

A MAN MELTING INTO WAR

MILITARIZATION AND LIBERAL IMAGINATION IN *FALLING MAN*

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In an illuminating article on affect and aesthetics in September 11 fiction, Rachel Greenwald Smith has argued that what “is unrepresentable in September 11 fiction is [...] not the trauma itself, but the intricacy of the web from which it emerges and which it causes to vibrate in turn.” This remark suggests that the incomprehensibility of the event of 9/11, so often culturally encoded in terms of trauma, is actually a matter of the event’s position within “a complex system of interactions.” Following this line of reasoning, we could conclude that those cultural assimilations of 9/11 and its aftermath that were limited to the experience and conceptual framing of trauma — especially in its hegemonic accounts as a founding, self-evident, bodily event — could not adequately tackle “the entanglement of the event in a knot of global relationships”.¹ The expansive movement implied in these remarks, from the moment of national trauma to the ethico-political network of global relationships, also implies not looking at the event merely as an occasion for the emergence of a first traumatized and then

¹ Rachel Greenwald Smith, “Organic Shrapnel: Affect and Aesthetics in September 11 Fiction,” *American Literature* 83 (2011/1): 169.

renewed subject, but focusing instead on the “complex system of interactions” against which this emergence takes place. In this essay, I would like to approach Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man*, a 9/11 novel usually considered to be an exemplary post-traumatic text, by shifting the analytical perspective away from trauma, and looking into the discursive and material structures supporting the novel’s various traumatizations. Approached this way, as a site of the articulation of the affective and the political, the novel allows for a consideration of wider social contexts that can deepen our understanding of the historical episode at its center. As I will argue in more detail below, *Falling Man* is not only about the trauma of 9/11, but about a more general historical crisis, which in DeLillo’s novel takes the form of an expansive process of militarization and a parallel collapse of liberal imagination.

As I hope to show, although articulated through the discourse of personal trauma — which within the US 9/11 archive more often than not depoliticizes the event and its implications — the crisis registered in *Falling Man* is a preeminently political matter. This also means that the incident of 9/11 appears in the novel not only as a historical event, but also a figure for a larger historical transformation. In my view, Wendy Brown’s reflections on the state of US liberal democracy after 9/11 offer productive terms for understanding this transformation. Brown has argued that since 9/11 we have been witnessing

a transformation of American liberal democracy into a political and social form for which we do not yet have a name, a form organized by a combination of neoliberal governmentality and imperial world politics, shaped in the short run by global economic and security crises.²

While it is true that “we do not have a name” for this political and social form — at least not a universally accepted one — George Steinmetz’s argument about the consolidation of an “authoritarian post-fordism” in the US after 9/11, which adds the important economic aspect to the description of the contemporary crisis, seems to me to be quite compatible with Brown’s depiction of this nameless historical formation. As Brown puts it, this formation

² Wendy Brown, *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 51.

is developing a domestic imperium correlative with a global one, achieved through a secretive and remarkably agentic state; corporatized media, schools and prisons; and a variety of technologies for intensified local administrative, regulatory and police powers. [Brown, 56-57]

Brown is primarily interested in the ways in which neoliberal governmentality works to weaken liberal democracy, and particularly its representative mechanisms. However, the relevance of the other aspect of her argument, about the “secretive and [...] agentic state” and its global reach, should not be too easily put aside. In my reading, *Falling Man* represents an attempt at grasping, from within the shaken imperial center and its hegemonic imagination, precisely the correlation between the domestic and the global “imperium.” I use the term “militarization” to refer to the structural conditions for the breakdown of the normative liberal democratic subject — deliberative, rational, tolerant, and multicultural — that in the novel represents the main symptom of the historical shift underway.

I.

Let me first state that I see *Falling Man* as a novel that works against certain hegemonic aspects of post-9/11 US culture. As I have argued elsewhere, the novel represents DeLillo’s take on the most common generic encoding of 9/11 in literature: the family drama, in which the private sphere and intimacy of the family allegorizes the state of the nation after 9/11.³ In other family dramas of 9/11 the event usually marks a crucial turning point in a process of personal and familial renewal (think of Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*). However, *Falling Man* stages the fundamental emptiness of such a traumatic emergence of subjectivity. Instead of a fully renewed national body and a reconstituted community, the novel offers a vision of arrested life in a state of emergency. This also means that DeLillo does not offer the conventional melodramatic closure. The only closure in *Falling Man* takes place within the traumatic loop that the narrative delineates by returning to the moment and site of trauma which sets it in

³ See Sven Cvek, *Towering Figures: Reading the 9/11 Archive* (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2011), especially chapter 8, “Killing Politics: The Art of Recovery in *Falling Man*,” on which this essay expands.

motion. The novel falls short of providing some sort of fictional assistance to communal healing. Instead of a definite narrative account, the writing in *Falling Man* effects a broad dispersal of meaning, a virtual loss of signification.

The logic that *Falling Man* revisits and subverts was displayed in a condensed form in an article about the controversial photograph of the “falling man” taken by Richard Drew. This canonical photograph was first published, then withdrawn from circulation, and subsequently became the focus of much public debate. The article, which continued the public debate about the photograph that was first published and then withdrawn from circulation, was written by Tom Junod the same year the war in Iraq started. In it, Junod defended the publishing of the photograph, claiming that the image represents “our most intimate connection to the horror of that day.” He concluded that “the Falling Man [...] became the Unknown Soldier in a war whose end we have not yet seen”.⁴ The article presents us with an aestheticized scene of suffering and death which becomes incorporated in a militant version of national history. The traumatic moment caught on the image now turns out to be the moment in which “a man [is] melting into the war,” to paraphrase DeLillo.⁵ This rhetorical move repeats the hegemonic emplotment of the 9/11 event, in which the representational inconclusiveness and ethical openness of the traumatic event becomes discursively incorporated into an ongoing political project, and echoes the immediate recoding of the terrorist act as an act of war that inaugurated the “global war on terror.”

The existence of the link between the 9/11 attacks and Iraq has in the meantime been disproved, the officially stated arguments for the invasion debunked, and Junod added in retrospect that “9/11 was not the beginning of something but rather the end.”⁶ The reality of war, however, remained. The continuation of military actions for many signified that rather than constituting a “victory of the American spirit” (*Falling (Mad) Man*), the event provided the opportunity for yet another victory of the military-industrial complex. Insisting on historical continuities, Ismael Hossein-zadeh has argued that “the recently heightened tendency of the United States to war and aggression [...] seems to be a reflection of the metaphorical domestic fight over allocation of

⁴ Tom Junod, “The Falling Man,” http://www.esquire.com/features/ESQ0903-SEP_FALLINGMAN.

⁵ Don DeLillo, *Point Omega* (New York, Tokyo, Toronto, Sydney: Scribner, 2010), 54.

⁶ Tom Junod, “Falling (Mad) Man,” <http://www.esquire.com/the-side/feature/falling-mad-man-6648672>.

national resources, or tax dollars.”⁷ He claims that “the 9/11 tragedy [was viewed by the Bush administration] as an opportunity for further militarization,” with the purpose of justifying “the continuous hemorrhaging of the Pentagon budget” (Hossein-zadeh, 23). This is certainly not to suggest that the economic interests surrounding the U.S. military can somehow provide a complete explanation of 9/11 and its aftermath, but to point out the fact that the event took place within an already existing political-economic structure that, to a significant extent, shaped its understanding and its ramifications. Despite the fact that this militaristic structure is a domestic matter, part and parcel of the everyday operations of the national economic and social reality, and not an exceptional post-9/11 development, its centrality is often obscured. Commenting on the increased militarization of American life after 9/11, Catherine Lutz has remarked on the peculiar accompanying process of cultural displacement: “Much of the history and the physical and symbolic costs of war on the home front and of war itself have been invisible to people both inside and outside the military.”⁸ This invisibility, she argues “is the outcome of secrecy laws, of an increasingly muzzled or actively complicit corporate media, and of the difficulty of assessing a highly complex and far-flung institution and the not-so-obviously related consequences of its actions” (Lutz, 724). Instead of a public awareness of the complex problems involved in militarization, we get “simplified histories, public relations work, or propaganda” (Lutz, 724). Militarization wrapped up in a renewed nationalist pathos — a manifestly simplified history of the contemporary moment — is clearly a process registered in Junod’s article. In my reading of DeLillo’s 9/11 novel, the traumas that the plot centers on are too, like the trauma of falling in Junod’s article, attached to the logic of war, albeit in somewhat more complex ways. Unlike in Junod or in the official post-9/11 political discourse, these traumatic experiences do not represent moments of origin for the consolidation of a militaristic body politic, but rather symptoms of an underlying militarized structure of contemporary reality.

⁷ Ismael Hossein-zadeh, *The Political Economy of U.S. Militarism* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2006), 22.

⁸ Catherine Lutz, “Making War at Home in the United States: Militarization and the Current Crisis,” *American Anthropologist* 104 (2002/3): 724.

II.

The world that is falling apart in the opening pages of Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, following the traumatic experience of the 9/11 attacks, appears to be held together only by the highly aestheticized act of storytelling which now takes its place. To the surprise of his wife, the traumatized attack survivor Keith Neudecker returns to his family, which he was previously estranged from. It, as we will learn, is the first in a series of repetitive acts in the novel, which are apparently meant to restore life to a previous state of normalcy. But, like Keith's obsessive poker games, these acts of repetition will only work to seal off Keith's existence in a terrifying, post-apocalyptic present. The background to this repetitive present is war, as the early description of Ground Zero suggests: Keith has to go through checkpoints, barricades, and "a chain-link barrier stretching down the middle of Broadway, patrolled by troops in gas masks" (*Falling Man*, 24). Right from its beginning, the novel articulates the simultaneously terrifying and routine experience of the present moment to the logic of war. One of the most significant gestures in that direction is the scene in which Keith is being checked by a doctor for signs of "organic shrapnel." Organic shrapnel, Keith learns, happens

where there are suicide bombings. [...] In those places where it happens, the survivors, the people nearby who are injured, sometimes, months later they develop bumps [...] and it turns out this is caused by small fragments, tiny fragments of the suicide bomber's body. [*Falling Man*, 16]

The phenomenon of organic shrapnel does not reappear in the novel, but the logic that animates it does. This scene works to connect disparate subjects, the attacker and the victim, through the violence of war. The connection established between the warring sides is physical, literal, as if through it the two bodies become one. But this link is not at all the outcome of some sort of intentional, politicized act of connecting people by way of a productive social tie. Instead, the monstrous connection and unlikely unity emerge as collateral effects of systematic acts of terror and war.

The organic shrapnel phenomenon brings into focus another important aspect of *Falling Man*. Namely, the novel constantly refuses to enact the easy movement from the body in pain to a consistent narrative account that would give it meaning. The pervasive sense of disorientation in the novel can be understood not merely as a consequence of trauma, but as an act of refusal to follow the logic of militarization of trauma

discussed above. The examples of this are numerous. Most notably, the “falling” from the novel’s title becomes progressively divorced from its original situation, as it reappears in different contexts throughout the text and accumulates metaphorical meanings. Consider, for example, the uncanny similarity between the following two scenes. This is Keith’s final vision of the post-9/11 world: “That’s where everything was, all around him, falling away, street signs, people, things he could not name” (*Falling Man*, 246). When Lianne is commenting on the deteriorating mental state of one of her students, preoccupied by the possibility of ending up a victim of the Alzheimer syndrome, she thinks: “This was an occasion that haunted [her], the breathless moment when things fall away, streets, names, all sense of direction and location, every fixed grid of memory” (*Falling Man*, 156). Similarly, the sentence “The truth was mapped in slow and certain decline” opens a section on Lianne’s Alzheimer group, but is also suggestive of other things: the decline of U.S. power that Martin discusses in terms of increasing “American irrelevance,” or the deliberate falling of the WTC victims (*Falling Man*, 191). This kind of multiple direction of reference provides a constant pressure to the novel, under which any definitive meaning seems to disintegrate. This is why I think that the historical trauma DeLillo’s novel revolves around has a pronounced figurative aspect (to which it nevertheless must not be reduced). It is not only that *Falling Man* should be read as pointing to a more general social anxiety boosted by the event of 9/11. As the dispersal of meaning in *Falling Man* works to preclude the emergence of a consolidated subject, it also points to the subdued presence and formative power of a dispersed, underlying structure that supports the emergence of such traumatized subjectivities. What we get instead of definitive meanings in *Falling Man* is a constant emphasis on the materiality of the human body. It is by focusing on the body, in an attempt to move beyond representation, that the novel makes visible the longer historical processes reanimated by the event of 9/11.

III.

In order to elaborate on this proposition, I would like to turn to the functioning and the functions of the novel’s bodies. Especially relevant for my argument are those moments that connect what DeLillo otherwise constructs as totally disparate worlds, namely the world of the traumatized Americans and anti-American terrorists. In this

construction of global division, *Falling Man* to a large extent repeats DeLillo's geopolitical vision elaborated in his 9/11 essay "In the Ruins of the Future," in which the world is sharply divided between the liberal democratic West and the pre-modern forces of religious fundamentalist terrorism.⁹ As in the essay, in the novel too these two worlds encounter only once, and this encounter results in disaster. However, the novel complicates this strict opposition by laying out the stories of Keith and Lianne in parallel with the story of the 9/11 terrorist Hammad. The parallel unfolding of their stories allows us to see certain patterns that the apparently disparate worlds share. A particularly intriguing one is the similarity established between Lianne and Hammad. At various points in the novel, both of them experience a dissociation of bodily affect and cognition, or a disconnection between the reflexive affective response and the power of rational deliberation.

Hammad, the novel's reluctant terrorist, who shows constant suspicion towards the plan he is a part of and doubts the necessity of killing innocent people, experiences a sense of disembodiment during the quotidian routines that occupy his days while preparing for the attacks: "He sat in a barber chair and looked in the mirror. He was not here, it was not him" (*Falling Man*, 175). He is "looking past the face in the mirror, which is not his" (*Falling Man*, 178). "He got up and followed [two women]. This was something that just happened, the way a man is pulled out of his skin and then the body catches up" (*Falling Man*, 176). During the hijacking of the plane on September 11, Hammad cannot remember how he got cut: "maybe the pain had been there earlier but he was only now remembering to feel it" (*Falling Man*, 237). The dissociation between the actions of Hammad's body and his thought can help explain the process through which the almost-human terrorist of the novel who constantly doubts his own actions ultimately succumbs to the sovereign will of the arch-terrorist Amir.

Lianne, Keith's wife who is trying to overcome the symptoms of vicarious trauma after the attacks, experiences something quite similar. Whenever she hears the music her neighbor Elena plays in her apartment — which Lianne describes as "Middle Eastern, North African, Bedouin songs perhaps or Sufi dances, music located in Islamic tradition" — she feels racial stereotypes overwhelming her. She thinks: "They are the ones who think alike, talk alike, eat the same food at the same time." At the same

⁹ Cf. Don DeLillo, "In the Ruins of the Future," <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/dec/22/fiction.dondelillo>.

time, she is aware that “this [the stereotype] wasn’t true” (*Falling Man*, 67-68). Despite this knowledge, after Elena refuses to turn down the volume, Lianne hits her. When later retelling the brief moment of physical violence to Keith, Lianne describes her sense of disembodiment at the time of the attack: “I could hear myself speaking. My voice was like it was coming from somebody else” (*Falling Man*, 124). The scene can be easily read as a figural sublimation of the social mechanisms of post-9/11 domestic anti-“Arab” violence, normally explained as a reflexive, albeit irrational and non-representative reaction to the 9/11 attacks. Elena’s ambiguous music choice — Lianne hears “a solo lute from Turkey or Egypt or Kurdistan” — exemplifies the fluidity of the racial profile of the post-9/11 US citizens’ antagonist, now racialized as vaguely Middle Eastern, Arab, or Muslim (*Falling Man*, 120).

But the similarity between Lianne’s and Hammad’s actions suggests that they are both supported by a more general logic, one that backs up the world-shattering antagonisms of the novel. Like Hammad, Lianne experiences a feeling of disembodiment and acts against her better judgment. Although she does not mean what she does, Lianne does it anyway: her apolitical body paradoxically becomes a pure agent of repressive policies of the sovereign state. Similarly, Hammad’s body becomes the agent of the sovereign will of fundamentalist terror against his own will. The question we could pose might be about the conditions that make this similarity discernible: how come Lianne and Hammad share the same bodily symptoms despite the fact they stand otherwise irreconcilably divided, positioned at two opposite extremes, belonging to two disparate worlds?¹⁰

The kind of dissociation of body and mind Lianne and Hammad experience can be considered a consequence of traumatization, a common post-traumatic symptom in literature on trauma. For example, in the study of Goldberg and Willse, who interviewed U.S. war veterans from Vietnam and Iraq we find precisely such examples: “My

¹⁰ John Carlos Rowe makes a similar and more general observation about DeLillo’s characters: “Initially sympathetic characters, versions of a waning humanism, Gray [in *Mao II*] and Neudecker [in *Falling Man*] degenerate into specters of their terrorist antagonists: aimless, stateless, *socially determined beings following others’ orders*,” John Carlos Rowe, “Global Horizons in *Falling Man*,” in *Don DeLillo: Mao II, Underworld, Falling Man*, ed. Stacey Olster (London and New York: Continuum, 2011), 122, my emphasis. My reading of *Falling Man* might be understood as an elaboration of the conditions for the transformation implied in Rowe’s remark, at the contemporary historical conjuncture.

body's here, but my mind is there," one soldier is quoted as saying.¹¹ The authors conclude that "This separation is one of many disjunctions experienced by returning soldiers, including significant memory loss that soldiers must be convinced they have experienced" (Goldberg and Willse, 269). However, the same study suggests there is another possible conceptual framing for such dissociation, in which it is related to the disciplinary practice of military training. Goldberg and Willse quote an Army trainer describing the military drill: "We attempt to instill a reaction. Hear a pop, hit the ground, return fire. Act instinctually" (Goldberg and Willse, 271). Despite the explicit appeal to natural response, the "instinctual" action is here clearly a result of military drill, and goes against the logic of the instinct of survival. They quote another soldier's experience: "Brown resisted the impulse to move straight to the glaring red wounds, and instead snapped into protocols" (Goldberg and Willse, 271). Again, the sentence suggests that what is presented as instinctual behavior, or bodily reflex, actually must be seen as learned behavior, the routine reaction resulting from the military's rebuilding of natural reflexes. Moreover, the "instinctual" is based on a disjunction of affect (natural response to flee) and cognition (resorting to learned protocols). That is, this disjunction is a condition for the exercise of sovereign power in the body of the individual.

What I want to suggest is that the reflexive reactions of Lianne (who is traumatized) and Hammad (who underwent military training) could be seen as analogous to soldiers' learned-instinctive response in deadly situations. In my reading of *Falling Man*, the dissociation of affect and cognition is not merely a consequence of trauma, but of a militarization of everyday life of the novel's protagonists. Both sides are more or less directly subjects of militarization, be it in their unwilling compliance to martial imperatives (Lianne), or their antagonistic orientation towards a thoroughly militaristic U.S. state (Hammad). By insisting on the characters' repetitive routines and dissociative behavior, the novel shows how the militarization of affective response also takes over the domestic front, the normal lives of Americans.

¹¹ Greg Goldberg and Craig Willse, "Losses and Returns: The Soldier in Trauma", in *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, ed. Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean Halley (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2007), 269.

IV.

There are two important aspects to this configuration in *Falling Man*. One has to do with the failure of representation that the novel constantly depicts and enacts. It can also be related to the military structure that imposes its sovereign will on the novel's protagonists. Consider that both Lianne and Hammad see what DeLillo simply refers to as "the state" as an oppressive force. Lianne remembers old passport photographs of American immigrants, and thinks of them as showing "human ordeal set against the rigor of the state" (*Falling Man*, 142). Hammad's practical reasoning about the dangers of state surveillance positions visual technologies at odds with the terrorists' strategy of bodily immediacy: "The state has fiber optics but power is helpless against us. The more power, the more helpless. We encounter through eyes, through word and look" (*Falling Man*, 81). In statements such as these — in which the American and the terrorist are united by their desire for immediacy and positioned against the state — we can discern a great deal of liberal suspicion towards what in some critical accounts of DeLillo's work is called "totalitarianism."¹² It is easy to understand how such suspicion is made more acute by the rise of U.S. security practices after 9/11. But these sentences also suggest that the state in *Falling Man* threatens to take on all activity involving mediation and representation, appropriating it for security purposes. In this configuration, all mediated experience is under threat of getting absorbed into the state's militarized channels of representation. In short, it is a militaristic state that takes away the

¹² Linda Kauffman has especially insisted that "DeLillo's post-9/11 texts suggest that all representations — including painting and photography — can and must confront totalitarianism," Linda S. Kauffman, "The Wake of Terror: Don DeLillo's 'In the Ruins of the Future', 'Baader-Meinhof', and 'Falling Man'," *Modern Fiction Studies* 54 (2008): 363. To me it seems that, as an explanatory term, "totalitarianism" is both insufficient and symptomatic in the context of DeLillo's post-9/11 work. On the one hand, "totalitarianism" can be understood as the traditional liberal code name for any non- or anti-liberal political position (for example, when Nazism and communism are reduced to a common denominator through appeals to their totalitarian character). DeLillo does describe the militaristic exercises of transnational sovereignty as "totalitarian," in the sense that his fundamental political imaginary remains within the confines of liberalism. On the other hand, I am arguing that *Falling Man* simultaneously points to a more expansive reality of the sovereign power directing the actions of the novel's characters, one which remains unspeakable from the ideological confines of the novel. Indeed, DeLillo's recourse to imagery and rhetoric that show how liberal imagination dissipates when confronted with the reality of the power structure that undergirds the separation between the "liberal democratic" and "religious fundamentalist" subject is itself symptomatic of the difficulty or inability to grasp its workings from within a liberal imaginary.

representational capacity from its subjects, as it turns not only their dissociated bodies, but also every act of mediation or symbolization into a potential weapon in the “war against terror.”

However, it should be noted how, in their failure as sovereign subjects, Elaine and Hammad are opposed to and controlled by something that might be called “the state,” but is obviously trans-national in its scope. Lianne and Hammad experience the operations of this sovereign power through the loss of their ability to relate meaningfully to themselves and to others. The apparently total and liminally unrepresentable operations of this structure effect a collapse of representation. Certainly, *Falling Man* is not DeLillo’s first novel about such a crisis of representational ability.¹³ In their own way, the novels that preceded *Falling Man*, *The Body Artist* and *Cosmopolis*, revolve around the issue of the limits of representation. But, while in these texts representation circles around, but cannot grasp, loss (in the former) and the workings of finance capital (in the latter), the limits to which *Falling Man* hints at are both more specific and more evasive, and should be understood as being related not merely to trauma, but to “the entanglement of the event in a knot of global relationships” that, following Greenwald Smith, we might posit as the ultimate horizon of American 9/11 fictions.

The other aspect of “militarization” in *Falling Man* is that it forms the basis for the recognition of similarities between disparate subjects, and remains virtually the only material infrastructure for their mutual, trans-national connection. The connection established this way between different subjects — one that reaches its peak in the fatal violent encounter from which Keith Neudecker emerges alive at the beginning of the novel — is then quite like the connection created by the phenomenon of organic shrapnel discussed earlier on. The fact that we can recognize the similarity between the novel’s antagonists only based on their common subjection to a military logic (or a militaristic rationality of national security) reveals another facet of the crisis of liberal imagination that the novel stages. The formal equality of otherwise incompatible figures of Lianne and Hammad which the novel makes discernible is attained by their equal subjection to sovereign power, and not their access to some formalized set of

¹³ Walter Benn Michaels mentions DeLillo’s work in the context of a novelistic “critique of representation well underway long before September 11,” which “has made the left and the right indistinguishable,” and according to him represents a symptom of “the ontologization of politics,” Walter Benn Michaels, “Empires of the Senseless: (The Response to) Terror and (the End of) History,” *Radical History Review* 85 (2003): 113.

equal rights. This is why I think that DeLillo stages the militarization of American reality primarily in terms of a dissipating liberal democratic social order. By emptying its characters of agency through a process of militaristic subjection, *Falling Man* suggests that this failure of liberal politics is not simply a natural, reflexive consequence of the trauma of 9/11, but the effect of a certain configuration of government, of a political shift away from deliberation and representation, and towards more direct, unmediated exercises of sovereignty. Since the novel represents this shift as being closely linked to military imperatives, I use the term militarization to point to the politico-economic locus of the trans-national sovereignty that equally governs the citizens and the terrorists.

V.

To those familiar with DeLillo's earlier work, his focus on the place of the military-industrial complex in American society will not be surprising. Alessandra De Marco has recently pointed out the continual presence of military topics in DeLillo's works from *End Zone* to *Point Omega*. What is interesting about *Falling Man* is that the workings of this complex now both remain subdued, and, perhaps even more importantly, achieve a world-encompassing power of subjection. The unveiling of the U.S. military power as the infrastructure that supports global interconnections represents somewhat of a shift in DeLillo's more recent opus, which previously envisioned a post-Cold War world globalized by the flow of capital, often with disastrous consequences. *Cosmopolis*, DeLillo's meditation on the effects of total financialization on U.S. polity, is perhaps the purest expression of this vision. DeLillo's 9/11 essay, too, opens with remarks on the "global consciousness" shaped by "the surge of capital markets" (*In the Ruins of the Future*). But *Falling Man* suggests that what takes the place of the market as the global formative power after 9/11 is U.S. military might.

This suggestion actually follows closely the trend observed in the large body of literature on American imperialism. In his *Political Economy of U.S. Militarism*, Hossein-zadeh argues that "the change from the neoliberal multilateralism of the 1990s to the unilateral militarism that has replaced it is obviously the result of the victory of one faction of the ruling class over the other" (Hossein-zadeh, 8). He sees this development as following a more general logic. As he argues,

the history of the leading capitalist countries shows that, depending on the degree of their economic competitiveness in global markets, world capitalist powers always tend to alternate policies of economic liberalism/neoliberalism with those of unilateral militarism. [Hosseini-zadeh, 8]

In *New Imperialism*, David Harvey has similarly argued that, from around 2001, the U.S. has been more and more shifting from “consensus” to “coercion” in order to control the inherently unstable processes of capital accumulation. According to him, “the jolt to the system administered by the events of 9/11” only amplified the repercussions of “the gathering recession, evident early in 2001”.¹⁴ De Marco makes a similar point, and relies on RETORT collective’s term “military neoliberalism” to stress the inseparability of U.S. militarization and capital accumulation, claiming that militarization “arises from the need to guarantee the safe and profitable navigation of US imperial capital throughout the global system”.¹⁵

Although *Falling Man* seems to point to such development when considered in terms of its position in DeLillo’s larger opus, there is hardly any hint to the existence of the connection between militarization — which is anyhow in the novel visible only through its traumatic symptoms — and the logic of capital. Instead, the process of militarization that the novel shows at work seems to be more readily articulated, broadly speaking, as a failure of liberal democracy. The shifting of the site of agency in DeLillo’s later work from the market to the state — both fundamental categories of liberalism — suggests that his vision of the post-9/11 world operates within and interrogates precisely the limits of the ideological discourse of liberalism. That is why militarization in *Falling Man* can become evident in the failure of Lianne’s liberal democratic self; in her unintentional, irrational, intolerant and violent behavior towards her “Arab” neighbor. The process through which Lianne and Keith work to reclaim their bodily functions and representational abilities after the trauma of 9/11 is bound to remain inconclusive, since the imaginative and political terrain within which they move has been severely reduced by the authoritarian logic of an imperial sovereignty. By displaying the social symptoms of this logic, and articulating it to shrinking possibilities of representation, DeLillo’s *Falling Man* offers some insight into important aspects of this

¹⁴ David Harvey, *New Imperialism* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 71.

¹⁵ Alessandra De Marco, *Late DeLillo, Finance Capital and Mourning from The Body Artist to Point Omega*, 20, <http://www.49thparallel.bham.ac.uk/back/issue28/DeMarco.pdf>.

historical transformation, and mourns the current state of American liberal democracy — to which the novel nevertheless remains melancholically attached.

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