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Writing the Precarious Self in *Falling Man*

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The terrorist attacks on American soil of 11 September 2001 have reminded people how easily they can be submitted to the will of the other. This article will analyse how literature, and more particularly post-9/11 literature, deals with a new world order where the self seems to have become subjected to terrorism, being today its potential victim rather than a subject. More precisely, how have American novelists dealt with the demise of the sovereign self after the attacks of 11 September 2001 and what is the role played by memory? Focusing on *Falling Man* (2007) by Don DeLillo, this article will demonstrate the importance of art and literature to fight against the demise of the sovereign self.

Introduction: Literature and 9/11

One of the main consequences of terrorist attacks is that they make one realize how vulnerable the self is to the other's will. Suddenly, the self loses the capacity to make decisions and gradually becomes subjected to those of others, no matter how definite or radical they may be. Owing to the arbitrary nature of such terrorist attacks, the sovereign self is at risk of becoming subjected to the destructive desire of others, which might cause unexpected and violent death. This has been even truer since 9/11, when 19 terrorists crashed four planes into American landmarks and symbols of American power, for the whole world to see. The impact of these attacks has been of major importance not only because they have been the first ones occurring on American soil since Pearl Harbor but also on account of the number of victims – around 3000 died and 6000 people were hurt (Holloway 2008, 1). Therefore, 9/11 can without doubt be considered as a traumatic event which goes beyond the range of usual human experience.

Writing about the attacks, Paul Auster (2003, 506) states that '[...] so, the twenty-first century finally begins'. Although these attacks are seen as a turning point in world history, their effect on literature has been slightly different. One cannot really speak about a complete rupture in literature before and after 9/11.

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In their book *Literature after 9/11,* Ann Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn assert that they

> refuse to interpret 9/11 *either* as a rupture with the past *or* as continuous with (and even anticipated by) earlier historical events. [. . .] We might say, then, that the history of literary representations of 9/11 can be characterized by the *transition* from narratives of rupture to narratives of continuity. (Keniston and Quinn 2008, 3; emphasis in original)

They describe post-9/11 literature as an evolving and hybrid genre, which deals with both the description of the attacks and their aftermath, either in New York and the US or in more global terms. Furthermore, according to Birgit Däwes, 9/11 literature can be defined as 'a predominantly self-reflexive genre. [. . .] [T]hese novels offer revisions of national (and transnational) affiliations, and thus allow for more general conclusions about processes of identity construction in the twenty-first century' (Däwes 2011, 24). Indeed, after facing the possibility and the random nature of death produced by terrorism, the subject has to reconstruct one's altered identity. Literature is one way of engaging with these processes of identity construction, with this new dependence between the self and the other. The self becomes liable to damage or harm, especially from aggression or attack by the other, which refers to the very definition of being vulnerable according to the *OED*: 'susceptible to physical or emotional attack or harm' and an individual who may be 'open to attack or injury of a non-physical nature; esp., offering an opening to the attacks of raillery, criticism, calumny, etc.' (*The Oxford English Dictionary* 2015, n.p.)

Consequently, a central question in post-9/11 literature is that of the vulnerability of the self that is submitted to the other, and the way writing can help come to grips with it. According to Judith Butler, after 9/11 people have to deal with the fact that 'there are others out there on whom my life depends, people I do not know and may never know. This fundamental dependency on anonymous others is not a condition that I can will away' (Butler 2006, xii). There is no question any more of an autonomous self that can be built without any attention to the other. On the contrary, it has become necessary to learn how to live with the influence of the other on the sovereign self because of the interdependence that links them. Because of this interdependence, life has become much more precarious, in the sense that it has become dependent on chance and uncertainty.

In this sense, Jean Michel Ganteau and Susana Onega lay stress on the importance of visibility of trauma and the wound when they claim:

> This short excursus through the field of trauma theory points to the visibility of the wound in contemporary culture, which does not imply that there are more wounds than there used to be, but that the evolution of psychology, psychiatry, psychoanalysis, media coverage, and a shifting system of empathy and sympathy for the pain of the other have come to vindicate the centrality of trauma as a paradigmatic or exemplary framework [. . .]. (Ganteau and Onega 2017, 2)

What is striking here is the link between visibility, media coverage and trauma, as these aspects seem to have a direct resonance with post-9/11 literature. Media

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coverage is indeed one of the particularities of the 9/11 attacks; they have been filmed and then televised worldwide, underlining the significance of images nowadays. This raises the question of how contemporary writers address the specific loss of sovereignty stemming from a terrorist attack that most people have seen or watched as well as the trauma that can occur from these attacks. Published in 2007, *Falling Man* is Don DeLillo's long awaited post-9/11 novel and a perfect illustration of the preponderance of images as well as the role they play in reconstructing the self after a traumatic event. Moreover, the novel emphasizes the role of literature in defining the predicament of the self. In Peter Boxall's words,

> the contemporary novel is engaged in an extraordinarily intimate refashioning of the ties which bind us in our environments. In doing so, it suggests that the novel is one of the most powerful and inventive critical tools we have to address the emerging conditions of a new being in the world. (Boxall 2013, 14)

DeLillo's novel perfectly identifies this statement, exploring the ties that link us to a post-catastrophe environment.

Falling Man depicts the story of a survivor of the attacks, Keith Neudecker, who was working in the World Trade Center when the planes crashed into the towers. He made it out alive, but not without witnessing the death of one of his close friends and co-workers. The three parts of the novel – which all focus on Keith's, his wife Lianne's, and their family's struggle after 9/11 through the voice (mostly) of an omniscient narrator – are interspersed with three smaller narratives concentrating on one of the terrorists, Hammad. Moreover, each part includes different chapters divided into small vignettes. Through this fragmented narrative, the reader follows not only the fallout of the attacks, but also, as Linda Kauffman points out, 'the disconnect that exists between America's self-image and its image in the eyes of the world, laying stress on the loss of sovereignty of a larger self, America itself' (Kauffman 2010, 21).The demise of the self is therefore depicted not only at a personal scale, but also at a much larger one of the nation. Keith, around whom the narrative evolves, is a direct victim of the attacks, as he is described wounded both physically and psychologically: 'Doctors in scrubs and paper masks checked his airway and took blood-pressure readings. [. . .] They told him things he could not absorb about a ligament or cartilage, a tear or sprain. Someone took the glass out of his face' (DeLillo 2007, 15). Disoriented after his escape from the World Trade Center, he wanders home, and tries to resume a family life with his wife Lianne (whom he had left) and their son Justin. As for Lianne, she also deals with the loss of memory through Alzheimer's. Her father committed suicide after being diagnosed with the illness and she works with a group of Alzheimer's patients and makes them write what they still remember. Both Keith and Lianne have a direct link with memory, although in two different ways: Keith's memory is the memory of trauma, the memory of the one who cannot forget, whereas Lianne's memory is that of Alzheimer's, of the one who is afraid to forget. A third character is intrinsically linked to memory: Falling Man, a performance artist who stages his fall – although with the safety of a harness – throughout New York. He appears at intervals in the

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novel and he is each time witnessed by Lianne. As stated by LaCapra (2001, 41), 'trauma is a disruptive experience that disarticulates the self and creates holes in existence; it has belated effects that are controlled only with difficulty and perhaps never fully mastered'. In his novel, DeLillo insists on the disruptive character of trauma, mainly through this eponymous character, the performance artist named Falling Man, who acts as a reminder of the trauma caused by the attacks of 9/11.

Considering the role of memory after being exposed to a traumatic event, this article will aim at analysing *Falling Man* as a representative of the significance of memory to overcome the loss of the sovereign self after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. In order to do so, I will first discuss the importance of art to remember and confront the demise of the self. Then, the depiction of the physical and psychological demise of the self through a specific illness associated with memory, Alzheimer's, will be discussed in order to analyse the various proceedings used by DeLillo to tackle the portrayal of human vulnerability when confronted with terror and trauma.

Staging the Self and Performing Terror

The eponymous character, Falling Man, embodies the well-known photograph taken by Richard Drew on 11 September 2001. His camera captured a man falling head first from the towers, which appeared behind him on the picture. Although it was published by several newspapers on 12 September 2001, it was afterward removed from publication, for it was deemed too appalling and unbearable: 'Press censorship was imposed not from above, by government or press bureaucracies, but from below, by untold numbers of readers who were outraged by the visual recording of the event' (Leps 2010, 195). Tom Junod best recalls the story of this picture and how it was withdrawn from newspapers and magazines:

> [Richard Drew] sent the image to the AP's server. The next morning, it appeared on page seven of *The New York Times*. It appeared in hundreds of newspapers, all over the country, all over the world. The man inside the frame – the Falling Man – was not identified. [. . .] In most American newspapers, the photograph that Richard Drew took of the *Falling Man* ran once and never again. Papers all over 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. Most letters of complaint stated the obvious: that someone seeing the picture had to know who it was. (Junod 2003, n.p., original emphasis)

The example of this photograph, and the fact that it 'ran once and never again', as well as the necessity for the newspapers to justify their choice to run it, underline that the demise of the self after 9/11 and the falling bodies representing it are best left unseen, or they might shock the reader/viewer. However, literature is here to conjure up these images that the press have mainly tried to conceal and some writers have

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found ways to talk about them, albeit obliquely. Cathy Caruth underlines the link between trauma and narrative by stating that

> trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. (Caruth 1996, 4)

Because of their intolerable nature, these visions need to be addressed properly. On the one hand they are among the hardest images from that day, but, on the other hand, they do participate in the memory of the event. Moreover, the obvious visual character of 9/11 forces writers to deal with and question the representation of deaths which, though concealed from the public, were seen live at first, as was the destruction of the towers.[1] Thus, visuality is intermingled with the terrorist attacks and literature is one way of addressing this link (Onega and Ganteau 2017, 1–18). As Laura Frost reminds us,

> [...] the falling people are central to 9/11 storytelling in literary narrative. While there are strong commonalities among artistic and literary representations of 9/11's falling bodies, literature both responds to visual culture and [...] often offers a critique of the common idea that visual culture is the medium best suited to representing 9/11. (Frost 2008, 184)

Literature also has a part to play in depicting and memorializing the dead of 9/11. The Falling Man appears from time to time in the novel, not revealing his identity and choosing to impose the vision of his falling body to passers-by. Staging Drew's photograph to the letter, he reminds those who witness his performances of an event they would rather forget:

> A man was dangling there, above the street, upside down. He wore a business suit, one leg bent up, arms at his side. A safety harness was barely visible, emerging from his trousers at the straightened leg and fastened to the decorative rail of the viaduct.
>
> She'd heard of him, a performance artist known as Falling Man. He'd appeared several times in the last week, unannounced, in various parts of the city, suspended from one or another structure, always upside down, wearing a suit, a tie and dress shoes. He brought it back, of course, those stark moments in the burning towers when people fell or were forced to jump. (DeLillo 2007, 33)

The pose of the performance artist, because it re-enacts Drew's photograph so clearly, turns into the figuration of the emotional wound caused by 9/11. Translating the traumatic history of 9/11 into literature becomes a way to remember the deaths of that day.

Just like the sheer panic of 11 September, Falling Man's appearances are answered with alarm and fear, as is shown by the reaction of a woman witnessing

1. This is, for instance, what Jonathan Safran Foer does in his novel *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005). The last pages are a flip-book in which the reader sees the falling man going up towards the sky. This is an example of the wish of the writer to address the falling men and women of 9/11 obliquely, and to find new ways of depicting them.

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one of his performances: 'What are you doing? [. . .] I call nine one one.' (DeLillo 2007, 163). The incomprehension and the emergency of this reaction recall that of 9/11, even though the apparitions of Falling Man are mere performances. Nevertheless, the public does not know that, because the harness the artist uses is concealed from vision: 'These people had not seen him attach the safety harness. They would only see him fall out of sight' (DeLillo 2007, 165). John Duvall best comments on the importance of the performer's art as far as remembering the demise of the self is concerned:

> Janiak's art is not primarily representational; rather, it carries with it an element of witness precisely because of its effect on his unsuspecting audience: Janiak's art, in other words, allows his viewers themselves to become witnesses of the horror. Rather than simply represent what happened when people jumped from the World Trade Center, Janiak's art extends the moment of 9/11 into the present. By doing so, DeLillo suggests that his imagined performance artist creates an art commensurate with the tragedy. (Duvall 2011, 161)

According to Duvall, the performer presents the fall to the witnesses rather than making them the witnesses of the traumatic event. His performances prolong the feeling of horror of the distressing falls. Stretching the horror to the present is a way to make people remember their own vulnerability, which some of them would rather forget, as the reactions in the novel show. Lianne herself remarks that '[h]e brought it back, of course, those stark moments in the burning towers when people fell or were forced to jump' (DeLillo 2007, 33). Forcing the passers-by to relieve this experience, he establishes a link between them and himself and illustrates how, as Onega and Ganteau (2017, 5) state, 'the wound is the trace of a relation, including a link to the other's wound'. The artist is indeed insulted and even arrested by the police, which underlines the uncomfortable feelings he brings in people through his performances: 'Traffic was barely moving now. There were people shouting up at him, outraged at the spectacle [. . .]' (DeLillo 2007, 33). Even the mayor of New York despises him: 'MAYOR SAYS FALL MAN MORONIC' (DeLillo 2007, 222).

Thus, the performances of the artist blur the lines between the self and the other, forcing the passers-by to become witnesses to an act they, like Lianne, whose husband Keith made it alive from the burning World Trade Center, would rather not experience again. The stillness of the body dangling in the air is too powerful a vision of human vulnerability, and lays emphasis on the 'fundamental dependency on anonymous others' (Butler 2006, xii), which explains the disquiet of the witnesses. Their reactions are mainly hostile: 'There were people [. . .] outraged at [. . .] the puppetry of human desperation' (DeLillo 2007, 61). The choice of the noun 'puppetry', that suggests a lifeless body, devoid of humanity, lays emphasis on the lack of sovereignty thereof. The passers-by are not just ill at ease when confronted with the man, but disapprove of the act itself, as their shouts suggest. They are dependent on his action, which forces them to remember 9/11 and the falling bodies, and they wish they could just look somewhere else.

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The performer stages an image that represents vulnerability and is used to the end of the novel, as even he himself finally ends up dead. The announcement of his death occurs in the narration the same way his jumps do, as if just in passing:

> [Lianne] came across the obituary late one night, looking at newspaper that was six days old. [...] The account of his life and death was brief and sketchy, written in haste to make a deadline, she thought [...] There was no photograph, not of the man and not of acts that had made him, for time, a notorious figure. These acts were noted in a single sentence, pointing out that he was the performance artist known as Falling Man. (DeLillo 2007, 218–219)

Even if his name is given in his obituary, the performer artist is still referred to as Falling Man and keeps a universal dimension. His identity remains multiple and indefinite because he stands for all the women and men that fell that day, acting as a sort of synecdoche. The artist's name is finally revealed only at the end of the novel, once Lianne has learned about his death and searches for more information about it in newspapers and on the internet. David Janiak – a name the reader has known in fact for the last third of the book, as it is the name given to the last part – is the man behind the mask of the Falling Man. Once again, the delay in naming emphasizes the link between the trauma of both the performer and his witnesses. The postponement of the revelation of the name, of the performer's identity, also lays stress more broadly on the difficulty of addressing, of naming the un-representable. This quest for the man's identity becomes a pretext to the only description of Drew's picture in the novel, ending on the description of the artist as a fallen angel:

> 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. (DeLillo 2007, 221–222)

The ekphrasis of Drew's photograph tends to the sublime, blending both horror – the death of the man – and beauty in the composition, and announces not only the fall of the performer, but also the fact that everyone now has to live with this fall in mind. Death is pictured by the photograph and provokes feeling in the other, as the exclamation of Lianne, 'dear God', highlights. This symbolizes one's interconnectedness with her/his environment. As Judith Butler (2010, 25) reminds us, '[l]ives are by definition precarious: they can be expunged at will or by accident; their persistence is in no sense guaranteed'.

However, the choice of re-enacting these falls through the character Falling Man is also a means to stand up to the repudiation of Drew's picture and restores memory to the crowd, as was the wish of DeLillo in his essay 'In the Ruins of the Future' (2001). According to DeLillo, '[t]he writer tries to give memory, tenderness, and meaning to all that howling space' (DeLillo 2001, 37). In a way, the performances

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fill in the shirt that appears at the beginning and the end of the novel and gives them substance:

> There was something else then, outside all this, not belonging to this, aloft. He watched it coming down. A shirt came down out of the high smoke, a shirt lifted and drifting in the scant light and then falling again, down toward the river. (DeLillo 2007, 4)

> He could not stop seeing it, twenty feet away, an instant of something sideways, going past the window, white shirt, hand up, falling before he saw it. [...] Then he saw a shirt come down of the sky. He walked and saw it fall, arms waving like nothing in this life. (DeLillo 2007, 242–246)

This shirt seen and described by Keith is understood by some critics as being a person, not only a shirt:

> The shirt, which stands in for an actual body, is 'like nothing in this life' because before 9/11, there was no referent for this type of death in the U.S. The shirt is also a placeholder for death and absence, much like the towers themselves, reminding us inescapably of real bodies, real lives, and the fact that this event happened. (Harack 2013, 330)

This image echoes the performance of the artist, because of the mention of the 'arms waving' and the 'hand up', and underlines the importance of his art to pay tribute to the victims, to remember, but also to memorialize 9/11. The artist thus really acts as a *memento mori*, reminding the characters and the readers of their own mortality and precariousness. As Butler points out: 'Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure' (Butler 2006, 20). Her words almost seem to summarize the actions of the performance artist; he is confronted by the violence of the others because they are disturbed by his action, which consists of exposing his act to the crowd in order to keep the memory of 9/11 alive.

Alzheimer's and Failing Memories

Memory in DeLillo's novel is also tackled through a particular disease; Alzheimer's. Lianne works with a group of patients suffering from the illness and tries to help them as best as she can through different talking therapies. Thus, DeLillo not only links trauma to memory, but also underlines the importance of language to remember trauma, and more particularly the events of 9/11. As a progressive mental deterioration, due to the generalized degeneration of the brain, Alzheimer's is a disease that has a direct impact on memory and on the construction of the self. Jesse Ballenger underlines the ambivalence of the identity of the subject suffering from Alzheimer's by stating that 'the unresolved tension between the assertion at the person with Alzheimer's disease loses selfhood and yet retains an essential humanity' (Ballenger 2006, 139). Because he becomes unable to remember, the

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subject loses parts of his identity. In DeLillo's novel, this loss is also parallel to that of language: 'It was in the language, the inverted letters, the lost word at the end of a struggling sentence' (DeLillo 2007, 30). These failing letters and words are the first clues of the loss of identity itself. Alzheimer's is linked in the novel both to personal stories and to the larger History of the United States. On the one hand, Lianne has a strong link with this disease. Her father was diagnosed with Alzheimer's but decided to kill himself rather than go through the decay that accompanies it. Besides the grief of her father's death, she also has to deal with the fear of being sick herself one day and of passing the illness on to her son, Justin: 'Lianne herself, bearing her father's mark, the potential toll of plaque and twisted filaments, had to look at this woman and see the crime of it, the loss of memory, personality and identity, the lapse into eventual protein stupor.' (DeLillo 2007, 125). On the other hand, this disease affects not only the characters, but can also be read as having a larger impact. Concerning this, Kauffman states that

> Alzheimer's is a metaphor for the post-9/11 condition. That condition is progressing exponentially: history is receding more and more rapidly from us – along with our will, imagination and power to anchor it in anything approaching the familiar. Nor can we fathom what the future holds, except to acknowledge that it will not resemble the past. (Kauffman 2010, 31)

Through the illness, DeLillo stages a quite literal loss of the self and memory. When it comes to the worst, the patients suffering from Alzheimer's do not know who they are anymore, cannot remember their name and address and finally lose their whole identity. The sovereign self is thus completely submitted to the disease and life is no longer possible without help. The choice of the illness to put the consequences of 9/11 into words also lays emphasis on the experiences of precariousness lived both by the victims of the terrorist attacks and the Alzheimer's patients. In both cases, both memory and language are affected and it becomes impossible to talk about the catastrophe and/or the vulnerability that results from it. Versluys reminds us that in DeLillo's novel, 'the Alzheimer patients [...] [s]ynechdochically [...] stand for the entropic drift of society, where things tend to come apart' (Versluys 2009, 35). There is no more sense of a community anymore; it is crumbled. The whole world has changed and become foreign and beyond recognition. The self is not the same before and after the event. Lianne almost fails to recognize Keith when he knocks on her door. By comparing him to a child, she states that '[f]inally we walked to the hospital. Walked, step by step, like walking a child' (DeLillo 2007, 9). The fall that the sovereign self experiences both through the attacks and the effects of this illness is central to its demise, and Alzheimer's becomes 'the image within which the condition of the American people after the attacks can gaze at itself: the subject is condemned to a kind of weightlessness or a constant fall' (Kauffman 2010, 32).

Thus, the motif of the fall, which was physical at first, later becomes psychological. This is illustrated through different slips of the tongue and lapse of concentration, such as the memory lapses that Lianne herself experiences although she is not sick: 'She was troubled by memory lapses, steeped in family

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history' (DeLillo 2007, 187), '[she] had trouble remembering their names at first and called them the Siblings and soon the name stuck' (DeLillo 2007, 16), 'Katie and what's-his-name' (DeLillo 2007, 39). These failures of memory represent the insecurity to which the self is confronted when words themselves start failing, when one cannot express himself anymore or name things and people. They reinforce Lianne's fear of the disease; she cannot help but think that she will soon be sick, like her father. This fear can be read as a symptom of the general condition of the post-9/11 American society, where the fear of the attacks remains vivid.

Another striking example of the demise of the self caused by the illness is that of Curtis B., one of the Alzheimer's patients. He first loses his watch, then the ability to use it, as can be read in the following episode:

> Curtis B. could not find his wristwatch. When he found it, finally, in the medicine cabinet, he could not seem to attach it to his wrist. There it was, the watch. He said this gravely. There it was in my right hand. But the right hand could not find its way to the left wrist. There was a spatial void, or a visual gap, a rift in his field of vision, and it took him some time to make the connection, hand to wrist, pointed end of wrist band into buckle. To Curtis this was a moral flaw, a sin of self-betrayal. (DeLillo 2007, 95)

The loss of the watch has a direct influence on the experience of time. The sudden impossibility to access it suggests that the end of Curtis' life is near and that time is limited. The illness invades both time and space and gives no way out to the self. The irony in this extract comes from the fact that the watch is finally found in the medicine cabinet, the content of which is not enough to counteract the illness. In Derrida's acceptation, time is equivocal and becomes a *pharmakon*; it is both poison – it kills – and remedy, for the watch is hidden amongst the medications:

> If the *pharmakon* is 'ambivalent,' it is because it constitutes the medium in which opposites are opposed, the movement and the play that link them among themselves, reverses them or makes one side cross over into the other (soul/body, good/evil, inside/outside, memory/forgetfulness, speech/writing, etc.). (Derrida 1981, 127)

The stress laid on ambivalence emphasizes the state of precariousness in which Alzheimer's patients find themselves because their memory can fail them any time.

Conclusion: Writing against Illness, Forgetting and Trauma

Once again, the only way to fight against the illness bringing the demise of the self seems to be art, and more precisely writing and language. Indeed, according to James W. Pennebaker

> Writing about the thoughts and feelings associated with traumas [...] forces individuals to bring together the many facets of overwhelmingly complicated events. Once people can distill complex experiences into more understandable packages, they can begin to move beyond the trauma. (Pennebaker 1992, 193)

In the novel, DeLillo fosters the role of literature in representing traumatic events, especially through the story of Lianne and her group of patients. Lianne lays

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emphasis on the importance of writing to give back meaning to lives that wear away. Writing allows the patients to put together parts of their lives that tend to disappear and to reconstruct their selves at the same time through their histories:

> They wrote for roughly twenty minutes and then each, in turn, read aloud what he or she had written. Sometimes it scared her, the first signs of halting responses, the losses and failings, the grim prefigurings that issued now and then from a mind beginning to slide away from the adhesive friction that makes an individual possible. (DeLillo 2007, 30)

The illness contaminates both writing and language and the fall seems to be inescapable, but at the same time, writing brings hope and laughter. It is through writing that memories resurface, delivering 'une parole en souffrance' to use Marc Amfreville's (2009) words, meaning both suffering and still outstanding words. Besides, the act of writing becomes a form of scriptotherapy, defined by Suzette Henke as

> the process of writing out and writing through traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic reenactment. [...] the authorial effort to reconstruct a story of psychological debilitation could offer potential for mental healing and begin to alleviate persistent symptoms of numbing, dysphoria, and uncontrollable flashbacks. (Henke 1998, xii)

The writing workshop thus becomes a metaphor of the difficulty writers experienced after 9/11. Besides, writing becomes a space of both remembering and commemoration, in order to give space to write precariousness and oppose it. The workshop can be linked with the narrative of the novel itself, which is, for the author, a place where memory is born. Writing allows the trauma patients to keep a trace of their disappearing selves, even if only a fragmented version. This fragmentation of the self is illustrated by the fragmentation of the narrative, which is scattered with the trauma patients' stories. These patients are also falling men and women, as Robert A. Ferguson states, in the sense that the 'The term "Falling Man" refers [...] *fourth* to the mental plunge of Alzheimer's patients who lose their hold on themselves and mirror the timeless drift in the long spiral down of those burning towers' (Ferguson 2013, 213). Picturing the illness and its consequences on memory and on the self is a way for DeLillo not only to reassert the ambivalent identity of the subject after a traumatic event but also to assert the importance of writing.

All in all, in his essay written after 9/11 DeLillo asserts that the role of the writer is to give back memory (DeLillo 2001). This is what he does in his novel *Falling Man* through the examples of the performance artist and the Alzheimer's patients, emphasizing the importance of art and writing in order to face trauma and its memory. This way, DeLillo pictures characters who use memory and the work on memory, especially through writing, as a bridge between past and future, the other and the self or even, in the case of the Alzheimer's patients, the old self and the new self, the one affected by the illness. His novel deals with a traumatic and a physiological memory, but both are linked by the fact that it is crucial not to forget, even events that are too painful to bear in mind. This is the condition to which the self can address its vulnerability and try to deal the best he/she can with this new state of

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being, with the 'conditions of heightened vulnerability and aggression that followed from [the events of September 11]' (Butler 2006, xi). Thanks to art, performance and writing, the self has a chance if not to overcome trauma, at least to deal with it as best as can.

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