

Fiction After September 11 and the Destabilization of Mass Narratives

By Michael Elmets

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Introduction

On September 11, 2001, the United States—the world even—would seem to have entered a new historical era—an era of mass consciousness defined by violence, fear, terror, and altered understandings of the relationship between the individual and the collective or group. The actions of the suddenly bellicose United States government, more blatantly interventionist than in the decade since the final demise of the Soviet Union, would seem to have enforced, or, at the very least, verified, the beginning of a new era in the world’s history. Two wars--or, as it were, extended military engagements—were launched in relatively quick succession under the umbrella of the extremely loosely defined “War on Terror,” and it would seem almost impossible for many even outside of the West (especially outside of it) to not, at the very least, function with some awareness of the fact that the actions of the United States were symptomatic—representative even—of a major alteration in its foreign policy, occurring, ostensibly, in response to the events of September 11. While it is clear that September 11 necessitated, or, at the very least, provided pretext for, a drastic re-imagining of the relationship of the United States to the world on the level of mass consciousness, the construction of media and political narratives has drowned out the voices of individual response and served to dichotomize the world between the monolithic categories of “us and them.” While the American media and government formed a cohesive response to the attacks incredibly quickly, with cable news organizations broadcasting their own narratives for September 11 within an hour of the moment when Flight 11 struck Tower 1, writers of fiction have been characteristically slow to respond, and, almost an entire decade since the attacks themselves, are indubitably not finished doing so.

While the task of writing about September 11, and the artistic and individual responses to it, is undoubtedly daunting given the sensitive and traumatized nature of the country in the

aftermath of the attacks, attempts have been made to codify the ways in which the events of September 11 have been contextualized. Much of the writing about September 11 and the literary response to it has focused on two primary categories of narratives—those of continuity and those of change (Though the word rupture may more accurately describe the latter category). In their introduction to *Literature after 9/11*, a collection of critical essays written about the genre that can be understood as 9/11 literature, editors Ann Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn argue that their book refuses “To interpret 9/11 *either* as a rupture with the past *or* as continuous with (and even anticipated by) earlier historical events.”¹ They claim, instead, that “The history of literary representations of 9/11 can be characterized by the *transition* from narratives of rupture to narratives of continuity.”² Still, an emphasis on such a transition seems to ignore the fact that particular novelists have managed to combine elements of both types of 9/11 narrative--those of continuity and those of change, or at least to demonstrate within single pieces of work, a transition between the narratives. Perhaps most significantly, there are novelists who emphasize, in fiction and in essays, the need to struggle against the construction of mass narratives, even those constructed out of individual experience. They emphasize the need for a multiplicity of narratives that exist on their own against the mass narratives which seem to distort individual experience. While this thesis accepts the fact that some works of literature exist exclusively within one category or the other (continuity or change), and even a transition from one category to the other, its primary focus is on those works of fiction that defy contextualization in either narrative, either through a synthesis of the two or a broader rejection of mass narrative as a means of contextualizing the events of September 11. As such, this thesis will focus primarily on

¹Keniston, Ann and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn. "Introduction: Representing: Literature and Resistance." *Literature after 9/11*. Ed. Keniston, Ann and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn. New York: Routledge, 2008. Print. Pg. 3.

²Keniston, Ann and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn. Pg. 1.

Don DeLillo's 2007 novel *Falling Man* and Philip Roth's 2007 novel *Exit Ghost*, each of which features September 11th as a sort of literary trope and deals with the issue of attempting to understand and create a means of understanding the catastrophe itself.

In order to analyze a synthesis between, or a rejection of, mass narratives of continuity and change, it is first important to define the mass narratives which have been most prevalent in discussions of September 11. As such, photographs taken of the World Trade Center towers, or at least featuring them, on September 11 will be used in this thesis to create a sort of frame for discussion, and, in a broader sense, to represent the ways in which mass narratives have been constructed. They will be used to represent each category of narrative, but also to represent the limitations of such narratives. Even in limiting the framing elements in this thesis to two photographs, each representing one of the two narratives, it becomes clear that such categories inhere greater internal complexity than might be implied by their use as opposing aspects of a sort of dialectic.

Following the discussion of the two mass narratives (that of continuity and that of change), an analysis of the ways in which Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* and Philip Roth's *Exit Ghost* add complexity to the understanding of September 11 and destabilize the mass narratives that have come to define contextualization of it. While the two novels approach September 11 in dramatically different ways, each emphasizes a multiplicity of individual narratives of response and features a discussion of the event itself as a sort of literary trope. While DeLillo's novel begins in the rubble of the towers and is truly a novel about September 11 itself, Roth's novel is not truly *about* the attacks and features the post-September 11 world as more of a backdrop than a foregrounded issue. Still, September 11 affects the characters in Roth's novels in varied ways and seems to imply an interesting synthesis between the narratives of continuity and change.

Throughout this thesis, I will demonstrate the ways in which two of the most prolific and prominent writers in the American literary canon have dealt with the events of the September 11, leading to a richer and more complex understanding of the attacks and their aftermath than can be possible when mass narratives, especially those created by politicians and members of the media, are emphasized.

Photographs of Continuity and Change

Following September 11, there was a proliferation of images of the catastrophe and those affected by it. The term “proliferation” has a special resonance with regard to this overwhelming representation of the attacks in visual media, as the images themselves form a somewhat ironically large part of the arsenal available to the terrorist in his or her quest against American modernity. The system, which relies upon images of death, destruction, and catastrophe elsewhere, is thrust, by the attacks and visual representations of them into a world of turmoil and violence. The spectacle of the event, while not necessarily responsible for the initial trauma, perpetuates it and disperses it throughout a much larger area than the one directly affected by the attack. Among the more arresting and disconcerting of the images of the attacks that began to circulate after September 11 is Richard Drew’s “Falling Man.” The image depicts a man, who has fallen, perhaps having propelled himself, from one of the towers. It is not an image in which one can easily find “human beauty” or heroism. It is an image that incorporates, but cannot encapsulate, the human terror, dread, and trauma that those within the World Trade Center towers, especially on its highest floors, must have felt when their normal, rational human fear of death had to have been transformed into a realization of the inescapable immediacy of mortality.

Thomas Hoepker's photograph, which was not published until 2006 and which Frank Rich describes as depicting "Five young friends on the waterfront in Brooklyn, taking what seems to be a lunch or bike-riding break, enjoying the radiant late-summer sun and chatting away as cascades of smoke engulf Lower Manhattan in the background,"³ evokes an altogether different sort of horror--the horror that *everything* might not have changed, that people might not have necessarily been entirely devastated in the midst of what *seemed* to be all-encompassing devastation. The response to, and repression of, these photographs and others like them implies an interesting role of a form of mass consciousness in the construction of the over-arching narratives of September 11. While Richard Drew's "Falling Man"⁴ and Thomas Hoepker's photograph of "Five young friends on the waterfront in Brooklyn"⁵ has been largely repressed and rarely published, the photographs can be understood as being representative of the narratives of continuity and change that have dominated discourse about September 11, with response to the photographs seeming to imply a tension which challenges the validity of these monolithic categories that defy individual experience even as they are based entirely upon still-lives, frozen images which seem to capture individual response to the tragedy.

Richard Drew's photograph "Falling Man" can be viewed as representing the narrative that understands September 11 as a moment of absolute rupture with a past that necessarily ceased to exist with the attacks on the World Trade Center towers. The photograph, which depicts a man plummeting from one of the North Tower's highest floors towards a certain death,

³Rich, Frank. "Whatever Happened to the America of 9/12?." *New York Times* 10 Sep 2006: 2. Web. 19 Mar 2011. <<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9E06E0DC1431F933A2575AC0A9609C8B63&scp=2&sq=whatever%20happened%20to%209/12&st=cse&pagewanted=2>>.

⁴"Falling Man." *esquire.com*. Web. 21 Mar 2011. <http://www.esquire.com/features/ESQ0903-SEP_FALLINGMAN>.

⁵Friend, David. *Watching the World Change: The Stories Behind the Images of 9/11*. New York: Picador USA, 2007. Print.

appeared on September 12, 2001 “On page seven of *The New York Times* [and] in hundreds of newspapers, all over the country, all over the world. The man inside the frame –the Falling Man –was not identified.”⁶ In a 2003 article written for *Esquire*, Tom Junod explores the progression of the theories presented as to the identity of the falling man of Richard Drew’s photograph.

While Junod accepts the possibility that the photograph’s subject may have actually been Jonathan Briley, an employee of the restaurant on the top floor of the North Tower, he argues that the photograph “Became an unmarked grave, and the man buried inside its frame -- the Falling Man -- became the Unknown Soldier in a war whose end we have not yet seen. Richard Drew's photograph is all we know of him, and yet all we know of him becomes a measure of what we know of ourselves.”⁷ The photograph seems to, at some level, represent the complete destruction of its subjects pre-catastrophe self and connection to humanity. If, as Junod articulates in his article, “It is up to people like [The photographer] -- paid witnesses -- to have the presence of mind to attend to [history’s] manufacture,”⁸ the narrative that Richard Drew constructed with the publication of his photograph was one of distortion, change, and horror that previously unthinkable acts possible. The first of the historical narratives “manufactured” by paid witnesses would thus be one of change, rupture, and discontinuity of a past no longer commensurable with the present into which the horror of September 11 thrust those directly, and, at some level, indirectly affected by it. Junod’s article demonstrates the extent to which individual experience itself is distorted and made into the basis for a mass narrative by a media which seeks to manufacture the history of an event.

⁶Junod, Tom. "The Falling Man." *Esquire*. Sep 2003: n. Web. 19 Mar 2011. <http://www.esquire.com/features/ESQ0903-SEP_FALLINGMAN>.

⁷Junod, Tom. "The Falling Man." *Esquire*. Sep 2003: n. Web. 19 Mar 2011. <http://www.esquire.com/features/ESQ0903-SEP_FALLINGMAN>.

⁸Junod, Tom. "The Falling Man." *Esquire*. Sep 2003: n. Web. 19 Mar 2011. <http://www.esquire.com/features/ESQ0903-SEP_FALLINGMAN>.

The act of jumping to one's death or resigning oneself to death, which the subject of Richard Drew's "Falling Man" appears to have done, becomes more conceivable when the fact of the possibility of death's immediate inevitability is considered. The narrative attached to Richard Drew's "Falling Man," and the broader narrative of change which it can be understood as representing, are intimately bound with the distortative potential of the fear of death, which, at the same time, is closely bound to the idea of human consciousness. In Slavoj Žižek's "Welcome to the Desert of the Real," a short article published in the wake of the September 11 attacks, on September 15, 2001, he states that "We don't know what consequences in economy, ideology, politics[...] this event will have, but one thing is sure: the U.S., which, till now, perceived itself as an island exempted from this kind of violence, witnessing this kind of things only from the safe distance of the TV screen, is now directly involved."⁹ Even before it became clear what actions the United States would take following September 11, the attacks themselves transformed what was previously perceived as a constant flow of abstracted events, from which the United States and Americans seemed to be detached, into distinguishable *real* events, which would have a perceptible impact on American lives and the idea of America itself. In a similar way, the attacks brought the reality of violence and violent death into the consciousness of Americans, especially those within the towers. Those who jumped from the tower, like the subject of "Falling Man" thus exemplify a distortion of humanity and consciousness related to the reality and immediacy of the threat of death and destruction, which September 11 forced Americans to recognize. The reality of September 11 distorted those like Jonathan Briley, if he was actually the "Falling Man," out of any sense of their pre-September 11 selves through the creation of a scenario which would necessarily intensify each individual victim's fear of death.

⁹Žižek, Slavoj. "Welcome to the Desert of the Real." *re: constructions: Reflections on Media and Humanity after Tragedy*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 15 Sep 2001. Web. 20 Mar 2011. <<http://web.mit.edu/cms/reconstructions/interpretations/desertreal.html>>.

The attacks on the World Trade Center made death inescapable for those within the towers, a fact represented and demonstrated by photographs such as Richard Drew's "Falling Man" that emphasize the horror of September 11, and, on a broader societal level, made the mass destruction and threat of terrorism constantly broadcast by "the media" a realizable reality for Americans. The narrative of change can thus be understood as, at some level, one of threat realized and actualized in the form of the event, which has the power to distort previously held conceptions of personal and national identity and invincibility, making the past and past selves incommensurable with a present in which past fears have been removed from abstraction.

While Richard Drew's "Falling Man" seems to be indicative of a narrative constructed around the idea of September 11 representing an absolute rupture with the past, which made that past incommensurable with the present, Thomas Hoepker's photograph of five young people sitting in Williamsburg across the East River from the World Trade Center towers, from which a black cloud of smoke is emanating, seems representative of an entirely different narrative--one of unaltered, if perhaps blemished, continuity. Thomas Hoepker's photograph, one of many that he took on September 11, was not published until 2006. Still, it captures an image of September 11, 2001. The image itself is of five people sitting on the waterfront in Brooklyn, in front of the backdrop of the smoking World Trade Center. The image is hauntingly beautiful, in a way, stunningly well composed, immaculately clear and sharp, with subjects who seem not to know they are being photographed at all. The smoking tower in the background makes clear the tragic context in which the photograph was taken. In an article written for *Slate* in the midst of a controversy surrounding the publication of the photograph, Hoepker states "I think the image has touched many people exactly because it remains fuzzy and ambiguous in all its sun-drenched sharpness. On that day five years ago, sheer horror came to New York, bright and colorful like a

Hitchcock movie. And the only cloud in that blue sky was the sinister first smoke signal of a new era.”¹⁰ In a sense, what makes the image so haunting is its clarity. There is no mistaking the date or time that the photograph was taken, yet there is a need to examine and to explore the actions of the subjects for whom the background may appear to be of little import. Without the smoking tower in the background—were the photograph taken on any other day—there would be no need to explain and analyze the picture, but the smoking tower dominates the backdrop of the photograph, which was not taken on any other day, but on the morning of September 11, and there was, and perhaps still is, some need to find a narrative, or to generate one as many have attempted to do since the photograph’s publication in 2006. Among the first narratives, that were generated in an attempt to create an understanding of Thomas Hoepker’s photograph, was that presented in “Whatever Happened to the America of 9/12?”, a September 2006 *New York Times* “op-ed” piece written by Frank Rich. In the piece, Rich argues that “The young people in Mr. Hoepker's photo aren't necessarily callous[,] just American,” and further that “Traumatic as the attack on America was, 9/11 would recede quickly for many. This is a country that likes to move on, and fast.”¹¹ In his article, Rich seems to argue, using Hoepker’s photograph as both evidence and a starting point, that the dominant narrative of September 11 is one of the ability of Americans to simply forget and move on with their lives--a continuity which relies upon a sort of amnesia. Rich, in essence, constructs a sort of mass narrative out of the imagined experiences of five individuals. While his argument is, in reality, built upon larger claims about broader pieces of evidence for the impact of September 11 on life in the United States, Rich’s is a political

¹⁰Hoepker, Thomas. "I Took That 9/11 Photo." *Slate*. Washington Post/Newsweek Interactive Co. LLC, 14 Sep 2006. Web. 21 Mar 2011. <<http://www.slate.com/id/2149675/>>.

¹¹Rich, Frank. "Whatever Happened to the America of 9/12?." *New York Times* 10 Sep 2006: 2. Web. 19 Mar 2011. <<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9E06E0DC1431F933A2575AC0A9609C8B63&scp=2&sq=whatever%20happened%20to%209/12&st=cse&pagewanted=2>>.

narrative which seeks not to understand the individual experiences of those in Hoepker's photograph, but to utilize, even to exploit, perceived narratives.

While Frank Rich, in his *New York Times* article entitled "Whatever Happened to the America of 9/12?," seems to understand Thomas Hoepker's photograph as representing a narrative of continuity based upon the ability of Americans¹² to forget, some have used the photograph to articulate an understanding of a narrative of a different sort of continuity altogether, a continuity based upon the desire to discuss and to understand September 11, to recover some semblance of the life that existed before the attacks while retaining the memory of them. In an article written for *Slate*, David Plotz articulates an almost certain rejection of Rich's narrative, as he asks his readership, "Do you agree with Rich's account of it? Do these look like five New Yorkers who are "enjoying the radiant late-summer sun and chatting away"? Who have "move[d] on"? Who—in Rich's malicious, backhanded swipe—"aren't necessarily callous"?"¹³ The very syntax that Plotz utilizes in answering those very questions¹⁴ demonstrates an absolute confidence in the fallibility of Rich's claims, as he states, "The subjects are obviously engaged with each other, and they're almost certainly discussing the horrific event unfolding behind them. They have looked away from the towers for a moment not because they're bored with 9/11, but because they're citizens participating in the most important act in a democracy—civic debate."¹⁵ He argues further that "There is nothing "shocking" in this picture[, that] These New Yorkers have not turned away from Manhattan because they have turned away from 9/11[, but instead

¹²Though perhaps it would be more accurate to describe it as a narrative of the American will and ability to forget.

¹³Plotz, David. "Frank Rich is Wrong About that 9/11 Photograph: Those New Yorkers Weren't Relaxing." *Slate*. Washington Post.Newsweek Interactive Co. LLC, 13 Sep 2006. Web. 22 Mar 2011. <<http://www.slate.com/id/2149508/?nav/tap3/>>.

¹⁴Not to mention the title of the article itself.

¹⁵Plotz, David. "Frank Rich is Wrong About that 9/11 Photograph: Those New Yorkers Weren't Relaxing."

that] They have turned away from Manhattan because they have turned toward each other for solace and for debate.”¹⁶ In a strange way, the narrative that Plotz chooses to emphasize *is* a narrative of continuity, in that it is a narrative of patriotic and communal bonding of Americans, who have come together to discuss what has happened, and to grieve or find “solace” together. Hoepker’s photograph can thus be understood as reflecting a “snapshot” from one of Don DeLillo’s pre-September 11 novels, *Mao II*, which was published in 1991. In the final scene of *Mao II*, Brita Nilsson, a photographer who had previously only taken pictures of writers, is in Beirut, a city defined by what seems to be an all-encompassing violence, a city in which she has “Read a magazine piece about Beirut because what else can you read or think or talk about in a place like this.”¹⁷ The violence of the place, of the context of the city in which she is staying, precludes interest in anything else. In the scene, Brita is standing on the balcony of the East Beirut flat in which she is staying when “She leans over the rail and sees a tank come chugging around the corner into her cratered street. Mounted cannon bobbing [...] The tank moves up the street and she hears voices, sees people walking behind it [...] And here is the stunning thing that takes her a moment to understand, that this is a wedding party going by.”¹⁸ In an essay which takes its title from a line in DeLillo’s novel, Michael Rothberg argues that “The wedding in Beirut reclaims a moment of beauty from the ruins of war,” pointing out that “What is particularly striking about this wedding is the way it combines the traditional components of marriage [...] with the most unlikely of elements: a graffiti-covered tank and its mounted cannon. Instead of rejecting entirely the experiences marked as threats in the novel [,] DeLillo

¹⁶Plotz, David. “Frank Rich is Wrong About that 9/11 Photograph: Those New Yorkers Weren’t Relaxing.”

¹⁷DeLillo, Don. *Mao II*. New York: Penguin Books, 1991. Pg. 238. Print.

¹⁸DeLillo, Don. *Mao II*. Pg. 238.

brings us dangerously close to them [, as] He depicts a scene of utopian possibility.”¹⁹ The resonance between Hoepker’s and DeLillo’s narratives is thus the persistence of beauty and that which existed before “the violence,” in a world that would seem to be entirely defined by it. It is thus not a beauty that rejects or forgets that which would seem to have interrupted it, but one which takes it into account as it persists in the world of the catastrophe. The sort of tension within the narrative of continuity demonstrated by Plotz’s rejection of Rich’s analysis of Hoepker’s photograph does seem to indicate that such a narrative cannot serve as a catch-all, that there is a need for a more complex form of contextualization which rejects monolithic categories of mass narratives based upon distorted personal experiences for the understanding of September 11 and instead acknowledges a broader context as it describes and attempts to understand a much more narrow and individualized one. The effect is that the overall understanding of the event can become more complex.

While Richard Drew’s “Falling Man” and Thomas Hoepker’s photograph of five “Young people on the Brooklyn waterfront on Sept. 11”²⁰ each seem to represent broad narratives of understanding of the impact of September 11—change and continuity, with attempts to repress each of the photographs and widespread criticism of them seeming to imply a tension within each of the narratives, helping to demonstrate the need for more complex narratives. While Drew’s “Falling Man” appeared in “Hundreds of newspapers, all over the country, all over the world,” Tom Junod mentions its repression in his article about the “Falling Man,” stating “the photograph that Richard Drew took of the Falling Man ran once and never again. Papers all over

¹⁹Rothberg, Michael. “Seeing Terror, Feeling Art.” *Literature after 9/11*. Ed. Keniston, Ann and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn. New York: Routledge, 2008. Print. Pg. 127-28.

²⁰Description from Plotz, David. “Frank Rich is Wrong About that 9/11 Photograph: Those New Yorkers Weren’t Relaxing.”

the country, from the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* to the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* to *The Denver Post*, were forced to defend themselves against charges that they exploited a man's death, stripped him of his dignity, invaded his privacy, turned tragedy into leering pornography.”²¹ Eric Fischl’s “*Tumbling Woman*,”²² a sculpture, which “Depicts a naked woman with her arms and legs flailing above her head, as if in a backward somersault” and was “Meant to commemorate those who jumped or fell to their deaths from the World Trade Center,”²³ was similarly repressed, as “Andrea Peyser of the *New York Post* denounced it in a column entitled ‘Shameful Art Attack,’ in which she argued that Fischl had no right to ambush grieving New Yorkers with the very distillation of their own sadness...in which she essentially argued the right to look away.”²⁴ The repression of photographs like Drew’s and sculptures such as Fischl’s, which “Was abruptly draped in cloth and surrounded by a curtain wall,”²⁵ seems to indicate that even an artistic representation of the horror of September 11 would be too painful for people to cope with in the period shortly after the attacks and, beyond that, that representations of irrevocable change and irreparable damage were simply unacceptable. Narratives of continuity were deemed no less painful, as Thomas Hoepker repressed his own photograph of “Young people on the Brooklyn waterfront on Sept. 11,”²⁶ stating “The picture, I felt, was ambiguous and confusing: Publishing it

²¹Junod, Tom. "The Falling Man." *Esquire*. Sep 2003: n. Web. 19 Mar 2011. <http://www.esquire.com/features/ESQ0903-SEP_FALLINGMAN>.

²²Fischl, Eric. *Tumbling Woman*. 2002. Rockefeller Center. New York.

²³Holguin, Jaime. "Sept. 11 Sculpture Covered Up: 'Tumbling Woman' Meant to Honor WTC Victims, but Drew Complaints." *US. CBS News*, 19 Sep 2002. Web. 22 Mar 2011. <<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2002/09/19/national/main522528.shtml>>.

²⁴Junod, Tom. "The Falling Man." *Esquire*. Sep 2003: n. Web. 19 Mar 2011. <http://www.esquire.com/features/ESQ0903-SEP_FALLINGMAN>.

²⁵Holguin, Jaime. "Sept. 11 Sculpture Covered Up: 'Tumbling Woman' Meant to Honor WTC Victims, but Drew Complaints." *US. CBS News*, 19 Sep 2002. Web. 22 Mar 2011. <<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2002/09/19/national/main522528.shtml>>.

²⁶Description from Plotz, David. “Frank Rich is Wrong About that 9/11 Photograph: Those New Yorkers Weren’t Relaxing.”

might distort the reality as we had felt it on that historic day. I had seen and read about the outpouring of compassion of New Yorkers toward the stricken families, the acts of heroism by firefighters, police, and anonymous helpers. This shot didn't "feel right" at this moment and I put it in the "B" box of rejected images."²⁷ The photograph's subjects, for their part, are highly critical of Hoepker in e-mails written to *Slate*, as one, a photographer, states "I also have a strict policy of never taking a photograph of a person without their permission or knowledge of my intent."²⁸ Another states that, "Had Hoepker walked fifty feet over to introduce himself[,] he would have discovered a bunch of New Yorkers in the middle of an animated discussion about what had just happened."²⁹ Response to the image, especially from its subjects, helps to demonstrate the extent to which that mass-consciousness continues to define the ways in which we can respond to the event and representations of it, as the subjects argue that they were "Objectified" and defined in a way which they felt was unfair. They felt victimized, as they seemed to be portrayed as callous, uncaring, uninterested, while they claimed to be deeply concerned, and, in the picture, discussing what was happening, what had happened. They felt that they had been deprived of their right to define their subjectivities, or at least the right to defend them. Continuity thus seemed to be too painful a narrative to be a part of or to be seen in the years following September 11. In a sense, the repression of both the narratives of continuity and change demonstrates that neither could be used to gain a complete understanding of

²⁷Hoepker, Thomas. "I Took That 9/11 Photo." *Slate*. Washington Post.Newsweek Interactive Co. LLC, 14 Sep 2006. Web. 21 Mar 2011. <<http://www.slate.com/id/2149675/>>.

²⁸Schiavo, Chris and Walter Sipser. "It's *Me* in that 9/11 Photo." *Slate*. Washington Post.Newsweek Interactive Co. LLC, 13 Sep 2006. Web. 21 Mar 2011. <<http://www.slate.com/id/2149675/>>.

²⁹Schiavo, Chris and Walter Sipser. "It's *Me* in that 9/11 Photo." *Slate*. Washington Post.Newsweek Interactive Co. LLC, 13 Sep 2006. Web. 21 Mar 2011. <<http://www.slate.com/id/2149675/>>.

September 11 and the response to it, because neither could, in an extreme form, capture the complexity of emotion or impact.

Richard Drew's "Falling Man," perhaps the most famous of the countless photographs taken on September 11, can be understood as representative of the narrative which has contextualized September 11 as something of an earth-shattering event, an event that left present selves unhinged from the past selves out of which they could no longer be understood to have arisen, and the present world entirely unconnected to the world in which the "U.S. [...] perceived itself as an island exempted from this kind of violence."³⁰ Thomas Hoepker's "Young people on the Brooklyn waterfront on Sept. 11,"³¹ on the other hand, can be understood as representing a narrative of contextualization of September 11, in which past selves and ideas of self have been able to persist into the present, and in which there is a continuity of the past world into the present one, even if that continuity is perhaps blemished by the fact of September 11. While the narratives of continuity and change have become the dominant narratives for the contextualization of September 11, each has been repressed to a somewhat shocking extent. Neither the narrative that emphasizes the horror of rupture with the past, nor the narrative of the horror of the ability to move on has been accepted, as each is painful to accept and probably incomplete. As it has become evident that neither narrative can be accepted or deemed complete, the need for more comprehensive narratives that emphasize the contradiction and complexity of post-September 11 emotion and sentiment, as well as those which emphasize a narrative leading towards September 11 has become apparent.

³⁰Zizek, Slavoj. "Welcome to the Desert of the Real." *re: constructions: Reflections on Media and Humanity after Tragedy*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 15 Sep 2001. Web. 20 Mar 2011. <<http://web.mit.edu/cms/reconstructions/interpretations/desertreal.html>>.

³¹Description from Plotz, David. "Frank Rich is Wrong About that 9/11 Photograph: Those New Yorkers Weren't Relaxing."

Don DeLillo and the Counternarrative

While contextualization of literary response to September 11 has tended to constrict understanding of the events of that day to fairly monolithic mass narratives that ignore the diversity of individual experiences, Don DeLillo's works about September 11, in their emphasis on humanizing both victim and terrorist, defy contextualization in any of the mass narratives produced to understand September 11. Among the first American novelists to write about the events of September 11, Don DeLillo has been highly prolific in the past ten years and has not shied away from attempting to understand and to deal with the horror of that day in fiction or essay. While his first, and only, overt response to September 11 in fiction, *Falling Man*, was not published until 2007, DeLillo wrote "In the Ruins of the Future: *Reflections on Terror and Loss in the Shadow of September*," an essay which first appeared in *Harper's Magazine* in December of 2001, two months after the attacks on the World Trade Center.³² While DeLillo has produced primarily fiction throughout a career, which has spanned nearly four decades, rarely publishing essays, and, by reputation, rarely giving interviews³³, the insights that he presents in "In the Ruins of the Future: *Reflections on Terror and Loss in the Shadow of September*" extend beyond art and literature to a broader need for societal mourning and the formation of what he refers to as a "counter-narrative."³⁴ In critic Linda Kauffman's understanding, "The Counter-narrative's

³²It is important to remember the attack on the Pentagon, and the hijacked plane, which crashed in a field in Pennsylvania, but DeLillo has simply not addressed either in fiction or otherwise as of yet, and it seems unlikely, at this point, that he intends to do so in the future.

³³DePietro, Thomas. "Introduction." *Conversations with Don DeLillo*. Ed. Thomas DePietro. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005. Pg. vii. Print.

³⁴DeLillo, Don. "In the Ruins of the Future: Reflections on Terror and Loss in the Shadow of September." *Harper's Magazine*. Dec 2001: 33-40. Print.

provenance is in the realm of the unspeakable, the unfathomable. It does the work of mourning."³⁵ That said, DeLillo believes in the need for fiction to be a part of that counter-narrative. Don DeLillo's writing after September 11, both fiction and non-fiction, with its emphasis on a multiplicity of individual, personal, and humanizing narratives, and its application of cultural theories as a means of understanding the causes and consequences of the attacks themselves, defies contextualization as part of any mass narrative, either of continuity or of change, of unity or of exclusion, without making any sort of a moral statement with regards to the attackers or the system, or systems, which may have provoked the antipathy that caused them to carry out such a massive and violent attack.

Don DeLillo is, among American novelists, perhaps uniquely suited to deal with the events of September 11, as his relationship to the attacks themselves and his apparent preoccupation with terrorism in earlier works offers a certain credibility to his insights that may not be shared by other writers. Many literary critics seem to understand DeLillo as a sort of social or cultural critic as much as a novelist, with Thomas LeClair stating that "DeLillo's books offer a precise and thorough anthropology of the present, an account of our kinship in myths, media, and conspiracies."³⁶ Among his more frequent subjects has been terrorism, and, while many novelists dealt with terrorism and the dangers of an image-driven media prior to September 11, perhaps none did so as intensively, interestingly, or frequently as Don DeLillo. Still, DeLillo's preoccupation with terrorism throughout the 1990s can hardly be viewed as unique, as

³⁵Kauffman, Linda S. "The Wake of Terror: Don DeLillo's "In the Ruins of the Future," "Baader-Meinhof," and Falling Man." *Modern Fiction Studies* 54.2 Summer 2008. 354. *Project Muse*. Web. 25 Mar 2011. <<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/mfs/summary/v054/54.2kauffman.html>>.

³⁶ LeClair, Thomas. "An Interview with Don DeLillo." *Conversations with Don DeLillo*. Ed. Thomas DePietro. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005. Pg. 3. Print.

Benjamin Kunkel, in an essay published on the fourth anniversary of the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center, argues that,

“There was something in the American novel of what you might call the long 1990's -- from 1989 to 2001 -- at least as conspicuous as the tortured wish for emotional sincerity and the appetite for historical significance. This was -- and is, since for the novel that period is ending only now -- the extraordinary number of fictional terrorists jostling one another for our attention. About as many major authors wrote about terrorists during the 90's as did not, and you are probably more likely to meet a terrorist in the pages of a recent American novel than anyone besides a college professor.”³⁷

The frequency of the portrayal of terrorists within works of fiction prior to September 11 would seem to indicate a unique relationship, at least in the eyes of many novelists, between fiction and terror, fiction-writer and terrorist. In DeLillo's *Mao II*, the protagonist, a novelist named Bill Gray, obsesses about this relationship and theorizes that “There's a curious knot that binds novelists and terrorists[...]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.”³⁸ Gray argues further that “We're [novelists are] giving way to terror, to news of terror, to tape recorders and cameras, to radios, to bombs stashed in radios. News of disaster is the only narrative people need. The darker the news, the grander the narrative.”³⁹ DeLillo's fiction dating back even to the 1970s has addressed not only issues of terrorism and the novelist's relationship to it, but even the

³⁷Kunkel, Benjamin. "Dangerous Characters." *New York Times* 11 Sep. 2005.
http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/11/books/review/11kunkel.html?_r=1

³⁸DeLillo, Don. *Mao II*. Pg. 41. Print.

³⁹DeLillo, Don. *Mao II*. Pg. 42. Print.

World Trade Center towers themselves. In DeLillo's fifth novel, *The Players*, which was published in 1977, one character "Chillingly perceives the twin towers as being 'no less transient for all their bulk than some routine distortion of light'."⁴⁰ In *Mao II*, the towers, referred to repeatedly, are described as "Two black latex slabs that consumed the available space."⁴¹ They even appear on the cover of DeLillo's 1997 novel, *Underworld*. While it would seem to go without saying that, despite his preoccupation with terrorism and the World Trade Center towers, Don DeLillo lacks the power of prophecy, many critics and reviewers of literature have proclaimed him a prophet whose works seem to predict some of the attacks of September 11, with one of the most extreme declarations being that he is "The Nostradamus of contemporary fiction."⁴² It is thus important to state the obvious--that, while Don DeLillo has written extensively about terrorism and referenced the World Trade Center repeatedly, he is not a prophet and that claims such as Frank Rich's that "*Mao II* seems one of the most forceful harbingers, among the countless that were ignored, of the steady march of international terror toward the locus of Boston, New York and Washington,"⁴³ must be taken with a grain of salt. Still, DeLillo's insights into the dynamics of terror and the relationship between terror and fiction make him an important literary figure to look towards in the wake of attacks such as those which occurred on September 11.

On a broad, structural level, Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* is somewhat unique among works of literature written about September 11, in that it contains basically separate narratives moving respectively, in terms of both time and space, towards and away from the attack on the

⁴⁰DeLillo, Don. *Players*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977. Qtd. in Kunkel, Benjamin. "Dangerous Characters." *New York Times* 11 Sep. 2005. http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/11/books/review/11kunkel.html?_r=1.

⁴¹DeLillo, Don. *Mao II*. Pg. 165. Print.

⁴²Linklater, John. "Moving Picture." *Sunday Herald* 12 May 2007, Print.

⁴³Rich, Frank. "The Clear Blue Sky." *New York Times Book Review* 27 May 2007, Print.

World Trade Center's north tower. Whereas, in *Libra*, an earlier novel by DeLillo, which was published in 1988, "The entire thrust of the novel is toward an event—that is the assassination of President Kennedy—[...] in *Falling Man*, the novel moves away from an event [. Still,] in another sense, there is a counter-thrust in *Falling Man*, that is, there are three brief episodes that do move toward September 11 and they involve a terrorist—one of the men who is on Flight 11 headed toward Tower 1."⁴⁴ The two opposing narratives and the characters involved in them bear no conscious knowledge or thought of or about one another, at least none that is presented within the novel itself, and only meet in the moment of impact, the moment when the hijacked Flight 11, one of the "Passenger jets that [became manned missiles]"⁴⁵ on September 11, reaches its target, the north tower of the World Trade Center. While many reviewers seem to have flatly rejected the "Three brief episodes that do move toward September 11," with one, John Linklater of the *Sunday Herald*, referring to them as "Not so much tasteless as miserably executed, like chapters from the thriller Jeffrey Archer has already created from the same source material,"⁴⁶ and another, Frank Rich of the *New York Times Book Review*, who is far more laudatory of the novel as a whole, describing them as "Brief interruptions [that] seem potted, adding little beyond mellifluous writing to the journalistic record,"⁴⁷ the fact that the "terrorist" episodes are present within the text, regardless of the feelings of particular reviewers, necessitates more complex analysis. DeLillo's "Brief interruptions" add to the "journalistic record" what the *journalistic record* has failed, and, it seems, must necessarily fail to include—an understanding of the

⁴⁴"'Falling Man' Maps Emotional Aftermath of Sept. 11." *All Things Considered*. National Public Radio: 20 Jun 2007. Radio. 29 Mar 2011. <<http://www.wbur.org/npr/11223451/falling-man-maps-emotional-aftermath-of-sept-11>>.

⁴⁵DeLillo, Don. "In the Ruins of the Future: Reflections on Terror and Loss in the Shadow of September." *Harper's Magazine*. Dec 2001: 33-40. Print.

⁴⁶Linklater, John. "Moving Picture." *Sunday Herald* 12 May 2007, Print.

⁴⁷Rich, Frank. "The Clear Blue Sky." *New York Times Book Review* 27 May 2007, Print.

consciousness of those who would seem to have left behind only destruction. Don DeLillo himself has stated that he

“Had mixed feelings about it [writing about a terrorist]. [He] didn’t particularly want to write about a terrorist, particularly since it involves the death and the injuries to real people in a city that [he] love[s], but [he] also felt a sense of what we might call novelistic responsibility. [He] didn’t think [he] could tell the entire story without the presence of at least one of the men, or a fictional version of one of the men, who was involved in those attacks.”⁴⁸

The works of cultural theorists such as Slavoj Žižek can help to illuminate the reasons that Don DeLillo might have felt it necessary to include a terrorist narrative in *Falling Man*.

In *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, a collection of six essays published in 2008, Slavoj Žižek explores the dynamics of violence, and the underlying problems with the way that it is currently perceived and understood by both people and cultures, in an analysis that resonates particularly with the feeling of “novelistic responsibility,” which compelled Don DeLillo to include a “terrorist narrative” in his novel, *Falling Man*. In the introduction to *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Žižek foregrounds the issue of the paradox that he believes holds true for society’s understanding of violence, stating “At the forefront of our minds, the obvious signals of violence are acts of crime and terror, civil unrest, international conflict. But we should learn to step back, to disentangle ourselves from the fascinating lure of this directly visible ‘subjective’ violence, violence performed by a clearly identifiable agent. We need to perceive the contours of the background which generates such outbursts.”⁴⁹ Žižek describes this “background” as “objective violence,” which he divides into two categories, the first of which is

⁴⁸“Falling Man' Maps Emotional Aftermath of Sept. 11." *All Things Considered*. National Public Radio: 20 Jun 2007. Radio. 29 Mar 2011. <<http://www.wbur.org/npr/11223451/falling-man-maps-emotional-aftermath-of-sept-11>>.

“A ‘symbolic’ violence embodied in language and its forms,”⁵⁰ with the other form is perhaps more relevant to DeLillo’s novel and September 11. That form of violence is what Žižek refers to as “‘Systemic’ violence, or the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems.”⁵¹ Most significant for this particular discussion is Žižek’s assertion that

“Subjective and objective violence cannot be perceived from the same standpoint: subjective violence is experienced as such against the background of a non-violent zero level. It is seen as a perturbation of the ‘normal,’ peaceful state of affairs. However, objective violence is precisely the violence inherent to this ‘normal’ state of things. Objective violence is invisible since it sustains the very zero-level standard against which we perceive something as subjectively violent[...] It may be invisible, but it has to be taken into account if one is to make sense of what otherwise [may] seem to be ‘irrational’ explosions of subjective violence.”⁵²

September 11 can perhaps be understood to be one such “irrational” eruption of “subjective violence,” so, without presenting the perspective of the actor, the “terrorist,” DeLillo cannot tell the complete narrative of the violent act, which any reader of *Falling Man* must be perfectly aware occurred on that fateful day in 2001. Other cultural theorists have commented on the objective violence out of which the subjective act of the September 11 attacks could have arisen, with Edward Said stating that

⁴⁹Žižek, Slavoj. “Introduction: The Tyrant’s Bloody Robe.” *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*. New York: Picador USA, 2008. Pg. 1. Print.

⁵⁰Žižek, Slavoj. “Introduction: The Tyrant’s Bloody Robe.” *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*. Pg. 1. Print.

⁵¹Žižek, Slavoj. “Introduction: The Tyrant’s Bloody Robe.” *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*. Pg. 2. Print.

⁵²Žižek, Slavoj. “Introduction: The Tyrant’s Bloody Robe.” *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*. Pg. 2. Print.

“What is most depressing [in the American response to September 11] is how little time is spent trying to understand America's role in the world [...] You'd think that 'America' was a sleeping giant rather than a superpower almost constantly at war, or in some sort of conflict, all over the Islamic domains. Osama bin Laden's name and face have become so numbingly familiar to Americans as in effect to obliterate any history he and his shadowy followers might have had before they became stock symbols of everything loathsome and hateful to the collective imagination.”⁵³

While neither Edward Said nor Slavoj Žižek argues that the acts of subjective violence (the attacks of September 11) against the United States were justified, or are justifiable, their discussions of the objective forms of violence inherent in the American system of foreign diplomacy and capitalist economics serve to demonstrate that the September 11 attacks were not and cannot be understood to have been borne of an ahistorical and irrational hatred, that they must be understood in the context of the world out of which they arose if they are to be understood at all. Žižek argues that “The (relative) prosperity of the “civilized” West was bought by the export of ruthless violence and destruction into the “barbarian” *Outside*” and that “Cruel and indifferent as it may sound, we should also, now more than ever, bear in mind that the actual effect of these bombings is much more symbolic than real. The U.S. just got the taste of what goes on around the world on a daily basis.”⁵⁴ DeLillo makes a similar, but not quite equivalent, argument in his essay, “In the Ruins of the Future: *Reflections on Terror and Loss in the Shadow of September*,” in which he states “The primary target of the men who attacked the

⁵³Said, Edward. "Islam and the West are Inadequate Banners." *Observer* 16 Sep 2001: n. pag. Web. 29 Mar 2011. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2001/sep/16/september11.terrorism3>>.

⁵⁴ Žižek, Slavoj. "Welcome to the Desert of the Real." *re: constructions: Reflections on Media and Humanity after Tragedy*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 15 Sep 2001. Web. 20 Mar 2011.

Pentagon and the World Trade Centre was not the global economy. It was America that drew their fury. It was the high gloss of our modernity. It was the thrust of our technology. It was our perceived godlessness. It was the blunt force of our foreign policy. It was the power of American culture to penetrate every wall, home, life, and mind.”⁵⁵ For the terrorists in *Falling Man*, who Linda Kauffman describes as “three dimensional characterizations” of the “thumbnail sketches of the terrorists” from DeLillo’s essay,⁵⁶ “There was a feeling of lost history. They were too long in isolation. This is what they talked about, being crowded out by other cultures, other futures, the all-enfolding will of capital markets and foreign policies.”⁵⁷⁵⁸ While DeLillo understands and shares the feeling of shock and horror of the unprecedented subjective act of violence that was the September 11 attacks, he does not delude himself into the belief that they represent an irrational aberration, or that the narrative of terrorism begins with the attacks, as he states that “Terror’s response is a narrative that has been developing over years, only now becoming inescapable.”⁵⁹ While the attacks of September 11 may have created a seemingly new world for both those directly and indirectly affected by them, the subjective acts of violence

⁵⁵DeLillo, Don. "In the Ruins of the Future: Reflections on Terror and Loss in the Shadow of September." *Harper's Magazine*. Dec 2001: 33-40. Print.

⁵⁶Kauffman, Linda S. "The Wake of Terror: Don DeLillo's "In the Ruins of the Future," "Baader-Meinhof," and Falling Man." *Modern Fiction Studies* 54.2 Summer 2008. 355. *Project Muse*. Web. 30 Mar 2011. <<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/mfs/summary/v054/54.2kauffman.html>>.

⁵⁷DeLillo, Don. *Falling Man*. New York: Scribner, 2007. Pg. 80. Print.

⁵⁸These views are reflected in the opening paragraph of “In the Ruins of the Future: *Reflections on Terror and Loss in the Shadow of September*,” in which DeLillo states that “In the past decade the surge of capital markets has dominated discourse and shaped global consciousness. Multinational corporations have come to seem more vital and influential than governments. The dramatic climb of the Dow and the speed of the internet summoned us all to live permanently in the future, in the utopian glow of cyber-capital, because there is no memory there and this is where markets are uncontrolled and investment potential has no limit.”

Quote From DeLillo, Don. "In the Ruins of the Future: Reflections on Terror and Loss in the Shadow of September." *Harper's Magazine*. Dec 2001: 33-40. Print.

⁵⁹DeLillo, Don. "In the Ruins of the Future: Reflections on Terror and Loss in the Shadow of September." *Harper's Magazine*. Dec 2001: 33-40. Print.

must be seen as continuous with that past world that would seem to have prompted them. DeLillo thus uses the “Three brief episodes that do move towards September 11”⁶⁰ as a way of placing the attacks in a broader historical context, one which involves the perceived “objective violence” necessary to uphold “Our [system of] modernity,” economy, and culture. Still, DeLillo’s “terrorist narrative” fulfills another purpose, which is as a part of the broader effort at the center of his novel that seeks to understand both victim and victimized attacker as individual and human.

If the preceding discussion of the function of the terrorist narrative creates the impression that, from a detached perspective, September 11 can truly only be understood as reflecting a narrative of continuity with past events, the “main thrust” of the novel seems to indicate that a detached perspective may not be possible, especially for victims who can in no way separate themselves from what must have seemed to be unprecedented, not to mention, unexpected trauma. From its first page, Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* emphasizes the individual experience of a traumatized victim, while at the same time acknowledging more widespread effects of the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11. The novel begins, “It was not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night. He was walking north through rubble and mud and there were people running past holding towels to their faces or jackets over their heads.”⁶¹ The man “walking north through the rubble” is Keith Neudecker, a lawyer who had worked in the North Tower of the World Trade Center prior to the attacks of September 11. Keith is the central character in the novel, though he remains nameless throughout its first chapter. His vision is of apocalypse, a “World [...] of falling ash and near

⁶⁰“'Falling Man' Maps Emotional Aftermath of Sept. 11." *All Things Considered*. National Public Radio: 20 Jun 2007. Radio. 29 Mar 2011. <<http://www.wbur.org/npr/11223451/falling-man-maps-emotional-aftermath-of-sept-11>>.

⁶¹DeLillo, Don. *Falling Man*. Pg. 3. Print.

night,” a world incommensurable with any he had known in the past and one which is all-encompassing, as “The noise lay everywhere they ran, stratified sound collecting around them.”⁶² The world of the towers encloses Keith, as “He walked away from it and into it at the same time.”⁶³ The world that Keith perceives, and that which is described by the narrator, seems to make no sense whatsoever. The event, and effectively the world, which DeLillo describes in his essay, “In the Ruins of the Future: *Reflections on Terror and Loss in the Shadow of September*,” as having “No purchase on the mercies of analogy or simile,” can be described as being nothing other than what it is,⁶⁴ as analogies are barely utilized throughout the chapter, though a few “Members of the tai chi group from the park nearby [are described as] standing with hands extended at roughly chest level, elbows bent, as if all of this, themselves included, might be placed in a state of abeyance.”⁶⁵ The description of the “tai chi group” has particular relevance to a discussion of the people fleeing from what would become known as “Ground Zero,” as, at least with regards to Keith, there does not seem to be any effort to come to terms with what has happened, or any possibility that he might be able to come to terms with it early in the novel. Phrases such as “This was the world now” are repeated throughout the chapter, because rationality and understanding, in that moment, have not begun to be able to grasp the severity or the magnitude of what had happened.⁶⁶ Even the most harmless objects from the past world are either discarded (“In the street, handbags and laptops,”) or, worse, made into weapons.⁶⁷ Paper is described as “Flashing past, standard sheets with cutting edge, skimming,

⁶²DeLillo, Don. *Falling Man*. Pg. 4. Print.

⁶³DeLillo, Don. *Falling Man*. Pg. 4. Print.

⁶⁴DeLillo, Don. "In the Ruins of the Future: Reflections on Terror and Loss in the Shadow of September." *Harper's Magazine*. Dec 2001: 33-40. Print.

⁶⁵DeLillo, Don. *Falling Man*. Pg. 4. Print.

⁶⁶DeLillo, Don. *Falling Man*. Pg. 3. Print.

⁶⁷DeLillo, Don. *Falling Man*. Pg. 4. Print.

whipping past, otherworldly things in the morning pall.”⁶⁸ In his essay, DeLillo describes “The paper that came streaming out of the towers and drifted across the river to Brooklyn backyards, status reports, résumés, insurance forms. Sheets of paper driven into concrete, according to witnesses. Paper slicing into truck tyres, fixed there.”⁶⁹ Even more horrifying are the “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,” but “The world was this as well.”⁷⁰ While Keith experiences this terror and distortion alone, he is only one amongst many, each experiencing it as an individual, as “There were others behind him, thousands, filling the middle distance, a mass in near formation, people walking out of the smoke.”⁷¹ Even before they can be understood as individuals with varied consciousnesses borne out of complicated and diverse contexts, those fleeing from the towers are portrayed as victims and fugitives from a terror that cannot begin to be understood from such a close temporal and spatial proximity. Before the event can be contextualized in any meaningful way, before people can begin to form any understanding of larger forces or broader narratives at play, it is first important, necessary even, to see the effect on the individual and on the group of individuals, the trauma, to see the world in its distorted and unrecognizable state, to see it as fundamentally changed.

While there is a narrative structure implicit in Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man*, the scenes themselves seem to be isolated from one another, almost functioning as literary “still-lives” or snapshots of Keith Neudecker and those closest to him, seeming to imply a sort of fractured consciousness that can be attributed to the trauma caused by the attacks of September 11, of

⁶⁸DeLillo, Don. *Falling Man*. Pg. 3. Print.

⁶⁹DeLillo, Don. "In the Ruins of the Future: Reflections on Terror and Loss in the Shadow of September." *Harper's Magazine*. Dec 2001: 33-40. Print.

⁷⁰DeLillo, Don. *Falling Man*. Pg. 4. Print.

⁷¹DeLillo, Don. *Falling Man*. Pg. 5. Print.

which he was an immediate victim. Linda Kauffman, in her essay “World Trauma Center,” describes the novel as “A mosaic of arrested moments, still lifes of paintings, a frieze of memories.”⁷² Kauffman’s observation is reinforced by the novel’s first chapter, in which DeLillo describes the scene in Lower Manhattan in terms clearly borrowed from the vocabulary of photograph and painting composition, saying “There were others behind him, thousands, filling the middle distance.”⁷³ Perhaps the most significant of the fragmented images are those which come from within the towers. Keith has memories of arrested moments within the swaying tower, but cannot connect with any of them, cannot place himself within any of them. In his essay, “In the Ruins of the Future: *Reflections on Terror and Loss in the Shadow of September*,” DeLillo describes the role of the writer as “Beginning in the towers, trying to imagine the moment, desperately, [Trying] to give memory, tenderness and meaning to all that howling space,”⁷⁴ yet Keith, the traumatized victim and protagonist of DeLillo’s novel cannot “Find” himself within the tower, within the frozen moments. He suffers from what DeLillo refers to in an interview with Melissa Block of NPR as “Some sort of dissociative amnesia that the shock of the attacks induced in him.”⁷⁵ Keith is detached from the experience of having survived the attacks and “Refuses to discuss (much less work through) the trauma with his (potentially) soon-to-be-ex-wife, Lianne, despite her insistent entreaties.”⁷⁶ He instead turns to a woman, Florence

⁷²Kauffman, Linda S. "World Trauma Center." *American Literary History* 21.3 Fall 2009. 654. *Project Muse*. Web. 29 Mar 2011. <<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/alh/summary/v021/21.3.kauffman.html>>.

⁷³DeLillo, Don. *Falling Man*. Pg. 5. Print.

⁷⁴DeLillo, Don. "In the Ruins of the Future: *Reflections on Terror and Loss in the Shadow of September*." *Harper's Magazine*. Dec 2001: 33-40. Print.

⁷⁵"Falling Man' Maps Emotional Aftermath of Sept. 11." *All Things Considered*. National Public Radio: 20 Jun 2007. Radio. 29 Mar 2011. <<http://www.wbur.org/npr/11223451/falling-man-maps-emotional-aftermath-of-sept-11>>.

⁷⁶ Kauffman, Linda S. "World Trauma Center." *American Literary History* 21.3 Fall 2009. 653. *Project Muse*. Web. 29 Mar 2011.

Givens, who was also in the North tower of the World Trade Center at the time of the attacks. While he engages in a brief sexual affair with Florence, Keith's actual motive is a seeking after of "Memories of 'the dazed reality they'd shared in the stairwells'." ⁷⁷ As Linda Kauffman states, "Together they rehearse [or rather, she rehearses for him] the specific, ghastly moments of that day. He needs to hear her recount it again and again, 'trying to find himself in the crowd' (*Falling* 57). He cannot absorb the randomness of having survived."⁷⁸ While Florence's descriptions of "Her experiences in the same tower in which he was working" help Keith to begin to deal with the trauma of having survived the attacks on the World Trade Center, he can see himself "Only fleetingly" in her recollections.⁷⁹ DeLillo has emphasized in interviews, that "They do perhaps remember one or two of the same things. Beyond that, he is at a loss."⁸⁰ Only at the end of the novel does Keith's experience begin to come into focus, only in the moment of the attacks can DeLillo imagine himself in the towers and begin to "Give memory, tenderness and meaning to all that howling space." In that moment, in the tower, Keith "Saw himself in it, the mass and scale, and the way the thing swayed, the slow and ghostly lean."⁸¹ Keith's experience in the towers and his personal experience with trauma and "dissociative amnesia," while it may interface and overlap with that of the other victims, is uniquely his own. Even if for those who can detach themselves from the events of September 11 enough to say that *they were* what was next, that they followed the previous attempted attack on the World Trade Center,

⁷⁷ Rich, Frank. "The Clear Blue Sky." *The New York Times Book Review* 27 May 2007: 1(L). *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 17 Mar. 2011.

⁷⁸ Kauffman, Linda S. "World Trauma Center." *American Literary History* 21.3 Fall 2009. 653. *Project Muse*. Web. 29 Mar 2011.

⁷⁹ "'Falling Man' Maps Emotional Aftermath of Sept. 11." *All Things Considered*. National Public Radio: 20 Jun 2007. Radio. 29 Mar 2011.

⁸⁰ "'Falling Man' Maps Emotional Aftermath of Sept. 11." *All Things Considered*. National Public Radio: 20 Jun 2007. Radio. 29 Mar 2011.

⁸¹ DeLillo, Don. *Falling Man*. Pg. 244. Print.

for Keith, and perhaps many victims, there is a fundamental divide between the world that existed before September 11 and that which began to exist after it.⁸² DeLillo, in allowing the reader to see that moment in the tower, even if only an imagined version of it with imagined characters, who are the products of imagined circumstances, offers the possibility for a counter-narrative to develop and the grieving process to truly commence.

While Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* deals with some of the "broader subjects" and narratives surrounding September 11, on a very basic level, it seeks not merely to give human attributes to the victims in the towers, but to make them into three dimensional characters, who, just like other human beings, are flawed, imperfect. Among the primary difficulties of writing about September 11 for novelists such as DeLillo must undoubtedly be the need to be sensitive to the very real trauma and grief with which families of victims have had to continue to cope. DeLillo himself has relatives who were directly affected by the attacks on the World Trade Center, or, more specifically, by their collapse, as they were trapped in their apartment building, which was located only a few blocks away.⁸³ A part of what makes writing about the victims of September 11—those who died in the attacks—so difficult is the fact that public discourse has placed them beyond reproach, made them into saints, heroes without mortal flaws other than perhaps their very mortality. Perhaps, the media and shapers of public discourse are *right* to glorify the victims. Who would have wanted to have been reminded in the weeks after the attacks that there had been perverts, sociopaths, homewreckers, and addicts among the victims? Would the knowledge that such people were among the victims have made September 11 seem any less tragic? Could it perhaps have made the effects of the attacks seem more tragic?

⁸² DeLillo, Don. *Falling Man*. Pg. 215. Print.

⁸³ DeLillo's relatives did survive, and he tells their story in his essay, "In the Ruins of the Future: Reflections on Terror and Loss in the Shadow of September." *Harper's Magazine*. Dec 2001: 33-40. Print.

The very tragedy of the attacks, it would seem, lies in the fact that the victims were human beings, that they were flawed, but that they had, as individuals, probably done nothing to make them deserve what happened to them on September 11. Critic David Simpson, who has written extensively about September 11 and the glorification of its victims in the media, argues that

“The rhetorical colonization, within hours of the event, of Lower Manhattan as ‘sacred ground’ and the reiterated description of the dead as ‘heroes’ by the politicians seeking to make something of their deaths has effectively imposed a scrim of pious exceptionalism that has made it almost impossible to face the materialist implications of death [or the emotional implications of it for that matter].”⁸⁴

Of the *New York Times* “Portraits of Grief” obituary series, Simpson argues that “The image of a happy and fulfilled American mainstream embodied in those biographies enshrined every victim as beyond and above disappointment and firmly unconcerned with death. Their stories were sanitized just as flagrantly as they had been by the rapid removal from the mass media circulation of all pictures of falling bodies.”⁸⁵ In a bizarre way, the protagonist from DeLillo’s novel *Mao II*, Bill Gray’s understanding of the effect of terrorism and of taking hostages holds true for the *New York Times* response to the September 11 terrorist attacks embodied in the “Portraits of Grief” obituary series. Gray argues that, “When you inflict punishment on someone who is not guilty, when you fill rooms with innocent victims, you begin to empty the world of the world of meaning and [...] replace real things with plots and fictions.”⁸⁶ The writer’s response, Gray seems to believe, should be to create “A character as a way to reveal

⁸⁴ Simpson, David. “Telling It Like It Isn’t.” *Literature after 9/11*. Ed. Keniston, Ann and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn. New York: Routledge, 2008. Print. Pg. 213.

⁸⁵ Simpson, David. “Telling It Like It Isn’t.” *Literature after 9/11*. Pg. 213-214.

⁸⁶ DeLillo, Don. *Mao II*. Pg. 200.

consciousness, [to] increase the flow of meaning. This is how we reply to power and beat back our fear. By extending the pitch of consciousness and human possibility.”⁸⁷ Both the actual narrative of the terrorists who attacked the United States on September 11 and that of the media and politicians have served to populate two towers with innocent victims and to detach those victims from the very humanity that makes their deaths tragic. In his essay, David Simpson argues that the *New York Times*’ obituary series has “Played directly into the hands of those who were committed to killing a lot more people [...] in revenge for the deaths in New York, Washington, and Shanksville.”⁸⁸ While Simpson may be overstating the function of sinister intentions in the glorification of the victims of September 11, the effect of the series does, in a sense, seem to be to “Replace real things with plots and fictions,” with a narrative of “us and them.” In an article written about *Falling Man*, Linda Kauffman states that “Confronted with unassimilable horrors, one must unsentimentally confess that they are hard to bear and commit them to memory. This is a moral and political responsibility: to rescue the dead from abstraction and oblivion.”⁸⁹ In portraying Keith Neudecker, a character who could hardly be considered saintly, as one of the traumatized survivors of the attacks on the World Trade Center, DeLillo begins the process of rescuing “the dead from abstraction” and repopulating the towers with *real* victims, who, while undeserving of what befell them on September 11, are not of altogether unblemished characters. In descriptions of Keith from before the attacks, he is portrayed as far from ideal, having been separated from his wife and child. His wife Lianne’s mother, Nina, says of him that “Keith wanted a woman who’d regret what she did with him. This is his style, to get

⁸⁷ DeLillo, Don. *Mao II*. Pg. 200.

⁸⁸ Simpson, David. “Telling It Like It Isn’t.” *Literature after 9/11*. Pg. 213.

⁸⁹ Kauffman, Linda S. “The Wake of Terror: Don DeLillo’s “In the Ruins of the Future,” “Baader-Meinhof,” and *Falling Man*.” *Modern Fiction Studies* 54.2 Summer 2008. 367. *Project Muse*.

a woman to do something she'll be sorry for [...] He was built for weekends.”⁹⁰ Keith, as a character, is genuinely human and flawed. DeLillo's novel, unlike many others written about September 11, features a victim rescued from abstraction, one who is three-dimensional and not altogether innocent. In constructing Keith, DeLillo takes up Gray's writerly task of “Increasing the flow of meaning,” and of “Extending the pitch of human consciousness,” and in doing so destabilizes the mass narratives that have come to define understanding of September 11.

DeLillo's *Falling Man* seeks to emphasize not only the humanity of the victims of the September 11 attacks, but also the humanity of one of the hijackers, who is molded into a mere input in the terrorist narrative. In “The Wake of Terror: Don DeLillo's ‘In the Ruins of the Future,’ ‘Baader-Meinhof,’ and *Falling Man*,” Linda Kauffman argues that “*Falling Man* invokes [the responsibility]” to “Rescue the dead from abstraction and oblivion—including the dead terrorists.”⁹¹ During the first of the three “terrorist episodes” in *Falling Man*, Hammad, the hijacker who on Flight 11 “was either supposed to keep watch [...] outside the cockpit, or to patrol the aisle, box cutter in hand,”⁹² is described as knowing “A woman who was German, Syrian, what else, a little Turkish. She had dark eyes and a floppy body that liked contact.”⁹³ His knowledge is carnal, lustful, as, together, “They shuffled across the room toward her cot, clamped tight, with their roommate on the other side of the door studying English.”⁹⁴ With the two women, “He played crude word games, inventing nonsense rhymes in four pidgin languages,”⁹⁵ and even his fidelity to the woman with whom he is having a sexual affair is

⁹⁰ DeLillo, Don. *Falling Man*. Pg. 12. Print.

⁹¹ Kauffman, Linda S. “The Wake of Terror: Don DeLillo's ‘In the Ruins of the Future,’ ‘Baader-Meinhof,’ and *Falling Man*.” *Modern Fiction Studies* 54.2 Summer 2008. 367. *Project Muse*.

⁹² DeLillo, Don. *Falling Man*. Pg. 237. Print.

⁹³ DeLillo, Don. *Falling Man*. Pg. 81. Print.

⁹⁴ DeLillo, Don. *Falling Man*. Pg. 81. Print.

⁹⁵ DeLillo, Don. *Falling Man*. Pg. 81. Print.

compromised, as “He did a little lusting after the roommate when he saw her ride her bike.”⁹⁶ In many ways, while he is and would have to be the lethal believer that DeLillo describes in “In the Ruins of the Future: *Reflections on Terror and Loss in the Shadow of September*,” as being “Willing to die,” having “Fire of Aggrieved belief,” he seems, at first at least, to be more complex, more human than might be expected.⁹⁷ He becomes distorted by the struggle and the plot and falls under the power of Amir, whose “Full name was Mohamed Mohamed el-Amir el-Sayed Atta” and whose “Mind was in the upper skies, making sense of things, drawing things together.”⁹⁸ He ceases to be motivated by fear of being crowded out, and instead is motivated by the striking out itself, by the brotherhood with those others who he has joined in Jihad.⁹⁹ In joining a plot against a common enemy, the terrorists of September 11 reduce not only themselves, but also those they attack, to a narrative that emphasizes a dichotomy between us and them.

Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man*, with its emphasis on individual, three-dimensional characters serves to destabilize the validity of the contextualization of September 11 as being a part of either a narrative of continuity or change. DeLillo utilizes multiple perspectives, and two separate narratives in order to demonstrate the complexity of the events of September 11. He seeks simultaneously to demonstrate how, for those in the World Trade Center, and perhaps for many other Americans, September 11 would seem to have had to have divided the world between before and after, but also demonstrates that there was narrative leading to September 11 as well. He seeks to help to begin the process of mourning, while also emphasizing the shared

⁹⁶ DeLillo, Don. *Falling Man*. Pg. 82. Print.

⁹⁷ DeLillo, Don. "In the Ruins of the Future: *Reflections on Terror and Loss in the Shadow of September*." *Harper's Magazine*. Dec 2001: 33-40. Print.

⁹⁸ DeLillo, Don. *Falling Man*. Pg. 80-81. Print.

⁹⁹ DeLillo, Don. *Falling Man*. Pg. 83. Print.

humanity of both victim and terrorist in a way not seen in other novels about September 11. DeLillo resists the urge to reduce the world to a single narrative and instead emphasizes the simultaneous existence of multiple narratives.

Philip Roth's Exit Ghost

For a novelist whose fiction often seems so intensely personal as to be perceived by many casual readers and critics alike as being highly, if not merely, autobiographical, Philip Roth's fiction works are frequently heavily grounded in, and concerned with, history. While Roth's 2004 masterpiece *The Plot Against America*, considered by many to be among his finest works, seems to resonate with the atmosphere and politics of the post-September 11 United States in interesting and profound ways, it can, and perhaps should, be understood as a genuine work of historical fiction¹⁰⁰—a vision of an alternate history set in a world that perhaps could have, but never actually did exist. Perhaps the novel should then be understood, as novelist J.M. Coetzee, a towering figure in the world of contemporary fiction himself, has argued as “A realistic novel about imagined events,” “a history book, but of a fantastic kind, with its own truth, the sort of truth Aristotle had in mind when he said that poetry is truer than history,” and one which “In any sensible reading, [...] is “about” the presidency of George W. Bush [and the United States that he governed] in only the most peripheral way.”¹⁰¹ The resonance that *The Plot Against America* has

¹⁰⁰ Roth himself refers to the novel as a “uchronia” in Roth, Philip. "Essay; The Story Behind 'The Plot Against America'." *New York Times Book Review* 19 Sep 2004: n. pag. Web. 1 Apr 2011. <<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9500E7DB1338F93AA2575AC0A9629C8B63&pagewanted=2>>.

¹⁰¹ Coetzee, J. M. "What Philip Knew." *New York Review of Books* 18 Nov 2004: n. pag. Web. 1 Apr 2011. <<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2004/nov/18/what-philip-knew/>>.

with the United States of George W. Bush and September 11 is perhaps best articulated by Roth in an essay published in the *New York Times Book Review*. In the essay, Roth states that “We are ambushed, even as free Americans in a powerful republic armed to the teeth, by the unpredictability that is history,” and that “The terror of the unforeseen is what the science of history hides, turning a disaster into an epic.”¹⁰² The theme of the “terror of the unforeseen,” and the terror of that which has happened, is taken up by Roth again in his lone novel that explicitly mentions September 11, *Exit Ghost*, which was published in 2007. Roth’s novel, while frequently rejected by critics as indicating “A certain diminution of Roth’s powers, a lack of irony and a heaviness of touch,”¹⁰³ bears a need for closer analysis and provides an interesting counter-point to Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man*. Whereas the attacks of September 11 themselves, and an attempt to understand them, are at the center of DeLillo’s novel, Roth’s novel exists entirely in the post-September 11 world in the city most catastrophically effected by the attacks. Roth’s novel does not *engage* with the world of September 11 and there is little reason to believe that the author intended for it to do so, but the fact of the time and place in which it is set and the varied response of the characters to it make this text an interesting vehicle with which to analyze the impact of September 11. While the September 11 attacks, and the political reality created by them, exist almost entirely in the background of *Exit Ghost*, the diversity of response to them represented by the characters within the novel directly or indirectly calls into question the validity of monolithic narratives for the contextualization of societal response to the events of September 11.

¹⁰² Roth, Philip. "Essay; The Story Behind 'The Plot Against America'." *New York Times Book Review* 19 Sep 2004: n. pag. Web. 1 Apr 2011. <<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9500E7DB1338F93AA2575AC0A9629C8B63&pagewanted=2>>.

¹⁰³ Cartwright, Justin. "Exit Ghost, By Philip Roth." *Independent* 07 Oct 2007: n. pag. Web. 1 Apr 2011. <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/exit-ghost-by-philip-roth-395978.html>>.

In *Exit Ghost*, Philip Roth makes a conscientious effort to place September 11 firmly in the background of the novel, setting its action in post-September 11 New York City. Nathan Zuckerman, Roth's frequently reprised protagonist, who is often assumed, though perhaps incorrectly, to be his alter-ego, returns to New York City after having not "Been in New York in eleven years."¹⁰⁴ He returns to Manhattan in order "To see a urologist at Mount Sinai Hospital who specialized in performing a procedure to help the thousands of men like [him] left incontinent by prostate surgery."¹⁰⁵ The trip, in being his first to New York in eleven years, represents his first return to the city since the events of September 11 would seem to have undoubtedly altered the culture of the entire United States, not just the city that suffered the most catastrophic loss of life as a result of the attacks. Zuckerman, in fact, writes that he "Had rarely looked at a newspaper or listened to the news since 9/11, three years back," on the novel's first page.¹⁰⁶ The fact of the novel's setting does not affect its characters uniformly though.

Nathan Zuckerman's detachment from the world that he left when he fled to a cabin in the Berkshires eleven years prior to the time in which the action of *Exit Ghost* is set leads him to seem, and largely to be, unaffected by the attacks of September 11, 2001. Zuckerman, in what Philip Roth has "Promised" will be the last of the novels that feature him as a protagonist,¹⁰⁷ is dealing with the loss of the ability to exert "Somewhat more control over [his] urine flow than an infant"¹⁰⁸ and the seemingly catastrophic loss of his powers as a writer. The purpose of this statement is not to call into question the integrity of Roth's novel, but to emphasize that, at some

¹⁰⁴ Roth, Philip. *Exit Ghost*. First Vintage International Edition. New York: Vintage Books, 2007. Pg. 1. Print.

¹⁰⁵ Roth, Philip. *Exit Ghost*. Pg. 1-2. Print.

¹⁰⁶ Roth, Philip. *Exit Ghost*. Pg. 1. Print.

¹⁰⁷ Kapp, Isa. "Zuckerman in Turmoil." *California Literary Review* (2007): n. pag. Web. 3 Apr 2011. <<http://calitreview.com/279>>.

¹⁰⁸ Roth, Philip. *Exit Ghost*. Pg. 33. Print.

level, Zuckerman's actions are indicative of a struggle to come to terms with his own loss of powers. Even in the fiction he constructs within the novel—a play entitled *He and She*—, Zuckerman, or rather the character *He*, cannot summon the imaginative powers as a writer to enter into sexual congress with Jamie Logan, or the character in the play that seems to share her biography, *She*. Still, Zuckerman seems, while aware of September 11 and, to some extent, its political after-effects, not to be preoccupied with it in any way, as he states on the novel's first page, "I had ceased to inhabit not just the great world but the present moment. The impulse to be in it and of it I had long since killed."¹⁰⁹ When asked whether he has followed politics since September 11, he states "I've served my tour as exasperated liberal and indignant citizen [and] I don't wish to register an opinion, I don't want to express myself on the 'issues'—I don't even want to know what they are. It no longer suits me to know, and what doesn't suit me, I expunge."¹¹⁰ In one of the few instances of what seems to be genuine indignation with regards to the political climate of the United States under the Bush administration, Zuckerman writes of November 2, 2004, the night of George W. Bush's reelection, that "Having lived enthralled by America for nearly three quarters of a century, [he] decided no longer to be overtaken by the emotions of a child and the pain of an adult [...] After 9/11 [he] pulled the plug on the contradictions."¹¹¹ Otherwise, Zuckerman feels that he will wind up "Ranting and raving while [reading] the newspaper, and at night, on the phone with friends, roaring indignantly about the pernicious profitability for which a wounded nation's authentic patriotism was about to be exploited by an imbecilic king, and in a republic, a king in a free country with all the slogans of freedom with which American children are raised."¹¹² While other characters in the novel are

¹⁰⁹ Roth, Philip. *Exit Ghost*. Pg. 1. Print.

¹¹⁰ Roth, Philip. *Exit Ghost*. Pg. 36-37. Print.

¹¹¹ Roth, Philip. *Exit Ghost*. Pg. 69. Print.

¹¹² Roth, Philip. *Exit Ghost*. Pg. 69-70. Print.

overcome with unbearable dread by the reelection of Bush and are wrought with feelings of terror and fear following the attacks of September 11, Zuckerman is able to detach himself from the modern moment, with its irrational politics and, perhaps more rational, fear, by reminding himself of the moments that would seem to have defined his and other generations of Americans, stating of his young hosts on election night (two young writers with whom he plans to swap homes), “They were some six to eight years out of college, I thought, and so Kerry’s loss to Bush was taking a prominent place in the cluster of extreme historical shocks that would mentally shape their American kinship, as Vietnam had publicly defined their parents’ generation and as the Depression and the Second World War had organized the expectations of my parents and their friends.”¹¹³ Roth, while perhaps somewhat sensitive to the younger generation’s dismay, is not altogether devastated, and understands that such devastations as September 11, and the reelection of George W. Bush, perceived by his hosts to be equally catastrophic, while unique, are not unprecedented in their effects on the consciousness of Americans. He seems to understand the attacks as existing within a continuity of consciousness-altering events that have affected perhaps every generations of Americans.

While Philip Roth’s *Exit Ghost* does not feature any immediate victim of the September 11 attacks among its fairly compact cast of characters, or any representation of the attacks themselves (It very briefly references images of “The doll-like people leaping from the high windows of the burning towers”¹¹⁴), one of the novel’s leading characters, Jamie Logan seems to be severely affected by the attacks and the political culture that they created, or rather was created as a result of them. The novel’s protagonist, Nathan Zuckerman, meets Logan and her husband, Billy Davidoff, a “Kindhearted Jewish boy” who she “Had met in the graduate writing

¹¹³ Roth, Philip. *Exit Ghost*. Pg. 97. Print.

¹¹⁴ Roth, Philip. *Exit Ghost*. Pg. 97. Print.

program at Columbia,” when he answers an ad the couple had placed in *The New York Review of Books* looking for a home one hundred miles outside of New York City to which to move.¹¹⁵

While neither she nor her husband has, at the time that the novel is set, published a book, Jamie is the more successful member of the young couple, having “Had a short story in *The New Yorker* that had prompted inquiries about a novel from agents and publishers.”¹¹⁶ Among the difficulties with discussing Jamie Logan as a character is the existence of multiple levels of fiction operating within *Exit Ghost*. In the novel, Roth utilizes the technique of constructing an evidently fantasized and fictional “frame narrative” (Which takes the form of a play called *He and She*) within the broader fiction that forms the basic reality of the text. Even when simply narrating, and not constructing fictions of his own, Zuckerman’s rendering of events and conversations cannot be entirely trusted, as he himself is entirely conscious of the fact of his rapidly advancing memory loss¹¹⁷, however unaware of individual lapses he may be.¹¹⁸ When Zuckerman’s play is considered, it becomes very difficult to distinguish fact from fiction even within the fictional world of the novel. Jamie’s lines of dialogue within Zuckerman’s play seem thoroughly unrealistic, such to the point that they can hardly be understood as anything other than fictions borne of Zuckerman’s mind, without any real basis in anything other than his fantasies. Still, there are certain “facts” within the fictional reality that seem basically plausible and undistorted, at least not by Zuckerman’s mind or his pen. The reason for the couple’s desire to leave New York City is, as Jamie states, that she does not “Wish to be snuffed out in the name of Allah,” that she is scared of terrorism, and that “This city is at the heart of their pathology.

¹¹⁵ Roth, Philip. *Exit Ghost*. Pg. 33. Print.

¹¹⁶ Roth, Philip. *Exit Ghost*. Pg. 36. Print.

¹¹⁷ Roth, Philip. *Exit Ghost*. Pg. 105-6. Print.

¹¹⁸ Roth, Philip. *Exit Ghost*. Pg. 242. Print.

Bin Laden dreams only of evil, and he calls that evil ‘New York.’”¹¹⁹ If in the summer of 1998, as Zuckerman writes in Roth’s 2000 novel *The Human Stain*, “Terrorism—which had replaced communism as the prevailing threat to the country’s security—was succeeded by cocksucking,”¹²⁰ the events of September 11 restored terrorism to its *pre-Lewinski scandal* status as the primary threat to the security of the United States and that of Americans, or at least that of New Yorkers. As a result, Jamie claims to live in constant fear of another terrorist attack, and, while Zuckerman is not entirely convinced by her fear, he does seem to accept that it is, at some level, genuine.¹²¹ From Billy Davidoff, Jamie’s husband, Zuckerman, and thus the reader, learns that she is from an old-money (oil money) family in River Oaks, “An insular, prosperous haven of uniformity, old-money families and new-money families at the top of the Houston caste system.”¹²² Jamie’s parents are not only from Houston, but “Members of the same country club as the elder George Bush.”¹²³ Despite her privilege and previous personal success September 11 instills such a fear in Jamie that she claims to no longer be able to work, to produce fiction, in New York City. In one scene from Zuckerman’s play, the once more fictionalized version of Jamie states that she is “Nervous and afraid all the time [and has] become silent and narcissistic and obsessed with [her] own safety, and [that her] writing is awful.”¹²⁴ Jamie, in her inability to detach herself at all from the fears of the world, is wholly changed by the attacks, but not without the desire to find a life in which she can exist as she had before September 11.

¹¹⁹ Roth, Philip. *Exit Ghost*. Pg. 36. Print.

¹²⁰ Roth, Philip. *The Human Stain*. First Vintage International Edition. New York: Vintage Books, 2000. Pg. 2. Print.

¹²¹ Roth, Philip. *Exit Ghost*. Pg. 43. Print.

¹²² Roth, Philip. *Exit Ghost*. Pg. 77. Print.

¹²³ Roth, Philip. *Exit Ghost*. Pg. 88. Print.

¹²⁴ Roth, Philip. *Exit Ghost*. Pg. 126. Print.

While Nathan Zuckerman, Philip Roth's protagonist in *Exit Ghost*, seems to be largely unchanged by the catastrophe that was September 11, he does not reject altogether the notion that the attacks could have had devastating and consciousness-altering effects on others. Zuckerman himself seems to understand the terrorist attacks of September 11, and the reelection of President George W. Bush, as events which would define and change a younger generation in ways that perhaps the Vietnam War had defined his own. Jamie Logan is, at one level of the fiction present in *Exit Ghost*, crippled by the attacks and, in some sense, defined by them, but Nathan Zuckerman places that defining event, perhaps *generation-defining*, in the context of other events that had similar impacts on other generations. September 11 can thus be understood as an event, which, while not necessarily unprecedented in its effect on the consciousnesses of Americans, affected a younger generation of Americans in a way that their generation may not have been previously affected.

Conclusion

While attempts to codify the ways in which September 11 has been contextualized by fiction-writers have tended to understand the events of that day as representing *either* an absolute rupture with the past *or* a continuity with it, novelists such as Don DeLillo and Philip Roth have emphasized the experiences of fictionalized individuals within the towers and the world that seemed to exist after their fall to construct more complex narratives of the meanings of the attacks against the World Trade Center. While the mass narratives constructed for the contextualization of September 11 have frequently utilized individual experience, they have only done so in order to construct broader, frequently political or politicizing, narratives that defy the

very individual experiences out of which they are constructed. Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* and Philip Roth's *Exit Ghost* destabilize such narratives by both bringing in a broader history and focusing upon a diversity of individual experiences with the attacks and their aftermath. In a 2007 interview with Melissa Block of NPR, DeLillo mused "It's curious to think what a fiction writer can do as opposed to a journalist or a historian. They say that journalism is the first draft of history and maybe, in a curious way, fiction is the final draft. Not because it's more truthful or more permanent than the work of historians, but because it can enter unknown territory—That is, a writer can work his way into the impact of history on interior lives."¹²⁵ In *Falling Man* and *Exit Ghost*, Don DeLillo and Philip Roth, respectively, attempt to demonstrate the effect of history on interior lives, creating narratives that cannot be contextualized as reinforcing categories so simple and constricting as those of continuity and change.

In *Falling Man*, Don DeLillo effectively constructs characters who are both thoroughly human and individual, with the novel itself seeming to exist simultaneously within the narratives of both continuity and change. Keith Neudecker, the protagonist of DeLillo's novel, is working in the North Tower of the World Trade Center when it is struck by Flight 11. The first scene of the novel depicts Keith fleeing the not-yet-collapsed towers, "Walking north through rubble and mud."¹²⁶ While Keith is something of a hero, having attempted to save his friend, Rumsey, the memory of whom haunts him throughout the entire novel, he is not a blameless or altogether innocent individual, and, in the descriptions of him from before the attacks, he is not portrayed as one. Unlike those described in the *New York Times* "Portraits of Grief" obituary series, Keith Neudecker is constructed as a three-dimensional character, thoroughly human, if flawed and, at times, of contemptible disposition. His world is shattered by the attacks though, and he has

¹²⁵ "'Falling Man' Maps Emotional Aftermath of Sept. 11." *All Things Considered*. National Public Radio: 20 Jun 2007. Radio. 29 Mar 2011.

¹²⁶ DeLillo, Don. *Falling Man*. Pg. 1. Print.

difficulty connecting with anything from the world that existed before the attacks.¹²⁷ His is a world fundamentally *changed* by the attacks. How could it not be? Still, narratives of change are not the only ones that exist within Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*.

While the narrative of Keith Neudecker, a fictional victim of the September 11 attacks, is at the center of Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, the novel also features the story of one of the hijackers aboard Flight 11, which struck the North Tower of the World Trade Center, in which Keith had been working as a lawyer. The three episodes in which Hammad is featured progress towards the attacks on the World Trade Center, and chart his movement from Hamburg, Germany, first to a terrorist training camp, then to a small town in Florida in which he obtained flight training, and finally to his movement aboard Flight 11 along the Hudson Corridor towards the North Tower of the World Trade Center. The narrative reaches its conclusion the moment that the plane crashes into the North Tower of the World Trade Center. Hammad's narrative serves two primary purposes, the first of which is to emphasize the contiguity of the September 11 attacks with the world that preceded them. The events of September 11 were not, and should not be, considered an irrational aberration, as they arose out of a specific set of historical, political, cultural, and economic circumstances. The second purpose of Hammad's narrative is to demonstrate the humanity of the attackers. Before Hammad was bound in a plot and a brotherhood with his fellow hijackers, he existed as an individual, whom one could hardly term a religious fundamentalist or a political extremist. By giving himself to the narrative constructed by Mohammed Atta, a fictionalized construction of whom exists within DeLillo's novel, Hammad reduces himself and those against whom he is carrying out his attack into inputs in a plot. Still, his individuality is not entirely sacrificed by his acceptance of the terrorist cause as he

¹²⁷ Kauffman, Linda S. "World Trauma Center." *American Literary History* 21.3 Fall 2009. 653. *Project Muse*. Web. 29 Mar 2011.

continues to question the justification for such catastrophic loss of life well into the process of his preparation. Hammad is thus presented as a terrorist, but not merely as an effigy.

Don DeLillo is perhaps unique among American novelists responding to the events of September 11 in his focus on the exact moment of impact of the first flight into the first of the World Trade Center towers, and his inclusion of both a terrorist narrative moving towards September 11 and a counter-narrative moving away from it, the effect of which is to destabilize dichotomies constructed for the contextualization of September 11. Among the narratives destabilized by DeLillo's novel are those of continuity and change, and of concrete division between the consciousness of those who carried out the attacks and those who were affected by them. DeLillo, in *Falling Man*, rescues both victim and attacker from oblivion and obscurity by giving human characteristics to each. On a broader scale, he effectively demonstrates that the conditions that led the "September 11 terrorists" to carry out their subjective acts of violence arose out of the *world* that preceded the attacks, while emphasizing that that contiguity with the past need not be perceived as such by those whose *world* was changed by them.

Unlike Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, Philip Roth's *Exit Ghost* does not focus on the September 11 attacks themselves, and can hardly be understood to truly be about them, as they exist primarily in the background of Roth's novel, serving as a part of the temporal setting. Still, it is difficult to ignore the fact that *Exit Ghost* is the first of Roth's novels to be set explicitly in the post-September 11 world and the first of his novels featuring Nathan Zuckerman as a protagonist to be set even partially in New York City since *The Human Stain*, which was published in 2000. The 1997 novel *American Pastoral* was the last in which Zuckerman himself actually traveled to the city. While hardly *about* September 11, *Exit Ghost* does seem to address the climate of fear that seems to have arisen from them.

From the frequent references to September 11 that appear throughout Philip Roth's *Exit Ghost*, a more complex narrative for the contextualization of the attacks on the World Trade Center begins to take form, one which seems to present the events of September 11 as existing as a part of a narrative of a continuity of changes. While the characters in the novel seem to be affected by the attacks in a variety of different ways, with Nathan Zuckerman, the novel's protagonist, seemingly unaffected by them and Jamie Logan, another character in the novel and Zuckerman's romantic interest, seemingly devastated by them, there is a synthesis of narratives that seems to arise in the text. Zuckerman, while himself unaffected by the attacks, understands them as existing within a tradition of events which seem to indelibly alter the consciousness of a generation. He understands that, for those of a younger generation (such as Jamie Logan), the events of September 11 may have wholly undermined their understanding of the world and caused them to live in terror, even if he is not entirely convinced that they have had that effect on her.

Whereas many have attempted to create an understanding of September 11 as existing within a narrative of continuity or change, the works of writers such as Don DeLillo and Philip Roth have emphasized the need for narratives of far greater complexity. The complicated history surrounding the events of September 11 cannot and should not be simplified to fit into monolithic categories which defy complexity and individual experience. If September 11 indelibly altered the history of the United States, it is important to understand the events of that day in the context of events which in the past have altered the consciousness of Americans and also in the context of America's role in the world. And, if September 11 did not change the United States and the world, it is important to remember those whose lives were indelibly altered by the events of that day. Novelists have only begun to attempt to understand the September 11

attacks in fiction, but some of those who have done so, especially Philip Roth and Don DeLillo, have emphasized the complexity of the circumstances which led to and arose from the attacks on the World Trade Center, on both an individual and a broad, societal level.

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