses into each other—including the relational proprioceptive sense of the self in space (as the self is defined by other bodies and objects in space)—perhaps indicates a breakdown of Keith’s normal, habitual perceptual processing of the five exteroceptive senses as discrete stimuli⁵ as well as that Keith’s sense of embodiment is contained in this process of witnessing. Synesthesia recurs in DeLillo’s work⁶ as a function of the Baudrillardian hyperreal, a condition where subject’s access to the “real”/actual is made unavailable through the all-pervasive mediating effect of the hyperreal/virtual media

⁵ I refer to Massumi’s conception of sensation: “Every attentive activity occurs in a synesthetic field of sensation that implicates all the sense modalities in incipient perception, and is itself implicated in self-referential action” (140).

⁶ Veggian notes, “Synesthesia is the bridge over which Karen crosses to the streets of lower Manhattan, looking for Bill, in [*Mao II*]. The sounds and smells heighten her sensitivity to color and light, triggering an effect comparable to what Warhol had achieved in coloring the portrait of Chairman Mao” (71).

landscape. Brian Massumi observes that, while “synesthesia is considered the norm for infantile perception,” adult “synesthetes are ‘normal’ people who are abnormally aware of their habits of perception” (188). The synesthetic experience is given directly to perception and though “it becomes so habitual as to fall out of perception in the ‘normal’ course of growing up . . . [it] is thought to persist as a nonconscious underpinning of all subsequent perception” (188). Keith does not suddenly lose all of his experiential memory, becoming a blank slate on which perception occurs; his synesthesia exceeds the restrictions of his habitual perception, while also necessitating a gradual return to “normal” habitual forms of perception. Massumi, speaking of the synesthetic form, the “biogram,” comments that “[t]here are simply too many dimensions of reality compressed into vision. It can’t hold them all in discrete, determinate, harmonious form and configuration.⁷ It buckles under the existential pressure. The biogram is not lacking in order. It is overorganized, loaded with an excess of reality. It is deformed by experiential overfill. It is a hypersurface. Its hyperreality explains why it is so stubbornly abstract” (189-90). Keith’s experience is a sudden excess of the real intruding into his world,⁸ forcing a cosmic abstraction of the ordinary, making the “it” that Keith finds himself in “not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night” (*Falling Man* 3). This abstraction repeats at the end of the book, in a scene which begins with a plane hitting the North Tower, with “a blast wave [passing] through the structure that sent Keith Neudecker out of his chair” (239). This final scene again documents how his habitual perception comes undone as the tower disintegrates with him still in it:

He was aware of vast movement and other things, smaller, unseen, objects drifting and skidding, and sounds that weren’t one thing or another but only sound, a shift in the basic arrangement of parts and elements . . . The stress was audible and then it

⁷ Massumi’s biogram presents an interesting consideration of Keith’s experience as synesthetes: “The biogram is a perceptual reliving: a folding back of experience on itself. Each biogram, then, is a virtual topological superposition of a potentially infinite series of self-repetitions. A biogram doubles back on itself in such a way as to hold all of its potential variations on itself in itself: in its own cumulatively open, self-referential event” and that as pre-9/11 normal adult, Keith’s “‘normal’ perception would [perhaps] be habitual unawareness of it” (194). In his synesthesia, Keith seems to re-intensify his ability to relive and make present his past self as other.

⁸ Massumi’s “real” is monist and so does not coincide entirely with the Lacanian order of the real, but is effectively the same in this case, where the unassimilable real intrudes-into and breaks the subject’s organization of the world.

opened, objects coming down, panels and wallboard . . . He was losing things as they happened. He felt things come and go. (239-40)

In this twice repeated abstraction, when Keith cannot “find himself in the things he saw and heard” (246), he suddenly finds something specific, a “something else . . . outside all this, not belonging to this . . . a shirt come down out of the high smoke, a shirt lifted and drifting in the scant light and then falling again, down toward the river” (4). While it has been argued that this shirt is a repressed image of a man falling down from the building, I believe it constitutes a Lacanian “mirror stage.” The shirt may be an extratextual reference to Associated Press photographer Richard Drew’s photograph of an unidentified man falling, head first, down the face of the North Tower in a strikingly stylized pose. If the shirt replaces Drew’s image of the falling man, Keith might be experiencing traumatic repression.⁹ I argue instead that this capture of the hitherto loosely differentiated subject by the image of a falling man is what further re-individuates Keith by propelling him past his simple but being-defining function as witness to a new and open space to an ego-bound subject who acts within it.

In Lacanian discourse, Keith’s capture by the image of the descending shirt marks his reembodyment as an ego-bound subject. So far, Keith’s activities have been limited to walking away from the Towers and observing the aftermath. Illuminated by his sight, “the world was this as well” (4). His sight and his steady progression away from the Towers illuminate the narrative space, expanding its scope. It is at this point that the descending shirt is introduced: “There was something else then, outside all this, not belonging to this, aloft” (4). This repetitive capture by the shirt is the beginning of the narrative space. I do not see the descending shirt as the repressed image of a falling man. I argue that Keith’s overall interaction with the shirt constitutes what Lacan calls a “mirror stage”:

What I have called the “mirror stage” is of interest because it manifests the affective dynamism by which the subject primordially identifies with the visual gestalt of his

⁹ Carroll argues “the shirt symbolizes, as it occludes the ‘as it is’ real of the horror of the falling man, is the power of traumatic memory” (115). Sonia Baelo-Allué agrees and adds that we as readers come to realize that “the shirt [is] a safe substitute in a mind that could not incorporate the image of falling men in its normal narrative processes, an image that has caused Keith’s cognitive and emotional paralysis throughout the novel” (76).

own body. In comparison with the still very profound lack of co-ordination in his own motor functioning, that gestalt is an ideal unity, a salutary imago. (*Écrits* 113)

Through the attacks, Keith is thrown back into a pre-mirror stage in certain respects, and is stuck in the Lacanian imaginary order and unable to participate in the symbolic order¹⁰ in that he is presented as uncoordinated, somewhat psychically undifferentiated from what he sees, and is seemingly unaware of his body and embodiment. He enters a mirror-stage, undergoing one in a series of other significant points in his life.¹¹ What occurs in this moment is what occurs in all mirror stages: an alienation of the subject from its primordial self through its capture¹² by an external object, a unified image, the unified 'ego-ideal.' Such

¹⁰ Lacan claims there are three interlocking, mutually exclusive, and ever-present orders that produce the subject's experience—the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic, whose "structural interdependence . . . is illustrated by the Borromean knot, in which the severing of any one of the three rings causes the other two to become separated also" (Evans 135). The real order is the indescribable and unorganizable real world, which repeatedly and unexpectedly punctures the symbolic order's attempted organization of the world. Bruce Fink points out that the real can be understood as both temporally prior and also co-existing with the symbolic and the imaginary. The real is a temporally "before" point in the subject's life, i.e., the real is "an infant's body 'before' it comes under the sway of the symbolic order, before it is subjected to toilet training and instructed in the ways of the world. In the course of socialization, the body is progressively written or overwritten with signifiers" (Fink 24). The real also co-exists with the other two orders as "that which has not yet been symbolized, remains to be symbolized, or even resists symbolization" (Fink 25). The subject first enters the imaginary order at some hypothesized point in the subject's past, the infant is undifferentiated from its mother (or primary caregiver) until it encounters its mirror image and mistakes itself for that image, to produce the ego and the ideal ego. The imaginary "ego arises as a crystallization or sedimentation of ideal images, tantamount to a fixed, reified object with which a child learns to identify, which a child learns to identify with him or herself" (Fink 36). The subject enters the symbolic order, the final phase of the mirror stage, which is defined by speech and laws, when the father (or equivalent functionary) prohibits the infant's enjoyment of having its desires continuously met with a primal "No!," thereby "annulling the mother-child unity, creating an essential space or gap between mother and child" (Fink 56). Then, in entering the symbolic, the infant cries out for its primary caregiver with a speech act to cure the lack created by its desires not being continuously met, in one of its many subsequent attempts "to completely monopolize the space of its mother's desire" (Fink 55). These are the three orders that continuously structure the 'normal' neurotic subject's experience, by responding to each other's intrusions.

¹¹ Lacan argues, "The mirror stage is not simply a moment in [a child's psychosexual] development. It also has an exemplary function because it reveals some of the subject's relations to his image, in so far as it is the *Urbild* (trans. archetype) of the ego" (*Seminar 1* 74). Lorenzo Chiesa further comments, "By means of the continuous acquisition of new imaginary identifications corresponding to different crucial moments in the subject's psychic life, the mirror-stage experience is repeated indefinitely throughout one's existence due to the imaginary relationships that are established with other human beings" (Chiesa 16). "The mirror stage represents a fundamental aspect of the structure of subjectivity" that is formally "permanent" (Evans 115).

¹² The term Lacan employs is "*capitation*," and the ego is produced in and through the subject's capture by this external image in which it recognizes itself, implying that this capture by an external image is a necessary condition of all human life, of the human being able to participate in the inner world, the

change, effected through successive mirror-stages, would necessarily be for the better and would be in line with the “normal” functioning of the Lacanian subject that positively adapts to an ever-changing external reality. I suggest that Keith, in his overdetermined state of mind, finds himself in the falling man. It is not a traumatic repression that occurs, but overorganization and subsequent capture. The encounter with the shirt therefore constitutes a significant event of ego-formation.

Keith encounters images of bodies falling from the building, both while still within the building and later when he’s on the street outside. On the street, he looks up at “figures in windows a thousand feet up, dropping into free space” (4). These are bodies turned into things and debris, and the world is an excess illuminated by “the light of what comes after, carried in the residue of smashed matter, in the ash ruins of what was various and human, hovering in the air above” (246). The human is an abstracted form, a part of the larger collapse and the specificity as human individuals is lost, as they become a part of the collapse:

Things began to fall, one thing and then another, things singly at first . . . Something went past the window, then he saw it. First it went and was gone and then he saw it and had to stand a moment staring out at nothing, holding Rumsey under the arms. 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. (242)

Keith registers the falling body and is captured by it. In the overorganization, abstraction, and breaking of habitual perception, the image of the man falling past the window while he is holding his dying friend begins to repeat, restructure and reorganize Keith’s experience around this repetition, rehabilitating him:

[F]or an instant he saw it again, going past the window, and this time he thought it was Rumsey. He confused it with Rumsey, the man falling sideways, arm out and up, like pointed up, like why am I here instead of there. (244)

Keith’s experience of himself and the world is formed through a reproduction of the image of the falling man. Like Rumsey, with whom he “confuses” the falling man, Keith is dressed about the same as the man in Drew’s original photograph, in non-descript business attire,

Innenwelt, and the external reality, the *Umwelt* (Evans 21).

wearing “a suit” and carrying “a briefcase” (3). A hyperreal sense of the self is produced, and the falling man multiplies as a reference for all objects. Keith recognizes himself (as an other) in this projected, fantastically, “other-wordly” unified image and is then irreversibly captivated by it: “He walked and saw it fall, arms waving like nothing in this life” (246). This moment marks both (a) the point at which Keith re-enters the imaginary order, and (b) his capture that will prevent Keith from moving past this moment.

Keith finds others in similarly disoriented states, who are also perhaps reindividuating themselves like he is. He meets a woman who tries “to hand him a bottle of water,” but he does not understand the gesture (4). He does not *need* water or the implied companionship. He focuses on how she comes out a diner wearing a “dust mask and a baseball cap,” visual and attire details which help him constitute the woman as Other¹³ and outside his imaginary self-identification (4). The offer of water is more an interpersonal *desire* of the symbolic order, a desire for a shared comment on the event and the rehabilitation of the distressed environment. Such desire is for the continuation of human desire itself and of a rehabilitative normalcy that its fulfillment promises. The bottle is withdrawn and “thrust toward him again” after the top has been twisted off:

He put down the briefcase to take [the bottle], barely aware that he wasn't using his left arm, that he'd had to put down the briefcase before he could take the bottle . . . He closed his eyes and drank . . . She was looking at him. She said something he didn't hear and he handed back the bottle and picked up the briefcase. There was an aftertaste of blood in the long draft of water. (5)

While he pauses, giving silent company to the woman, his relational awareness gradually increases. Keith awkwardly adjusts from witnessing to understanding and accommodating this woman's desire for normalcy. Armed with the self-constitutive ego-ideal of the shirt, Keith's re-integration into language, into the symbolic order, where everything carries a pre-defined and specific (if unstable) meaning, begins: “He tried to tell himself he was alive but the idea was too obscure to take hold” (6). His desire is produced by the lack of wholeness

¹³ As opposed to the imaginary “other” that produces the ego through an alienation of the subject from itself, Lacan's “Other” refers to the sum-total of the symbolic systems of ideological determination that act on the subject, i.e., language, which may be instantiated in part by other subjects. Evans adds, “The big Other designates radical alterity, an other-ness which transcends the illusory otherness of the imaginary because it cannot be assimilated through identification” (136).

and fixity of his self caused by the traumatic and real collapse of the towers which organized his world; the desire is to live in the language of the symbolic order of the Other. When he then hears “the sound of the second fall, or [feels] it in the trembling air,” his identification with the image of the act of falling intensifies, as he senses “that [it] was him coming down, the north tower” (5). Keith is re-individuated, as an individual who constantly experiences a sense of falling away from the past as a hypermasculine subject, who experiences never-ending movement and loss.

Keith’s hypermasculine past and his undetermined present are accessed through the image of the falling man. Mary J. Parish claims that *Falling Man* criticizes post-9/11 American hyper-masculinity; Keith is “handsome, strong, and . . . in extremely good physical condition, as well as aggressive and professionally successful in the world’s economic center, [and so] Keith embodies the trope of the man’s man” (187). Little about his past falls outside such a construction of masculinity. Michael S. Kimmel argues that “American manhood is always more about the fear of falling . . . always more about the agony of defeat than the thrill of victory” (218). Poker games with his friends before 9/11, for instance, contained “one’s intent to shred the other’s gauzy manhood” (*Falling Man* 97). After having spent a lifetime engaged in keeping his manhood’s precarity in check, Parish argues, “DeLillo enacts Keith’s worst nightmare as he and the entire culture are made vulnerable by a terrifying and unexpected attack . . . [in] perhaps the ultimate challenge to the cultural dominance Keith has relied upon, and his immediate response is . . . [a] catastrophic loss of self” (189). Rather than seeing this catastrophic loss as forcing a productive re-engagement with the monolithic Other of hegemonic masculinity, I argue that Keith, like Parish suggests is true of many Americans, returns to identifying himself in relation to an ego-ideal that is not exceptionally different from what he identified with pre-9/11.

Parish suggests that Keith “exists in a kind of liminal space” for the weeks that follow 9/11, but this liminal space, as perhaps all liminal spaces, only functions to produce and reproduce the normal state of affairs (193). Parish comments that “deprived of the compulsive activity that soothed him by obscuring the uncomfortable aspects of his life, [Keith] now recognizes his own self-alienation” (193). It is through this loss of his compulsive activities that Keith recognizes the limitations of his previous self, how it limited the possibilities of the world. As

he revisits his past residence and relationships, its inadequacies keep becoming clearer. When he visits the apartment where he lived to be closer to work during his separation from Lianne, he observes:

Everything else was the same as it had been when he walked out the door for work that Tuesday morning . . . He lived here for a year and a half . . . finding a place close to the office, centering his life, content with the narrowest of purviews, that of not noticing . . . But now he looked . . . Here he was, seen clear, with nothing that mattered to him in these two and a half rooms. (26)

Freed from the constraints of his previous ego-ideal that allowed its subject, Keith, to see and appreciate this place as a functional space; this space that he had occupied and that was thoroughly familiar to him is alienated, reproduced as unfamiliar, and re-examined. This new liminal subject finds little of value here. When he returns to Ground Zero immediately after the attacks, a stranger approaches him, and Keith struggles to find himself, to find his voice, to embody himself successfully. He shouts out “I’m standing here,” and then repeats himself, louder than before (27). His inability to embody himself is distressing, but it is indicative of the ending of the mirror stage, marked by aggressivity¹⁴ as the subject realizes it cannot fulfill the demands of the ego-ideal.

This “aggressivity” is developed further. When Keith returns to Lianne’s apartment, he sorts through his mail and finds that some of his mail has his name misspelt. He immediately and unconsciously sets to correct it, even though it matters very little now that the mail has already reached him.

Because it wasn’t him, with his name misspelled, that’s why. He did it and then kept doing it and maybe he understood at some snake-brain level of perception that he had to do it and would keep doing it down the years and into the decades. He did not construct this future in clear terms but it was probably there, humming under the skull. (31-32)

In the lack of a firm, foundational sense of the self, Keith instead feels his self as placed in a vast hyperreal array of very similar persons. He can be pointed out and individuated by his exact and precise name; Keith gets access to his self through such a selection from the

¹⁴ On aggressivity, Lacanian theorist Philippe Julien writes, “In the mirror stage . . . at the very moment when the ego is formed by the image of the other, narcissism and aggressivity are *correlatives*. Narcissism, in which the image of one’s own body is sustained by the image of the other, in fact introduces a tension: the other in his image both attracts and rejects me” (original emphasis, 34).

implied and disorienting array that threatens to level his differences into the sameness of a specific type of person. The performative reiteration of his precise name, in his vigilance and correct repetition, guarantees and maintains his individuation in normal “neurotic” activity.¹⁵ His name names the other, the ego-ideal, what he expects to be and is expected to be, always in excess of his actual activity. He retreats into the domestic life of his family, hoping it will be the answer to the incessant desire to conform to an image of the falling man that he does not completely understand. He says to Lianne, “We’re ready to sink into our little lives,” indicating a very real desire to fall into a routine where loss is acceptable even if it is continuous (75). Keith, however, remains troublingly self-aware, unable to *sink* into the imagined ideal of his previous life’s habits:

Nothing seemed familiar . . . and he felt strange to himself, or always had, but it was different now because he was watching . . . things seem still and clear to the eye . . . 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. (65-66)

His ability to think, at first, cannot escape the unpleasant awareness of his self as abstract, artificial. This self-awareness then transforms and, in these “spells of reflection,” he realizes that his perception involves primarily an abstracting of the world rather than concretizing it and reifying its processes, as is pre-requisite to interaction in the symbolic order, i.e., he is unable to think relationally, in “clear units, hard and linked” (66). The precision of standard associative logic that defines “normal” perception of the world as comprised of discrete, stably relatable objects is lost to Keith. By consuming wholesale what appears to him, including drawing up his past as perceiver, he re-thinks his past relationality, i.e., his past as it is constituted by the sum of his relational experiences, which further alienates himself from it.

After the attacks, Keith has a short-lived affair with a fellow survivor, takes an interest in his own child’s activities, undergoes therapy; but his frustration, his inability to conform to his

¹⁵ Neurosis is “normal, in the sense of that which is found in the statistical majority of the population . . . and ‘mental health’ is an illusory ideal of wholeness which can never be attained because the subject is essentially split” as soon as it experiences the incompleteness brought on by separation from its mother or primary care-giver in a hypothesized moment in its infancy (Evans 126).

ego-ideal's demands overtake him. Keith realizes that to live in a familial organization, after a full day's work, he would "need an offsetting discipline, a form of controlled behavior, voluntary, that kept him from shambling into the house hating everybody" (143). Such a life is unsatisfactory because of the relationship between Keith and the ego-ideal of the falling man. 9/11 changed Keith, a subject whose complex ego-ideal required vigilance from symbolic castrations, like Parish suggests, and transformed it into an ego-ideal that requires from Keith only a constant adjustment to perceived loss. Consequently, there is no teleological progression towards being a "fuller" and "content" human being; there can be no movement away from this particular mirror stage, no further mirror stages that demand Keith adapt to their demands instead. There is only loss and slippage away from everything and every person he attempts to rehabilitate himself with; there is no capture, no inhering in meaningful relationships. Keith, in his being stuck in this mirror stage and in failure to see past his subordination to this one image of the falling man (or shirt), in his inability to distinguish this other as other (even as he recognizes his previous life as other), is thus, in Lacanian terms, nearing "psychosis." The Lacanian psychotic is produced by the *absence* or foreclosure of the fundamental signifier of the "name-of-the-father," which should enact and support the primal prohibition of the "No!" that is responsible for the subject's introduction into the symbolic order. This absence, *as* the aftermath of the fall of the Towers, leaves a hole in the symbolic and the result is the confinement of the subject in the imaginary, while it attempts to repair the hole with a different organization of the real, a different reality.

Keith's capture by the shirt and inability to move out this image stage, from the imaginary to the symbolic, his nearing psychosis ultimately requires Keith to abandon his family life and seek employment as a full-time mediocre gambler. He travels and attends poker tournaments. He wins "but not too much, not winnings of such proportions that he'd slip into someone else's skin" (227). If the events of 9/11 are a traumatic intervention of the real into Keith's carefully organized masculine being that forecloses the symbolic law of the father, Keith must either descend into full psychosis characterized by delusions or discover a new law to fill this hole, a new organizational principle to defeat the absolute contingency of his being that the real of September 11 revealed. To defeat the chance and contingency that threaten all of his organization, he turns to gambling as a way of life. He starts to fully realize

his ideal-ego's mandate by attempting to empty his being's content into this playing at chance: "The game mattered, the stacking of chips, the eye count, the play and dance of hand and eye. He was identical with these things" (228). Marshall comments that "[t]he gambling is symbolic—avoiding loss by playing at loss" (632). Keith becomes a shell of a person, defined only by his choice to fold or to call and the random outcome that the universe produces in turn. Keith knows only "the choice of yes or no. Call or raise, call or fold, the little binary pulse behind the eyes, the choice that reminds you who you are. It belonged to him, this yes or no" (212). His whole life is compressed to the unity of this "little binary pulse" and it determines his interactions with the entirety of the external world. He wins some, loses some. It matters little, as long as he sustains the game.¹⁶ Keith, as Lacan's theory of the subject claims, *is* lack, lack of a unity, a lack that compels him to find an external ideal unified image of the self and conform entirely to it. Keith's inability to look past the falling man prevents him from undergoing further mirror-stages, which would force him to change as he tries to conform to *their* demands. Instead, in finding an ideal unity in a singular image that incorporates continual but sustainable loss into its form, Keith is unable to differentiate between his self and this image of the "little binary pulse" (*Falling Man* 212), the object, that he now falsely locates inside himself as the essence of his being. The binary pulse keeps him moving, but traps his movement within the binary of 'win' or 'lose.' Carroll notices that the terms used to describe the shirt's motion include "'lifted,' 'drifting,' and then 'falling again,' [and so] the shirt constructs an altered temporal space in which the ineluctable downward momentum of the falling bodies is, if only momentarily, arrested . . . space and time are created for reflection and the event is held in abeyance" (112). In his gambling, Keith performs this exact same task of abeyance, and it is in this sense that he is finally continuously falling. Parish claims this play "provides a future that is eternally benign because, win or lose, a new deck is always available, and the cards themselves exist only in

¹⁶ Gerda Reith's study of gamblers in *The Age of Chance: Gambling in Western Culture* offers insight into the durational and spatial aspects of gambling that exists for itself, not just as a means to win money, but as a means to produce a space and time where gamblers can both continually experience the "fleeting sensation of the thrill" associated with gambling (150), and also affirm the self and order reality by imaginatively privileging individual "luck" over universal chance by repeatedly interrogating (like Lacan's obsessional neurotic does) one's destiny or fate, which is an imaginary and organizational construction of the future that is otherwise wholly determined by the contingency of the real.

the moment and have no memory” (195). This is how Keith comes to be wholly determined by the foreclosure of previously valid imaginary possibilities produced by the events of 9/11.

Lianne’s Individuation

Lianne’s experience of the events of 9/11 is more mediated through external sources than Keith’s is. Keith’s capture by this new ego-ideal—that only seeks to address the possibility of continuous loss—suspends Keith in orbit around the event. DeLillo here points to how the exceptionality of any event, including 9/11, works at the level of the individual. Carroll claims, “September 11 may be like nothing, but everything in *Falling Man* is like September 11” (127). Lianne echoes DeLillo’s concerns about the state of a nation paralyzed by its own fear and grief when she asks, “[b]ut isn’t it demoralizing? Doesn’t it wear you down? It must eat away at your spirit . . . Like a séance in hell. Tick tock tick tock. What happens after months of this? Or years. Who do you become?” (216). It is in Lianne’s engagement with various media narrations of 9/11 that *Falling Man* finds its critical voice.

Lianne, unlike Keith, does not undergo a catastrophic alienation. The primary mechanism of her individuation and activity is quite different from Keith’s. She enters the narrative as a “normal” individual who is gradually but increasingly affected by the events of 9/11 as they come to change how she *knows* the world. As a “normal” adult, Lianne makes sense of the world through what Lacan calls a “*hominization* of the planet,” by projecting her own ideal image of the self, the *ideal ego*, onto the entirety of the world, to constitute and individuate all external objects and beings—humans, animals, and inanimate objects—with “attributes of permanence, identity, and substantiality”¹⁷ (Lacan qtd. in Chiesa 22). Lianne must rationalize Keith’s unexplained return to her, him standing in her doorway “like gray soot head to toe . . . with blood on his face and clothes” and the entirety of 9/11. Lianne must project, however unsuccessfully, her ideal ego onto Keith, her son, her son’s friends, her

¹⁷ Such a projection of our own ideal ego onto the world, which is the condition of human knowledge, is imaginary knowledge and is characteristically what Lacan calls “*paranoiac knowledge*,” in that it is always experienced as vulnerable and doomed to failure—due to the “organic insufficiency” infants experience in their inability to fend for themselves, and which humans continue to experience throughout their lives as a fundamental vulnerability of their self-hood and self-definition against the disruptive power of the real world (Chiesa 16).

mother, her mother's boyfriend, her patients, the performance artist, demonstrators on the street, paintings, and so on. This projection is an unconscious process of knowledge acquisition. However, both the successes and failures of this unconscious effort, as is characteristic of "paranoiac knowledge," affect her positively or negatively. She is, in some sense, putting herself (as the sum of her past sensorial knowledge) out there and risking failure every time, risking thus a failure of her own ideal ego, her own idea of the self.

Lianne's individuation mirrors how *Falling Man* examines what 9/11 and its aftermath produce. Alan Marshall comments that "*Falling Man* explores the experience of loss principally through . . . female subjectivity" (627). He employs Julia Kristeva's claim that "men's time has traditionally been linear, i.e., historical and political. Women's time, by contrast, has always been either monumental or cyclical" (qtd. in Marshall 630). It is in this sense that the reader comes to understand, as Lianne does, that the exceptionality of the grief for 9/11 is itself continually lost and is always in the process of being forgotten, "that grief is always bigger than its occasion—it is always potentially there, waiting for an occasion" (Marshall 636). Lianne is always already adjusting to a loss whose object was never clear, unlike Keith, whose experience of loss is constituted by considering the event as an exceptionality and anomaly.

Lianne's relationship to 9/11 begins with Keith unexpectedly showing up at her doorstep after 9/11 after they had been separated for an undetermined amount of time. She accepts him back into her life, seemingly without condition. At this point, she "didn't need to know [his] feelings about everything, not anymore and not in this man. She liked the spaces he made" (18). With the increased difficulty in making sense of the world after 9/11, she perhaps holds Keith accountable for the uncertainties she faces. These uncertainties in *hominization* following 9/11 are assigned to her image of Keith, added to the uncertainty she feels about what motivates his actions—uncertainty is one of Keith's fundamental characteristics and thus a known, unified, and acceptable form of uncertainty. However, any complacency is soon lost, and she asks him why he came back to her, suggesting he only returned to her to check on their son Justin:

This was the answer she wanted because it made the most sense . . . But it was also only half the answer and she realized she needed to hear something beyond this, a broader motive for his action or intuition or whatever it is. (21)

He replies he could not go to his apartment because it was too close to the towers, which is an acceptable answer, but does not fully resolve the uncertainty of his motivations because it does not account for why he chose her apartment over, for example, a hotel room. To resolve uncertainties like this is what motivates Lianne's actions from early on. She works with Alzheimer's patients in order to understand why her father committed suicide, conducting therapy sessions at an Alzheimer's clinic where she helps a group of seven patients to work through their personal traumata by writing about their experiences. She asks the supervising clinical psychologist "to increase the frequency of the meetings" (60):

He told her it would be a mistake. 'From this point on, you understand, it's all about loss. We're dealing inevitably with diminishing returns . . . You don't want them to feel there's an urgency to write everything, say everything before it's too late . . . This is for them . . . It's theirs . . . Don't make it yours.' (60)

This "[making] it yours"-aspect is presumably what attracted Lianne to the job in the first place. Since she must project her ideal ego onto these patients to individuate, humanize, and empathize with them, their grief must necessarily be hers. She realizes that she "needed these people [and] that the group meant more to her than it did to the members" (61-62). She also needs to experience their thought processes—marked by gradual but continual loss—, which her father, also an Alzheimer's patient, must have experienced, too, because these patients "were the living breath of the thing that killed her father" (62). She resolves the uncertainty of why her father killed himself, even though he never told anyone: "My father shot himself so I would never have to face the day when he failed to know who I was" (130). Her explanation is perhaps narcissistic, but not exceptionally so. She must project her ideal ego onto her memory of her father whenever she thinks about him. She wants from the group, I argue, a voice that would resemble her father's, to replicate it in order to comment on her present. She urges them to write about 9/11: "There has to be something you want to say, some feeling to express, nineteen men come here to kill *us*" (63-64, my emphasis). She now begins to identify as an American, and offers descriptions of fellow Americans and terrorists in terms of those who are threatened and those who are threatening. She needs the imaginary wholeness of her father's voice to substantiate what she imagines the terrorists to be, to have her imaginary knowledge of the distressingly unknowable terrorists be validated and substantially expanded.

Over the course of the novel, Lianne's relationship with Keith grows uneasy and her uncertainties keep stacking up: Justin becomes involved in a very secretive game with two other children, where they scan the skies with binoculars and look for "Bill Lawton," a name that is later revealed to be a mishearing of "Osama bin Laden." She unexpectedly encounters a performance artist who recreates Richard Drew's photograph of the falling man by suspending himself headfirst from high places while wearing business attire. Lianne sees the artist's performance twice, and finds herself in close proximity to him once: "There was something awful about the stylized pose, body and limbs, his signature stroke. But the worst of it was the stillness itself and her nearness to the man, her position here, with no one closer to him than she was" (168). Being so close to the artist makes Lianne just as uncomfortable as the style and the stillness of the artist hanging suspended with one bent leg. Identifying the artist with Keith, the disturbing uncertainties of Keith's behaviour, and his unresponsiveness to her needs and questions, all of the problems she has chosen to ignore come back ten-fold. Aaron DeRosa argues that like a suicide bomber who strikes with no warning, the performance artist captures and traumatizes his audiences with "self-inflicted performances, performances that nearly kill him" (165). Lianne's first encounter with the artist illustrates the artist's impact on her:

[He] brought it back . . . those stark moments in the burning towers when people fell or were forced to jump . . . There were people shouting up at him, outraged at the spectacle, the puppetry of human desperation, a body's last fleet breath and what it held. It held the gaze of the world, she thought. There was the awful openness of it, something we'd not seen, the single falling figure that trails a collective dread, body come down among us all. (33)

The unexpected closeness is again an upsetting, unexpected, and unwelcome intrusion of the real order, as an "awful openness" (33) presenting a fundamental lack on to the crowd's understanding of the events of 9/11 and their "post-9/11" form of social life. The crowd's members fail to adequately hominize the artist. This is distressing and it opens up room for revision of the event's narration and a remaking of their selves. Such a self-refashioning works in allowing individuals to associate with the Other of a crowd and cohere together in such crowds, as in the case of the five hundred thousand strong anti-war protest Lianne attends.

[She] began to feel . . . a heightened sense of who she was in relation to others, thousands of them, orderly but all-enclosing. Those nearby saw her, smiled, some of them, and spoke to her, one or two, and she was forced to see herself in the reflecting surface of the crowd. She became whatever they sent back to her. She became her face and features, her skin color, a white person, white being her fundamental meaning, her state of being . . . She was privileged, self-involved, white. It was there in her face, educated, unknowing, scared . . . The crowd was gifted at being a crowd. This was their truth. They were at home, she thought, in the wave of bodies, the compressed mass. (184-85)

Lianne's interaction with the crowd is not as productive as it might have been in a novel from DeLillo's earlier career; as Veggian notes, here the "crowds have lost their [previous] wondrous vitality and their capacity to function as the imaginative witnesses (and substitutes) to historical events" (103). Lianne is further individuated through a process that she is uncomfortably aware of—hundreds of individuals project their ideal egos onto her body to know her, imaginarily, primarily through their experiences of whiteness. She experiences this as violence. She is constituted as a hyperreal object, in "her face and features, her skin color, a white person, white being her fundamental meaning" (184), and her examiners produce her without what she understands to be her real subjecthood. She suddenly "felt all the bitter truth that stereotypes contain" and when she senses herself thinking about "crowds in panic, surging over riverbanks," she realizes she has internalized their ideas of her, that these were a "white person's thoughts, the processing of white panic data" (185). Her awareness of the process of her individuation as a white person allows a reexamination of her imaginary knowledge.

Recalling Carroll's comment that "September 11 may be like nothing, but everything in *Falling Man* is like September 11," everything that Lianne encounters becomes an encounter with 9/11 (Carroll 127). Lianne's mother's boyfriend, Martin, calls her over to the Morandi paintings in her own living room, which presumably, have been hanging there for a considerable amount of time.

The painting in question showed seven or eight objects, the taller ones set against a brushy slate background. The other items were huddled boxes and biscuit tins, grouped before a darker background . . . They looked together. Two of the taller items were dark and somber, with smoky marks 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)

Lianne returns to the experience of the events of 9/11 again and again. However, unlike Keith, Lianne's individuation is presented in a somewhat optimistic light. Charles Sumner claims that with Keith, "DeLillo paints a bleak psychical portrait of pre-9/11 America and thereby saws off any historical support for the fantasy of a bright future" (25). In Lianne, we see an individual whose world is consumed by the events and the aftermath of 9/11, but is able to resist the psychosis that threatens Keith enough for him to devote his entire life to abolishing contingency.

For Lacan, psychosis threatens all humans continuously because it is included "in the basic structure of human subjectivity" (Chiesa 17). Lianne, in the narrative present, has moved past the mirror-stage and recognizes the external object of the imaginary other as other. This recognition occurs naturally as the ego becomes more complex, falsely "self-aware," and is stabilized as it passes through a number of mirror-stages. Her ability to recognize the other as other, or her evidence of not being psychotic, becomes evident just after Keith and she have sex for the first time after 9/11:

She got up to dress for her morning run but then pressed herself naked to the full-length mirror, face turned, hands raised to roughly head level. She pressed her body to the glass, eyes shut, and stayed for a long moment, nearly collapsed against the cool surface, abandoning herself to it. Then she put on her shorts and top and was lacing her shoes when he came out of the bathroom, clean-shaven, and saw the fogged marks of her face, hands, breasts, and thighs stamped on the mirror. (106)

Lianne's closing her eyes to her mirror image, collapsing against it, leaving an impression on the mirror all indicate the "normal" functioning of a "normal" human subject—someone who struggles, on an everyday basis, with what she recognizes as the other, her ego-ideal, who recognizes the other as other, and who psychically (and in this case, physically) projects her idea of the self, her ideal ego, onto the other to know it. Lianne revisits her personal sense of her body as a source of selfhood in the face of the distress that other sources of self-hood are causing her.

Keith's process of individuation ends on the last pages of the epilogue with the plane crashing into the North Tower, with him running out and seeing the shirt gently falling down towards the earth—indicating his inability to move past this single act of all-determining individuation. Lianne's journey, on the other hand, ends as the final note of *Falling Man* on the final page of the final chapter, in her being momentarily arrested by the smell of her

body as she undresses, in her recognizing herself through her “body and everything it carried, inside and out, [as] identity and memory and human heat” (236). “It,” the initial abstraction, finds its end in Lianne exploring and knowing that this bodily presence is her eternal sense of the self. It is not just about her self-definition but that her “child was [contained in this self-hood], [so was] the girl who wanted to be other people, and obscure things she could not name” (236). In her realization that she contains a sense of the world, a particular and precious *hominization* of the world, hope returns to *Falling Man*’s bleak world. In her determination to “be alone, in reliable calm, [her] and the kid, the way they were before the planes appeared that day,” Lianne stops living in a myopic “post-9/11” condition.

Conclusion

At its heart, DeLillo’s *Falling Man* is a continuation of his three-novel discussion of American processes of individuation, with an unsurmountable loss taking center-stage. Instead of understanding the loss caused by the events of September 11 as trauma, as an a fixed feature of the post-9/11 subject, DeLillo explores such loss as a point of individuation. Lacan also places the loss that splits the subject at the heart of its psychosexual individuation—a “normal” neurotic subject is able to participate in the symbolic and experience the unconscious only due to a primal loss of wholeness. *Falling Man*’s conversation thus is not about the exceptionality of the loss caused by 9/11 as an event, but about how lack and an unfulfillable desire to overcome it structures both Keith and Lianne’s behaviour.

Placing Lacan’s theory of individuation in conversation with *Falling Man*’s Neudecker household offers an exploration of two kinds of coping mechanisms. Keith, in his avoidance of ever-present threat of psychosis as it is realized more fully by the loss of the Twin Towers that pre-9/11 dominated his psychic structure, in his capture by the idealization of a continuous adjustment to loss, turns to an unending series of games that reduce his entire life to an avoidance and management of the real. Lianne encounters the real of the collapse of the Twin Towers secondarily, through the repeated collapse of the household, through crowds that try to imagine her as a part of themselves, through her ever-more unstable hominization of the planet, through the hyperreality of the Towers’ circulation. The real’s interventions are both brought into focus and then attempted to be mitigated in both

subjects' cases, even as their mitigation is linked through the collapsing image of the self-sufficient wholesome household.

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