# Terrorism, Precarity, Security: 9/11 Revisited

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**Abstract**

This essay re-examines 9/11 through the twin lenses of security and precarity. As Judith Butler writes, Americans experienced "something like the loss of their First Worldism" in 2001 (*Precarious Life* 39). What followed – a profound reconfiguration of the security paradigm – was coupled with an unprecedented wave of anti-intellectualism. In this essay, I examine Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007), as a response to that national crisis of confidence. Centred on the idea of bare life – encapsulated by the image of a body in free fall – the novel strips back the dominant affects of national affront and retributive violence, in which, as Giorgio Agamben argues, terrorism and security reinforce each other in an escalating cycle, showing how a different mode of mourning and survival might begin in the rubble of the towers. For Butler, the urgent and difficult task underscored by 9/11 is that of imagining a new basis for community on the ground of our shared vulnerability. *Falling Man* begins that work, showing us 9/11 afresh, as a revelation of collective precarity.

On September 11 2001, what can be said with certainty is that the US was forced to confront a stark and unexpected realisation of its own precarity. A nation complacent in its superpower status, America was compelled by Al Qaeda's assault to re-examine its security, especially its capacities and mechanisms for self-defence. This necessary process of self-analysis, however, rapidly led to something much more, a fundamental shift in the security paradigm that went, for the most part, unquestioned and unchallenged by a shell-shocked and compliant media. Not only did this paradigm shift involve an unprecedented privatization of the apparatus of defence, it also entailed a rolling back of long-celebrated legal and democratic protections, as well as a weakening of the public sphere as a space for the supervision of power. As Judith Butler writes in *Precarious Life*, an authorised narrative frame for understanding its violence of 9/11 quickly became hegemonic, which worked to preclude any questioning of the assumption that America's meaning and destiny lay in the reassertion of global domination and supremacy. "Perhaps the question cannot be heard at all, but I would still like to ask: Can we find another meaning, and another possibility, [allowing us] to emerge from the narrative perspective of US unilateralism and, as it were, its defensive structures, to consider the ways in which our lives are profoundly implicated in the lives of others" (7), she says. The profound disquiet out of which Butler writes can also be found in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, one of the most important literary responses to September 11. While Butler's idiom is primarily political and philosophical discussion, DeLillo's offering works on a quite different level. Explicit political discussion is confined to a few pages, and in no way does the novel present itself as a riposte to the Bush policy agenda *per se*, or even to the politics of continual war. Instead, what DeLillo does is to return us to 9/11 itself, in order to rethink the meaning of that event in fundamentally different terms. Its central image is that of a single man, in free fall to his death from the North Tower. From this starting point—a spectacle of ultimate human precarity—the novel begins to chip away at the question of how an individual, a city, or a nation might survive such violence and such trauma, without simply reflecting them back on others. In this respect, the imaginative boldness of *Falling Man* has been little recognised by

critics. For Butler, the key question to be asked in the wake of that event was whether, both in America's unaccustomed exposure to violence and in the recognition of its complicity in it, a new way of thinking about community might be discovered. Perhaps *Falling Man* does not provide a complete answer to that challenge, but it does attempt a process of re-imagining that might bring such an answer closer.

## Terrorism, Precarity, Security

After the events of 11 September 2001, it took a long time for US authorities to quantify the extent of the damage that had been inflicted on the US by a small group of jihadi terrorists. Several years passed before the number of people who had died in the attacks or as a result of them could be accurately estimated. Similarly, the economic impact of that day proved very difficult to assess, with the costs of physical reconstruction, heightened homeland security, and the associated military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq soon running to hundreds of billions. On the cultural level, however, one major effect of the attacks was almost immediately apparent: the incredible rupture they had created in the established narrative of American exceptionalism. "Most Americans have probably experienced something like the loss of their First Worldism as a result of the events of September 11 and its aftermath," Judith Butler writes in *Precarious Life*. "What kind of loss is this? It is the loss of the prerogative, only and always, to be the one who transgresses the sovereign boundaries of other states, but never to be in the position of having one's own boundaries transgressed" (39).

The US, whose simultaneous interventionism and inviolability in the post-Cold War era had increasingly come to be seen as unchallengeable, discovered on September 11 how abruptly it could be reconstituted as a target, exposed and vulnerable. As Butler suggests, common responses among Americans included "anxiety, rage: a radical desire for security, a shoring-up of the borders against what is perceived as alien" (39). In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, such instincts were starkly apparent in the reactions of President George W. Bush. According to his own account in *Decision Points*, Bush initially struggled to comprehend

that such an assault could happen. As the reality sank in, he was then filled with an overwhelming desire for revenge. "My blood was boiling. We were going to find out who did this and kick their ass," he writes. "I hated the idea of terrorists putting me on the run" (128-30). Press Secretary Ari Fleischer's handwritten notes reveal how, as the hours passed, the president's anger and appetite for retribution against the attackers intensified. "We're going to get the bastards," he informed Vice President Cheney by telephone from Air Force One (qtd. in Lusher). Addressing the nation from the Oval Office later that day, he spoke of the victims as "moms, dads, friends and neighbours" whose lives had been cut short by "evil, despicable acts of terror." As president, he assured Americans that he had devoted "the full resources of our intelligence and law enforcement communities to find those responsible and to bring them to justice." The American military stood powerful and prepared, but what was needed above all was that "Americans from all walks of life unite in our resolve for justice and peace" (*Public Papers*, 1099-1100).

Over the next few days, however, a very different approach evolved. Rather than a focussed campaign to identify, capture, and punish the architects and facilitators of 9/11, on September 20 Bush announced the commencement of an open-ended and apparently unwinnable war on "Terror" itself. "Our War on Terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there," he told a joint session of the US Congress. "It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated." For the foreseeable future, he made clear, America would inhabit a new state of exception, a condition of ongoing war, calling for a major reshaping of both foreign and homeland security policy. "We have suffered great loss," he said. "And in our grief and anger we have found our mission and our moment."

In the sense developed by Foucault, Agamben, and others, I want to suggest, this move from the idea of punishing terrorists to the proposition of a war against Terror itself represented a highly significant paradigm shift, away from the framework of democracy and law and towards that of security. In *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault attempts to elucidate the nature of this shift by setting out a quasi-historical progression in governmental consciousness, in which the legal/juridical, on

the one hand, and the disciplinary, on the other, give way to security thinking. In this scheme, the way in which the legal/juridical operates is essentially by defining a range of prohibited acts (such as murder) and prescribing a punishment for them. In the second formation–the disciplinary–power intervenes on a different level, installing "a series of adjacent, detective, medical and psychological techniques […] which fall within the domain of surveillance, diagnosis, and the possible transformation of individuals" (5). For Foucault, it is important to understand, the fundamental way security consciousness departs from these frameworks is not through an intensification of intelligence or defensive or military deployments in themselves, even if these follow in its wake. Instead, its defining characteristic is a form of stepping back, by means of which the population and the system in its totality, rather than the individual, become the targets of intervention.

> Putting it in a [...] general way, the apparatus of security inserts the phenomenon in question [such as murder] within a series of probable events. Second, the reactions of power to this phenomenon are inserted in a calculation of cost. Finally, third, instead of a binary division between the permitted and the prohibited, one establishes an average considered as optimal on the one hand, and, on the other, a bandwidth of the acceptable that must not be exceeded. In this way, a completely different distribution of things and mechanisms takes shape. (6)

Where the techniques of law, and of disciplinary society, can be seen as designed to maximise obedience and conformity, for Foucault, the goal of security is rather different: to manage uncertainty, including ranges of acceptable loss, and in particular to minimize disruption to social and economic flows and processes. Within this understanding, Bush's immediate reaction to the September 11 attacks, "[w]e're going to get the bastards," could be characterised as a legal/juridical response, defined by an appetite for just retribution. The "War on Terror," as soon became clear however, represented a development of a different order.

After the discovery of America's new-found precarity as a result of the attacks, Americans did of course see a tightening of laws as well as the creation of new institutional structures, such as the Department of Homeland Security itself. Both the Patriot Act of 2001 and the Homeland Security Act of 2002 undoubtedly did pave the way for an intensification of disciplinary techniques including surveillance. There was large-scale intervention in institutional systems of all kinds, including a wholescale reappraisal of the failed intelligence and policing apparatus and a radical review of government spending. What Bush's War on Terror rapidly enabled under cover of these reviews, however, was something else: the ascendancy of a newly emboldened, expansionist security paradigm, driven by neo-liberal economics, amounting to a major reconfiguration of the relationship between the private and the public sectors. In this sense–under cover of an unprecedented national emergency–the driving agenda of Bush's War on Terror was as much to open up the fields of defence and security to American corporations as it was to wage a campaign to defend the homeland. As early as November 2001, as Naomi Klein writes in *The Shock Doctrine*, the Department of Defense took steps to recruit and assemble a new force in government, a group of "venture capitalist consultants" from the dot-com sector, to assist the US government in the conduct of the War on Terror. By 2006, this group "had become an official arm of the Pentagon: the Defense Venture Catalyst Initiative (DeVenCI)" whose function was to provide a continual feed of security information to "politically connected venture capitalists" (299-300).[1] As Klein argues, "[a]lthough the stated goal was fighting terrorism, the effect was the creation of […] a full-fledged new economy in homeland security, privatized war and disaster reconstruction" (299). Beginning in late 2001, she reports, the Department of Homeland Security and other security agencies paid out an average of 68 billion dollars a year to private security firms operating in the US and its theatres of war. At the same time, funding from the Pentagon to private contractors increased by an unprecedented 137 billion per annum. In 2003 alone, public funds to the tune of 327 billion were chan-

[1] Quotation from Defense Venture Catalyst Initiative, "An Overview of the Defense Venture Capitalist Initiative," www.devenci.dtic.mil (now defunct).

nelled to private companies by the Bush administration. In December of that year, at the 'Rebuilding Iraq' conference in Washington D.C., representatives from hundreds of US corporations were urged, in no uncertain terms, to start bidding for the proceeds of Iraqi oil:

> Once that oil starts flowing, money is coming – there's going to be lots of money. It's the second largest reserve of oil in the world. There's no question how much money is there. And it's going to get better. Start building relationships, because it's going to get much better, as the oil flows and budgets increase. The good news is, whatever it costs, the government will pay you (qtd. in Moore).

As Klein argues, from a military perspective the "sprawling and amorphous" objectives and parameters of the War on Terror made it essentially unwinnable. It was also incredibly costly in American lives. By the end of the Bush presidency, operations Enduring Freedom (in Afghanistan) and Iraqi Freedom had left many more Americans dead than were lost in 9/11—over 5,000 according to figures published by the Department of Defense, with a further 30,000 wounded, many of them in life-changing ways. To use Foucault's terminology, these casualties evidently fell within a "bandwidth of the acceptable" (6) within the new security paradigm. On a macroeconomic level, however, the expansive and open-ended nature of Bush's mission constituted an enormous opportunity for the corporate sector. As was made clear from the outset, as Klein says, what the administration envisaged was not "a flash-in-the-pan war that could potentially be won but a new permanent fixture in the global economic architecture" (301). In this sense, as Giorgio Agamben had predicted in an article for the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung only nine days after 9/11, terrorism and the War on Terror could already be seen as falling into a kind of symbiosis. While terrorism thrived on the continuing global coverage and intensity of reaction engendered by 9/11 and its aftermath, the US's campaign, ostensibly to secure its national security, was also being seen in terms of the unique opportunities it promised for a floundering American economy. In Agamben's

words, the risk was beginning to realise itself that, fuelled by their confluence of interests, "security and terrorism may form a single deadly system, in which they justify and legitimate each other's actions."

For Foucault, as I have suggested, a defining characteristic of security consciousness is a form of stepping back, in which the smooth running of (especially economic) systems is safeguarded, through interventions which may entail "acceptable" losses in human terms, as well as modifications or circumventions of law. In the case of Bush's War on Terror, as many have observed, the overwhelming tendency on the part of the US media in response to this was unquestioningly and uncritically to reproduce the discourse of Bush's White House. Writing in the *New Yorker* on September 24, Susan Sontag was among the small minority to voice the alarm felt by many intellectuals in the face of this quietism and conformity. Underneath the "self-righteous drivel and outright deceptions being peddled by public figures and TV commentators," she argued, democratic debate was being systematically suppressed. Particularly notable was the media's blanket refusal to consider the roots and causes of anti-American sentiment abroad, an obvious and necessary framework within which the attacks needed to be thought through. "Those in public office have let us know that they consider their task to be a manipulative one: confidence-building and grief management," she suggested. "Politics, the politics of a democracy—which entails disagreement, which promotes candor—has been replaced by psychotherapy. Let's by all means grieve together. But let's not be stupid together" (qtd. in Kibblesmith 2001). In 2004–three years into the campaign in Afghanistan and a year into the second Iraq War–this problematic situation largely remained. In *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler warned of the dangerous myopia of a commentariat who–unquestioning of the seismic changes taking place in security policy–continued to reproduce a prescribed narrative of American hurt and righteousness retribution. What was needed from writers and intellectuals in such times, she suggested, was not supine conformity but rather the courage to imagine a different way of mourning and surviving 9/11 and its aftermath, one capable of breaking from the authorized revenge script. "This means, in part, hearing beyond what we are able to hear. And it means as well being

open to narration that decenters us from our supremacy," she argued. "Only then do we reach the disposition to get to the 'root' of violence, and begin to offer another vision of the future than that which perpetuates violence in the name of denying it" (18). At the time she was writing, DeLillo was still drawing together the elements he needed to write *Falling Man*. As I will argue later in this essay, however, his starting point would be exactly the same: an acknowledgement of the shared condition of precarity that 9/11 had exposed.

From the beginning, the War on Terror narrative as dispensed from the Bush White House had been built around a 'for us or against us' binary, directly recapitulating the imperialist opposition of civilization to barbarism, *Precarious Life* argues. In the press, as Erin Steuter and Deborah Wills have shown, the dehumanization of Muslims—especially as vermin—had quickly become routine (Steuter and Wills). At the same time, however, a more radical form of othering had also established itself, in which the media determinedly turned its gaze away from the mass casualties inflicted by America's continuing military action. While a vast and continual memorial for the American victims of 9/11 continued to fill TV airtime and newspaper column inches, an almost unimaginable number of deaths (including, they estimate, those of 200,000 Iraqi children) were vanishing into a black hole of silence. Frames of perception had become hegemonic, embodying a fundamental denial of collectivity, in which grieving of one kind had become compulsory while the names of other dead were rendered effectively unutterable. Such prohibitions are not merely prejudicious, as Butler argues, but always politically saturated. Not only do they work to "shore up a nationalism based on military aims and practices," they also have the effect of suppressing "any internal dissent that would expose the concrete, human effects of its violence" (38). In this sense, the War on Terror narrative that institutionalised itself in the US after 9/11 had not only facilitated a major reorientation of government policy, but also a serious weakening of the public sphere as a space for debate and the supervision of power. Under cover of a rhetoric of exceptionality, and a *de facto* ban on debate, significant legal prohibitions were being rolled back. For those deemed to pose a threat to the security of the US, neither internationally recog-

nised human rights, nor judicially recognised principles of due process were being extended. In the new security paradigm, she continued to argue in *Frames of War*, the assertion of American supremacy, the dehumanization and disavowal of the enemy, and the suppression of dissent went hand in hand. Whether in Guantanamo or in the coverage of the American media, an enemy that was not acknowledged as human was one for whom the privileges and protections of human rights were no longer deemed to apply. Away from public supervision, it was no longer taboo for such an enemy to be subjected to exceptional techniques of power and confinement that transgressed international norms of conflict and the framework of law. In the discourse of the Bush White House, such exceptional measures continued to be required because the wickedness and hostility America now faced was itself inexhaustible. For Bush, the field of conflict was no longer–as in the Cold War–between rival state actors and their spheres of influence, but with the forces of a spectral enemy, "Terror," against which no protection was enough. In this sense, America's ultimate foe was neither Al Qaeda nor the Taliban nor Saddam Hussein–any of whom might conceivably be defeated–but "evil" and "evildoers" (Perez-Rivas), whose limitless hostility to liberty, freedom, and democracy would continue to justify an equally unending deployment of force.

## 9/11 Revisited: Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*

As Özden Sözalan writes in *The American Nightmare*, DeLillo did not begin to write *Falling Man* as an immediate reaction to the events of 2001, but in an attitude of dismay, the day after the re-election of George Bush in 2004. Like Butler, amid the mood of passive compliance to the new security paradigm described above, he felt that a "counter-weight" (5) was needed, one that a different view of 9/11 might begin to provide. At that time in early 2004, few works of literary fiction on the attacks and their legacy had yet emerged. More broadly and especially outside the US, however, he was by no means alone. Internationally, the politics of unending war had begun to attract sustained and widespread opposition. By the start of Bush's second term in office, as M. Kent Bol-

ton says, the controversial justifications for, and conduct of the second Iraq war had substantially weakened support for the ongoing conflict among many of America's allies. In 2005, the *Washington Post* underlined this, reporting that international opposition to the war was growing "because of what many Europeans see as dubious U.S. tactics in the broader fight against terrorism, including the use of secret prisons and abusive interrogations" (Anderson). The paper quoted Daniel Keohane, a researcher at the Center for European Reform in London: "most Europeans . . . feel that the U.S. is part of the problem now and is causing more damage by staying and should just admit it got things wrong and leave." Certainly, as the immediate atmosphere of crisis engendered by 9/11 waned and diminished, what Sontag had disparaged as the "infantilizing" rhetoric of the Bush White House no longer enjoyed the respectful reception it had done in 2001. The time had come, as DeLillo's novel showed, when a fundamentally different representation of 9/11 was possible: a narrative of people struggling to assimilate their newly discovered precarity.

From its very beginning, in a conscious redeployment of War on Terror thematics, what DeLillo first underscores in *Falling Man* is the "shock and awe" of the attacks. The reader is plunged straight into the scene in downtown Manhattan at the peak of the crisis, as the roar of the South Tower's collapse fills the air, transforming one of America's iconic urban spaces into a new "time and space of falling ash and near night" (3). All around, he describes the paraphernalia of everyday life–papers, shoes, handbags, laptops–scattered like so much detritus. Later in the novel, we view the scene from a different perspective as, sure of their righteousness in death, the terrorists fulfil their mission, bathed in "heat, then fuel, then fire" (239) as the hijacked plane penetrates the building. At the moment of impact, DeLillo dissolves the terrorist-eye-view into that of an office worker inside the tower (the protagonist Keith Neudecker), small and disorientated in the face of the assault. In a strikingly cinematic sequence, we see the ceiling lift and ripple, before the whole building begins to sway in a long dreamlike arc. Objects begin raining from above while the air fills with the stench of burning, as

those inside consider "the space they had to cover to street level" (241), the thin precarious line separating death from survival.

As this indicates, DeLillo's treatment of the attacks in these framing scenes is self-consciously filmic and spectacular. As such, what the novel points to, right from the start, is the dynamic of spectatorship that ran to the heart of 9/11 as an event. Only five days after the attacks, as Graley Herren writes in an article on the novel, the composer Karlheinz Stockhausen had suffered vitriolic denunciation for suggesting this, when he described the event in its totality, as "the greatest work of art" (171) or one-act performance conceivable. That such comments should receive a negative reaction at a time of tragedy is not difficult to understand. Nevertheless, the insight Stockhausen had put into words was also an inescapable one:

> Al-Qaeda's motives were not artistic per se, but its methods might as well have been, choreographing and staging the attacks as visual spectacles geared toward maximum impact on a global audience. Furthermore, the choice of stages could not have been more emblematic, and the attack on the World Trade Center in particular was deliberately designed to displace an American icon with a jihadist counter-icon. (171)

In this sense, *Falling Man* undoubtedly concerns itself with the symbolic impact of 9/11 as a public act of terror. At the same time, however, its narrative is also a very personal and intimate one, studying the experience of one survivor, Keith Neudecker, and the effects the event has in his life. In a narrative that circles more than it progresses, DeLillo also weaves in the perspectives of a variety of other characters: Keith's wife Lianne, who runs weekly therapy sessions for people with early-stage Alzheimer's, his mother-in-law Nina and her politically-minded partner Martin, and a lover, Florence, whose briefcase Keith has randomly saved from the towers. In broken scenes, we are shown something of the terrorists themselves—anxious, fallible humans as much as 'evil-doers'—as they prepare for and carry out the attack. Osama bin Laden is

also introduced in a deliberately quirky, indirect way through a group of children who, having misheard his name, spend hours anxiously searching the skies for the return of "Bill Lawton." Most enigmatic and provocative, meanwhile, is the figure of David Janiak, a performance artist who, in different parts of New York City, takes it upon himself to re-enact the tragedy in a unique and disturbing way.

Through Janiak's performance, as well as through a number of other allusions, DeLillo's novel repeatedly draws the reader back to the idea of precarity through one particular, defining image of 9/11: Richard Drew's depiction of a man falling to his death from the North Tower, subsequently known as "The Falling Man." In the photograph, the doomed man plunges head first, arrow-like, against rigorous vertical lines formed by the towers' still-intact facades. One of the most emotive representations of September 11, it had been reproduced in hundreds of newspapers immediately following the attacks, before abruptly disappearing from the US media a few days later. As Tom Junod wrote in an essay for *Esquire* in 2003, this iconic representation in fact presented the World Trade Centre attacks in a very stylized way. It was not this that provoked such a powerful negative reaction, however. Rather, it was the powerful way in which Drew's image worked to define 9/11 through an image of radical human exposure. As Junod says:

> In the most photographed and videotaped day in the history of the world, the images of people jumping were the only images that became, by consensus, taboo—the only images from which Americans were proud to avert their eyes. All over the world, people saw the human stream debouch from the top of the North Tower, but here in the United States, we saw these images only until the networks decided not to allow such a harrowing view, out of respect for the families of those so publicly dying. At CNN, the footage was shown live, before people working in the newsroom knew what was happening; then, after what Walter Isaacson, who was then chairman of the network's news bureau, calls "agonized discussions" with the "standards guy," it was shown only if

> people in it were blurred and unidentifiable; then it was not shown at all.

"Falling Man" was one of a continuous run of frames shot by Drew from which, working on-the-fly with the aid of his laptop, he selected the most compelling. In fact, as the adjacent frames in the sequence show, the man in the photograph did not fall with the power and grace suggested by his chosen image, but plunged to his death in a chaotic spin, his white shirt ripped violently off by the force of the fall, a moment after "Falling Man" was captured.

DeLillo's use of this proscribed image as a defining motif in his text–including in the novel's title–is central to its re-figuration of 9/11. On the second page of the novel, he begins with a dark, oblique reference, as escaping from the North Tower a few minutes before its collapse, protagonist Keith sees a white shirt, ripped from its owner, drifting down in the smoke. The novel's closing words reinforce the same image as we see the shirt again, "arms waving like nothing in this life" (246). In the scene inside the tower, DeLillo provides a more chillingly direct reference, as a figure in a white shirt flashes past the window. On the morning of September 12, Keith's wife Lianne sees the photograph itself for the first time, along with most other Americans, but it is not until later that she considers it more closely:

> The man headlong, the towers behind him. The mass of the towers filled the frame of the picture. The man falling, the towers contiguous, she thought, behind him. The enormous soaring lines, the vertical column stripes. The man with blood on his shirt, she thought, or burn marks, and the effect of the columns behind him, the composition, she thought, darker stripes for the nearer tower, the north, lighter for the other, and the mass, the immensity of it, and the man set almost precisely between the rows of darker and lighter stripes. Headlong, free fall, she thought, and this picture burned a hole in her mind and heart, dear God, he was a falling angel and his beauty was horrific. (221-2)

In "Falling Man," Drew had encapsulated the idea of 9/11 in an image of ultimate precarity, a body reduced to bare life, with death the only certainty. In the novel, DeLillo takes this image and re-frames it as an artwork-within-an-artwork, through David Janiak's performances. Each of these events, enacted for impromptu gatherings of New Yorkers throughout the city, features a precipitous leap from a roof, balcony, bridge or other structure, followed by a fall and an eventual coming to rest, mid-air, in the instantly recognisable pose from which, in Junod's phrase, Americans had so determinedly averted their eyes. Halfway through the novel, Lianne is witness to one of his falls as, dressed as an office worker, he waits poised above a railway track, waiting for the moving carriage full of passengers that, at the moment of his fall, will complete the tableau.

By endlessly re-enacting the death of the un-named worker and re-presenting it as public *spectacle*, Janiak's performance self-consciously fuses the elements that had rendered Drew's photograph so infamous: precarity and exposure. On the one hand, as Lianne realizes, the complicity of an audience is central to the piece's meaning. "She was the photograph, the photosensitive surface. That nameless body coming down, this was hers to record and absorb" (223). On the other hand, as she discovers when she hears of Janiak's death, however, each of his falls is also painful and injurious. One of them leaves his spine so damaged that he has to be hospitalized. At the same time that his performance partakes of the dynamic of collective spectatorship implicit in Drew's photograph, in other words, the gradual breaking of his body over time also mirrors, in slow motion, the catastrophic demise faced by Drew's subject. DeLillo's drawing of Janiak, in this sense, is radical indeed. By incrementally enacting the death faced by those lost, his performance actualises, or makes physically manifest for the people of New York, the unhealed wound they also share as survivors.

In DeLillo's novel, the problem or question raised by this artwork-within-an-artwork runs to the heart of the 9/11 experience–how to mourn in the wake of catastrophic trauma and loss. As Judith Butler suggests in *Precarious Life*, "[p]erhaps mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation (perhaps one should say *submitting* to a transfor-

mation) the full result of which one cannot know in advance" (21). In terms of personal grieving, that transformation may entail an acknowledgement that in losing others, something of oneself is also lost. On a broader political level, she argues however, what the experience of loss can also expose is our fundamental dependency as socially constituted beings. "Maybe when we undergo what we do, something about who we are is revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that these ties constitute what we are, ties or bonds that compose us" (22). In the novel, and particularly in DeLillo's drawing of the survivor Keith, this idea of the transformative and potentially redemptive power of traumatic loss is central. From the outset, DeLillo presents his protagonist as a man who, although he has escaped death in the attacks, has nevertheless been altered by them in fundamental ways. Much like America itself, he has been a man of independence and self-sufficiency before 9/11 reconstituted him unexpectedly as exposed and vulnerable. Early in the narrative, when he appears in the doorway of his estranged wife's apartment, covered in blood, ash, and glass, as if "up from the dead" (8), he bears obvious physical marks of trauma. At the hospital, he is told by a healthcare worker to look out for the emergence of lesions on his body, where "organic shrapnel" (16), tiny pellets of flesh from the exploded bodies of the attackers, may have penetrated his skin. As the novel immediately begins to suggest, however, the event has also changed him in more profound ways. He no longer recognises his apartment as home. "Here he was, seen clear, with nothing that mattered to him in these two and a half rooms, dim and still, in a faint odor of nonoccupancy" (26). Unexpectedly and against his will, the effect of 9/11 has been to confront this ostensibly whole and successful American male with the emptiness and inanity of a life defined by "the blood guilt tracings of severed connections" (27).

From this condition, the novel suggests no painless path of rehabilitation. In the case of Lianne, we see a conscious effort to draw back from the anger and paranoia she had felt in the wake of the attacks. A woman who, in a febrile post-traumatic state, had physically assaulted a neighbour for playing Islamic music, we later see her trying to find refuge in a shared God, mirroring the efforts of her friends who "were try-

ing earnestly to learn something, find something that might help them think more deeply into the question of Islam" (231). Three years after the planes, Keith has given up his life as a corporate functionary for an existence apparently no less alienated, playing poker with strangers on the Las Vegas strip. Whether the game represents therapy, or displacement for him remains ambiguous. Within it, however, the disclosure of his precarity pursues him like a haunting:

> The point was one of invalidation. Nothing else pertained. Only this had binding force. He folded six more hands, then went all-in. Make them bleed. Make them spill their precious losers' blood. These were the days after and now the years, a thousand heaving dreams, the trapped man, the fixed limbs, the dream of paralysis, the gasping man, the dream of asphyxiation, the dream of helplessness. (230)

On September 11, by instinct more than design, what DeLillo's protagonist discovers is not the need for revenge, but the necessity of connection. As the narrative draws to a close, his new existence may seem bleak, but like a spark of hope, this is the recognition that persists. Between the games, "[h]e was going home periodically, three or four days, love, sex, fatherhood" (197), the narrator informs us. Painfully, DeLillo shows him inching towards a new mode of survival, slowly learning to re-connect. The 9/11 survivor, *Falling Man* suggests, remains a precarious being, but one for whom redemption is not ultimately barred.

In the "counter-weight" that is *Falling Man*, as I have suggested, DeLillo makes no attempt to provide a systematic critique of the neo-liberal security paradigm that became hegemonic under Bush's presidency. Though terrorism and conflict are among its subject matters, the novel does not engage directly with the politics of unending war described with so much concern by Klein and others. What it does, instead, is to redraw 9/11 as a revelation of precarity, a collective wound whose proper healing will be contingent, not on counter-violence or retribution, but on an acceptance of dependency. One of Judith Butler's concerns, working in a very different idiom in *Precarious Life* and *Frames of War*, is to

call attention to the dangerous blind-spotting of the casualties of Bush's War on Terror. As she argues, "the frames through which we apprehend or, indeed, fail to apprehend the lives of others as lost or injured" deeply mark our politics (Frames of War 1). Just as importantly, as *Falling Man* suggests however, the ways in which we apprehend and react to our own condition of injury and loss also profoundly shape the frames though which we think and perceive. In this sense, to recognize "precariousness as a shared condition of human life" (13) is also to think afresh about the meaning of connectivity.

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## Biography

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