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Navigating the Uncanny Spaces: Spatial Relations in Don DeLillo's Falling Man

Abstract

Following the twentieth-century's spatial turn in literary and cultural studies, this paper examines spaces and spatiality in Don DeLillo's novel Falling Man, a seminal fictional response to the most traumatic (spatial) event in the USA at the turn of the century. Starting from Robert T. Tally Jr.'s thesis that authors are cartographers, I analyze how DeLillo acts as a mapper of the post-9/11 space. By exploring the depictions of the altered spatial landscape DeLillo creates, and the world he thrusts his characters into, I examine the intricate relationship between space and identity. Ultimately, I argue that the loss of a familiar and dependable space creates unfamiliar spaces the characters struggle to navigate.

Keywords: space, spatiality, DeLillo, Falling Man, 9/11, post-9/11 literature

1. Space Takes Place

In the introduction to his 2013 book Spatiality, Robert T. Tally Jr. claims that "over the past few decades, spatiality has become a key concept for literary and critical studies" (3). Exploring the different disciplinary takes on spatiality – literary cartography, geography, and geocriticism – Tally asserts that if the nineteenth century's major obsession was dominated by the discourses of time and history, in the post-war period of the twentieth century, "space began to reassert itself in critical theory, rivaling if not overtaking time in significance" (3). The author reiterates numerous writers, philosophers, and thinkers who came before him to suggest there has been the so-called spatial turn. Bertrand Westphal, the founder of geocriticism, a literary theory that incorporates the study of geographic space, claims that "cataclysmic restructuring of societies during, and in the immediate

aftermath of, Second World War, led to the decline in the obsession with time" (Tally 6). In the essay "Of Other Spaces," French philosopher Michel Foucault argues that we live in the world "when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein" (22). He argues that the twentieth-century era is the epoch of space and that "we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed" (Foucault and Miskowiec 22).

Societal advancements and progress, globalization, air travel, and the Internet have all contributed to the importance of examining the role of space and how we experience it and change with it. However, of the many events that fostered the need for the spatial turn in literature, few facilitate the need to examine space as much as dramatic occurrences and movements – wars, destruction and exiles (Tally 13). Such events "emphasized geographical difference; that is, one's place could not simply be taken for granted any longer" (Tally 13). Moving away from familiar space or seeing domestic space dramatically altercated will profoundly impact one's sense of space, so "[d]isplacement, perhaps more than a homely rootedness in place, underscores the critical importance of spatial relations in our attempts to interpret, and change, the world" (Tally 13).

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the most documented and most traumatic impact, not just on space but on all forms of narrative and discourses, occurred on American soil – the 9/11 terror attacks. The attacks, which "appeared like nothing the United States or the world have ever seen (calling to mind, perhaps, and uncannily, only the spectacular special effects of Hollywood disaster movies)" (Cvek 2), wreaked havoc in New York, taking the lives of thousands. The domestic space had suddenly and shockingly changed, creating unimaginable national trauma. Nothing before, or since, has so profoundly affected American space and the citizens occupying it, nor has there ever been such a monumental tragedy that occurred so close and resonated in all aspects of life – from airport security to fiction.

Literary responses appeared soon enough, seeking to set stories against the backdrop of the changed landscape to explore numerous discourses – from trauma and religion to politics and intimate relationships, etc![1] Looking back at the post-9/11 literature, Crownshaw argues that "cultural and particularly literary responses to 9/11 are often preoccupied with time rather than space, or, put otherwise, the time of trauma rather than the space of American territory" (758). In

the interest of examining the space in post-9/11 literature, in this paper, I look at Don DeLillo's Falling Man, a seminal novel depicting the immediate days of the 9/11 attacks on New York. By exploring the spatial relations in the novel that, arguably, most profoundly addresses how the tragedy impacted space, I examine how DeLillo acts as a mapper and a cartographer of the dramatically altered landscape, thrusting characters who were closest to the unfathomable tragedy into navigating and remapping the uncanny space of the post-9/11 world.

2. Altering Cartography

In my examination of spatial relations in Falling Man, I would first like to focus on the cartography of the post-9/11 world. Tally, linking and likening writers to cartographers, claims that "a map is not only a geometrical figure like a grid, a visual archive like a table … a map may also constitute itself in words" (2). He, who "take[s] mapping to be the most significant figure in spatiality studies today … because of the ancient and well known connections between cartographic and narrative discourse" (Tally 4), believes that writers are mapmakers. DeLillo, who has set his previous fiction in New York,[2] in Falling Man sets out to first remap and then explore the altered landscape. Namely, as a cartographer, DeLillo frames the novel by placing us at what later became Ground Zero. Starting and finishing with the depiction of space perhaps minutes after the planes had impacted the towers from the beginning conveys his interest in observing the fundamental change of the landscape as we know it – and how it affects people in it. Strikingly and in medias res, the opening line of the novel eerily but succinctly portrays the immediacy of the changed space which the characters now inhabit: "It was not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night" (DeLillo 3), therewith signaling the end of one map, something Alkhayer calls "the death of the street," implying that the street, "with its social and cultural implications, has come to an end" (238). This "death of the street" signifies an altercation in space, and DeLillo, in his role as a cartographer of the post-9/11 world, does what Tally claims authors (as cartographers) inevitably do – "sets out to map the world, to trace lines and shadows upon the blank spaces of the page, [and] also makes possible other worlds" (48).

Furthermore, if a line on the map is meant to represent a street, and the street is now gone, it is as if the map has been redrawn by the attacks. Moreover, supposing that lines representing

Manhattan's perfect grid of streets are complete with towering skyscrapers, thus forming a dense cartography of occupied space, the attacks have much to do with changing the landscape both on the ground and in the sky, where towers rise to form the unmistakable New York skyline. In this new map, the one of the post-9/11 world, streets, sky, and the world are not recognizable anymore. [3] In fact, Linda Kauffman points out that in Falling Man, "[t]here is something empty in the sky," and that DeLillo "tries to give memory, tenderness, and meaning to all that howling space" (357). In this dense grid of lines, with every inch of the space between them filled, the terror attacks have created a gap, significantly altering the consistent and familiar cartography. The iconic and recognizable towers of the World Trade Center are gone, the "giantism that eased over the years into something a little more familiar and comfortable, even dependable in a way. Now a small group of men have literally altered our skyline. We have fallen back in time and space," writes DeLillo in "Ruins of the Future," an essay published a month after the attacks, six years before the publication of Falling Man.

Some have argued that featureless, similar-looking buildings and spaces of metropolises such as New York "serve as monuments to capitalistic glory but fail to create an emotional connection" or that "the twin towers were relatively featureless, and, as individual buildings, did not seem to capture the public imagination" (Leach qtd. in Harack 317), while others have examined the impact of 9/11 attacks in New York on American (capitalist) power.[4] However, I propose that DeLillo takes advantage of the destruction that remodified the familiar landscape into something unfamiliar to depict the impact the space exerts on those who occupy it. Furthermore, through the circular narrative of destruction – as the novel starts and ends with the attacks and their immediate aftermath – DeLillo seems to be interested in how New York, which "as character participates in the lives of these figures altering their lives in unknown ways" (Gravano 188), and the destruction of its crucial features, impacts the characters in this novel. With the destruction of a city building, which acts almost as a limb to every character that inhabits the space, DeLillo's characters must now remap the space to feel familiar with it and even reaffirm their identity. In other words, DeLillo focuses on the destruction of familiar space to demonstrate its fundamental importance for the occupiers and their sense of identity.

3. Remapping Spaces, Reshaping Identity

Set in the aftermath of the two jet-engine planes crashing into and ultimately bringing down the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001, Falling Man follows Keith Neudecker, a lawyer who survives the collapse, his estranged wife Lianne Glenn, their sever-year-old son Justin, Lianne's mother Nina Bartos, her partner Martin Ridnour, and Florence Givens, another survivor with whom Keith has an affair, as they grapple with the traumatic reality of the monumental loss of identifiable surroundings. The loss of space – one of the underlying themes of the novel and main ideas of this paper – has a resounding, albeit different, impact on all the central figures in the novel. Keith, the survivor and most traumatized witness of the destruction of space, represents throughout the novel the active participant in the examination of new spatial relations created after the fall. Others, like Lianne, her son, her mother, and Martin, serve as observers, having experienced the loss from farther away. Each is trying in its own way to transition into a remodified landscape. In what is a novel framed by the collapse of towers, the characters seek to reestablish their relation to space, and in turn, to themselves, since they now "inhabit a world to which they can barely relate" (Harack 308).

Writing on body, space, and time in Falling Man, Katrina Harack argues that after the collapse, "[d]etached from the reality of what he has witnessed, Keith is experiencing a changed relation to place" (321). He walks in and out of things, observing the signs, streets, and people walking in and out of them, wondering whether they belong there. Keith does not recognize the world he used to be in. As he walks through the street that "was not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash" (DeLillo 3), we see him struggle, having lost familiarity with the space that he had previously identified with. Through haunting, echoing sentences: "This was the world now" or "[t]he world was this as well" (DeLillo 3, 4), we are introduced to the magnitude of the loss. For instance, after the collapse of the second tower, DeLillo conveys this through Keith, who walks out of the rubble, covered in ash, only to find that space is not what it used to be: "There was something critically missing from the things around him. They were unfinished, whatever that means. They were unseen, whatever that means" (DeLillo 5, emphasis added). The vagueness of the latter parts of these sentences seems to suggest the indescribable unfamiliarity that underlies trauma;[5]

whereas “critically missing” indicates the loss of space, with Keith failing to recognize the space that now surrounds him.

What is critically missing from things around him is not just space but a matter of locating oneself in it. Silvia Caporale Bizzini comments that “Keith is lost in an outer cartography that he is unable to recognize and that does not display clear and known symbols of identification” (48). In the cartography altered by horrific terror attacks, DeLillo’s characters repeatedly attempt to navigate new, unfamiliar spaces as if trying to anchor themselves in them because, as Lee Zimmerman argues, “the possibility of experience, of personal identity itself, depends upon the specificity of place” (566). This is seen at the very beginning of the novel, as the driver who picked Keith up in the rubble “thought one tower was blocking his view of the other tower, or the smoke was. He saw the smoke. He drove east a ways and looked again and there was only one tower. One tower made no sense” (DeLillo 21).

This substantial spatial change quickly turns to characters interacting with space or otherwise trying to get accustomed to whatever space they now live in, as Harack concisely puts forward that “we form a sense of self by reacting to the world around us and seeing ourselves as situated amid places of significance” (309). For Keith or even the van driver, places of significance are the known cartography that has now been altered. The new map was created via destruction, and it “made no sense.” In turn, their sense of self has been affected since the sense of place and the sense of identity, as we see here, are mutually interchangeable. Namely, the fact that something is missing around them essentially means something is missing in them, demonstrating the inextricable link between who one is and where one is. Keith’s thoughts seem to establish this (un)breakable link: “Maybe this is what things look like when there is no one here to see them” (DeLillo 5). An integral part of existing is occupying space, navigating through it, and being molded by it. Indeed, walking out of the debris, covered in soot, Keith becomes a cartographer himself. What starts as him being shell-shocked and traumatized in the way that “[h]e was a hovering presence now. … He was not quite returned to his body yet” (DeLillo 59) is followed by his attempts to return to his body by counteracting the impact the loss of space has had on his physical and mental state.

Back in his apartment, Keith begins to make corrections on the envelopes of his mail because “it wasn’t him, with the name misspelled,” and he “would keep doing it down the years and into the

decades" (DeLillo 31). If envelopes with addresses on them are meant to represent a designated point in space and identity, then Keith's corrections are an attempt to anchor himself in that space as if saying – I belong to this space, and I am this person. He also acts as a kind of an explorer, navigating environments he had never paid attention to: "He went about fifteen paces into the corridor, away from the stairwell, and spoke in a voice slightly above a whisper. He said, 'I'm standing here,' and then, louder, 'I'm standing here'" (DeLillo 27), echoing the words spoken by a man in the rubble. The meaning and sound of – I'm standing here – appearing several times in the novel, is in fact reminiscent of a red marker on a city map, indicating where one is, helping one find a way. Furthermore, throughout the novel, Keith undertakes numerous small, repetitive spatial explorations. He counts floors, rides escalators, ponders over his actions in space: "He began to see what he was doing. He noticed things, all the small lost strokes of a day or a minute, how he licked his thumb and used it to lift a bread crumb off the plate and put it idly in his mouth" (DeLillo 65). Keith longs for recovery by exploring, observing the environment around him, because "[s]omething is always happening … if you stand a while and look" (DeLillo 66).

Similarly, Lianne, who had lived apart from Keith together with their son Justin before the tragic events, is attempting to reestablish a connection with spatial objects. She stood looking at herself in the mirror but "[t]he moment seemed false to her, a scene in a movie when a character tries to understand what is going on in her life by looking in the mirror" (DeLillo 47). She, too, is attempting to find comfort in navigating mundane spaces: "The flushing toilet wasn't audible in the living room. This was for her own pointless benefit, flushing. Maybe it was meant to mark the end of the interval, to get her out of there" (DeLillo 48). However, unlike Keith, who walks in and out of altered space, Lianne, who did not experience the collapse firsthand, keeps seeing the towers in other spaces. They appear to her in a painting and, in a way, in her therapy group. In the Alzheimer therapy session, which she uses as a way to process what has happened, "[t]hey wrote about where they were when it happened" (DeLillo 60), addressing one of the most frequently asked questions pertaining to 9/11. If DeLillo shows how the tragedy affected survivors through Keith, Lianne is meant to represent the more distant observer, and in that sense, most New Yorkers. For Keith, who lived through the collapse, the loss of space is traumatic and numbing. For Lianne, loss of space has more to do with not being able to accept the changed cartography, which persistently

causes a sense of unease. Perhaps this is why Lianne is the most frequent observer of the representation of towers. In fact, on several occasions, she encounters the performance artist suspended upside down from a wire, who comes to be referred to as the falling man. A culminating point of her spatial navigation is witnessing the performance, after which she digs deep to find out everything she can about the artist, named David Janiak, "the man who'd stood above her, detailed and looming" (DeLillo 78), just as the towers once did.[6] His provocative performances remind her of the spaces where men and women jumped to death, the space of "[t]he enormous soaring lines, the vertical column stripes. The man with blood on his shirt … and the effect of the columns behind him" (DeLillo 221). In a way, all characters either belong to the world after (Keith, Lianne, and survivors) or the world before (Keith's friend Rumsey, his poker friends). The artist, however, is suspended in between. His lingering presence in the novel – and the rage surrounding his performances – symbolizes the inability of characters to move from the space before into the space after.

Keith and Lianne's son, Justin, uses binoculars to search for the planes in the sky as if they were still flying. He refuses to believe that the towers came down: "They were hit but did not collapse. That's what he says" (DeLillo 72). For Justin, the towers are still there, and the space is the same. The child is in denial about the loss of familiar space, the same way he is in denial about his parents' separation. Namely, now that Keith was living with Lianne and Justin again, "[t]here were the walks to and from school, the meals he cooked, something he'd rarely done in the past year and a half because it had made him feel like the last man alive, breaking eggs for dinner." He reassumes the role of father, and when Justin says: "'We go home now,'" there is an indication that home – a house – is a firm ground and that living together there offers solace to the child and connection. Apart from seeking comfort in closeness, Justin resembles his father in the way he engages in ritualistic bodily movements to anchor himself in space. Lianne sees him sharpening numerous pencils he had collected at his desk: "She stood at the door and watched him insert each pencil in the slot and then crank the handle … It was awful, in a way, all these fragments of status washing up in some little kid's room" (DeLillo 146). Justin was also "trying to speak in monosyllables only, for long stretches" (DeLillo 57) because it helped him go slow when he thinks. Similarly, "Keith as well … was going slow, easing inward." Interestingly, even without his father,

Justin, through the pencil-sharpening act, mirrors his father's spatial rituals in an attempt to become re-connected with space. His mother loved to watch "the way he blew the microscopic shavings off the pencil point after he finished sharpening. … He'd crank and blow, crank and blow, a ritual more thorough and righteous than the formal signing of some document of state by eleven men with medals. (38)" When Justin speaks in monosyllables, he mirrors Keith's attempts to reconnect with space and, in turn, to his father.

Lianne's mother's lover, Martin, observes the detachment of space in a still life painting: "I'm looking at these objects, kitchen objects but removed from the kitchen, free of the kitchen, the house, everything practical and functioning" (DeLillo 49), as are all characters of the novel. He keeps "seeing the towers in this still life" and so does Lianne, who in still life paintings "saw what he saw. She saw the towers" (DeLillo 49). The space that the towers had held, still present in the minds of characters who had observed its destruction, lingers in other spaces. Martin, an upper-class art dealer and collector, saw the two towers as "fantasies of wealth and power that would one day become fantasies of destruction" (DeLillo 43). His belief that "[t]here's an empty space where America used to be" (DeLillo 50) when coupled with the first line of the novel, "[i]t was not a street anymore but a world …" (DeLillo 3), indicates that the loss of familiar and identifiable space – world, not a street – points to a loss of national identity.

Several authors analyzing DeLillo's novel have pointed out that identity is inextricably linked with space. Neil Leach asserts that "once a sense of identity has been forged against a backdrop of a certain architectural environment, any damage to that environment will be read as damage to the self" (qtd. in Harack 321). As a result of trauma, we see instances of Keith's interactions with the now transformed spaces in an effort to repair the damage and somehow reconnect to space, which is fundamental to belonging and being because "anchoring the body and vision is a vital part of Keith's changing experience of space and memory," as Harack puts it (322).

In line with Tally's notion of altered spatial relations necessitating a reinterpretation of the world,[7] Falling Man also shows that the space of the towers and the workers occupying it has been displaced and dispersed onto survivors, whether as human shrapnel, or the ash and smoke they breathed in. When a man driving a van picks up Keith, who minutes earlier walked out of the rubble, Keith is described as "a man scaled in ash, in pulverized matter" (DeLillo 6). The collapsed

buildings and their constituting parts now reside on the entire city, as do the people: “The dead were everywhere, in the air, in the rubble, on rooftops nearby, in the breezes that carried from the river. They were settled in ash and drizzled on windows all along the streets, in his hair and on his clothes” (DeLillo 25). The remains of the pre-9/11 world now reside on the entire city and its residents, or as Harack puts it, the dead “are embedded in the environment and in Keith’s own body, where the trauma of near-death linger” (325). Space that once was, now uncannily, morbidly resides on and in those who survived to experience the space altered. The space of the world before has, tragically and uncannily, become infused with the post-9/11 world because, as Alkhayer claims, “Manhattan is ubiquitous, intertwined with its own residents who become their own city” (235). What prevents the characters from readjusting to the altered space is the persistent presence of the once grand, identifiable, unmistakable, but now dispersed space of the pre-9/11.

The novel at the end returns to that fateful September morning, as we again follow Keith, who walks into the new, unknown world. The ending is the beginning, or rather, there is no end, as DeLillo seems to suggest, as Keith walks past the falling bodiless shirt. “By implementing a disruptive narrative structure, DeLillo creates a juxtaposition between pre-9/11 and post-9/11. The streets are no longer familiar, and neither is the world of the person who once walked them” (4), argues Walsh. DeLillo seems to suggest that space cannot provide solace to the characters inhabiting it despite their attempts to navigate it. He does so by staying focused on his characters’ experience of a particular place and time: “He could not find himself in the things he saw and heard” (246). Again, the loss of familiar space can be juxtaposed with the loss of familiar self: “That’s where everything was, all around him, falling away, street signs, people, things he could not name” (DeLillo 246).

Florence, to whom Keith returns a briefcase he picked up when evacuating the towers, seems to be resembling Keith most. With her, he engages in the most meaningful social and physical interactions since she shares the same experience, trauma, and the space of the world before, having evacuated from the burning towers. When she recounts the world in which towers still stood and to which Keith too belonged, she does it by “often pausing to look into space, to see things again, the collapsed ceilings and blocked stairwells” (DeLillo 55), enabling a sort of therapy to

Keith, but even more importantly, a sense of belonging to the space he recognizes. In fact, as a survivor of the collapse, she comes closest to embodying a sense of solace for Keith. This comfort comes from her repeatedly recounting the steps they took to escape the burning towers, and, in those conversations, Keith is trying to locate himself, only this time, he is looking for himself in someone else's narrative: "She was going through it again and he was ready to listen again. He listened carefully, noting every detail, trying to find himself in the crowd" (DeLillo 59, emphasis added). Perhaps, then, Keith's physically intimate relationship with Florence represents an attempt to ground himself in the space now gone but still felt, and she is the only one who can provide that anchoring comfort, albeit a fleeting one.

By shifting perspective to the terrorist Hammad, DeLillo again reiterates that space is integral to identity. New York, as seen through the eyes of the terrorists, is an unfamiliar place. The attackers "studied architecture and engineering" and "urban planning" (DeLillo 79). At the same time, Hammad reminisces about his training in Afghanistan and the landscape that "consumed him, waterfalls frozen in space, a sky that never ended. It was all Islam, the rivers and streams" (DeLillo 172). The space of Islam is no less defining, consoling, and empowering to Hamad than Manhattan was to Keith. "There was no feeling like this ever in his life" (DeLillo 172), Hammad reflects, picking up a stone in the desert. In a way, the two spaces represent polarly opposite environments – the tall, towering structures of New York that block the view of the sky versus the vast, empty landscape with a never-ending sky. The horrific collision between them, bringing the vast emptiness to replace the skyscraper-filled skyline, represents the inability of the co-existence of two spaces. Moreover, the collision of two worlds takes place in the same sentence at the end of the novel, as we transition from Hammad, who is fastening his seatbelt in the aircraft, seconds before it strikes the tower, causing "fire, and a blast wave [that] passed through the structure that sent Keith Neudecker out of his chair and into a wall" (DeLillo 239) to Keith's perspective. The two ideologically, geographically, and structurally opposing spaces of the protagonist and the antagonist collide, merging to form a new space, the post-9/11 space, something the characters of the novel remain unable to identify with.

4. Navigating Uncanny Spaces

Finally, I turn to the paradigm of understanding spatial relations that has lingered in the novel and previous discussion, that of the uncanny. In "The Study of Space in Literature: Some Paradigms," David Spurr examines some spatial paradigms found in literature, one of which is the uncanny, or das Unheimliche![8] He examines the representation of it in Rilke's The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge, in which the title character is "struck with feelings of terror and alienation when he wanders into a newly demolished quarter of modern Paris" (24), where "an inner wall … is now the outer wall of … houses" that are no longer there (24)![9] Spurr, paraphrasing Schelling and Freud, claims the uncanny refers to the state in which "everything that ought to have remained secret and hidden … has come to light" (22). Moreover, he holds that the feeling is that of a "disquieting quality of being familiar and unfamiliar at the same time" (22). He likens the intense feeling of the uncanny to that of space:

> *something that ought to have remained secret and hidden – the interior of the house, alternately intimate and obscene, the concealed inner space of the narrator's being –has come to light. In this domestic space turned inside out, now become the exterior space of the modern city in the full process of its transformation, the familiar is made unfamiliar, and vice versa. (25)*

Similarly, what has come to life in Falling Man is the inner, concealed space of a building, but even more so, the unfamiliar emptiness of a metropolis. On the one hand, the collapse of the towers, ash covering the city – the concealed inner space – has uncannily been exposed. The dead are covering the windows, and streets, instead of being alive and in the towers just as, according to Spurr, Rilke "breaks down the barriers between inner and outer space … discovering the anatomy of being in the form of fear, debris, and human waste" (25). On the other hand, what is repressed is the emptiness – a gap – a world the characters have not depended on nor identified with. It is the void created by the destruction of dependable and familiar surroundings that determines the space and, in turn, the characters who identify themselves as New Yorkers. Consequently, they possess a strange feeling of being familiar and unfamiliar with the space. The gap created on the ground and in the sky of Manhattan uncannily creates new spatial relations. Some occupiers of space feel uneasily familiar (Lianne, Justin, Martin) and some numb and unfamiliar (Keith, Florence) with the

post-9/11 space, while others, stuck in-between (like the performance artist), seem to bring to light something that should have stayed hidden.

Moreover, the feeling of uncanny is linked to the anxious state the characters of the novel never entirely abandon. It was Martin Heidegger who wrote about the feeling of anxiety as "fundamentally a sense of not being 'at home' in the world" (qtd. in Tally 47). When such a feeling takes hold, Tally believes that the sense of being lost invites "individuals [to] develop projects by which to give our lives meaning, … to re-establish our sense of place in the world" (47). Every character in the novel is concerned with projects, starting with Keith showing up at Lianne's apartment, taking the briefcase to another person who walked out of the ruins, Justin searching for the plans, terrorists bringing Islamic space into collision with the American one, and finally, the artist suspended in space between the old and the new world. Each, in their own way, struggles to navigate the uncanny spaces resulting from never-before-experienced trauma. Ultimately, it is not a question of whether they succeed in dealing with trauma, but the fact that these attempts are "strategies for navigating these uncanny spaces of everyday life" (Tally 67).[10] Since Keith seems to be constantly mapping and trying to identify a spot he could anchor himself in, and other characters, through projects, grapple with the post-9/11 environment, I would agree with Harack, who asserts that "without this grounding of self in terms of place, we are left with a proliferation of manic and depressed characters who do not know where they belong or where they come from" (308). Whether it is Martin and Lianne seeing towers in the paintings and performances, Justin's denial of the loss of space, or Keith's attempts to identify with space and ultimately abandon the once familiar one,[11] the world they now inhabit signifies "the death of a street," the post 9/11 world.

Remapping the once familiar and recognizable landscape by framing the story using the attacks and consistently examining their aftermath, DeLillo remains focused on his characters' attempts at navigating the redrawn map throughout the novel. Thrust into an unfamiliar environment – which they try to make sense of differently – all the characters continuously struggle to establish a connection with space (and each other) and thus demonstrate how essential space is in establishing a sense of self. The towers, integral to the consistency of the ground and the sky, are the symbols of familiarity, dependence, and connection but also power and identity. Now, their

destruction brings about the uncanny feeling of things in space – being where they are not supposed to be – and characters not belonging to the space they are supposed to belong.

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[1] See Gray for a comprehensive examination of literature after 9/11.

[2] See Gravano for more.

[3] I would be amiss not to liken this feeling to the feeling of unease and uncanniness the residents of Zagreb, Croatia, felt upon looking at the missing tower of the Zagreb Cathedral that collapsed on the day of the devastating 2020 earthquake.

[4] See Medovoi, pp. 98-99.

[5] Julia Walsh wrote a thesis on trauma and memory in Falling Man. She says that through "unreliable and frantic narration, readers gain a better understanding of the 9/11 victim mentality and their trauma responses" (7).

[6] Writing on visual memory in Falling Man, Schultermandl argues that Lianne is "the primary focalizer" in the novel and that watching the performance, for her, "the image of the falling man connotes something secretive, even forbidden" (49).

[7] See p. 3

[8] The author also explores space as chora, extension, limit, void, and power among other paradigms. See Spurr.

[9] According to Spurr, the narrator of Rilke's work senses "in this scene the living remains of a domestic life in all its intimacy … all the suffocating closeness of domestic interior" (24). The narrator says, "I recognize everything here, and that is why it passes right into me: it is at home inside me" (25).

[10] Tally here addresses Satre's notion that projects are ways of creating meaning or giving shape to existence. These projects are "a kind of figurative cartography, through which it is possible to overcome this disorientation, or in Heidegger's sense, this 'not-at-home-ness' …" (66).

[11] Near the end of the novel, Keith leaves New York and goes to Las Vegas, where he engages in gambling.



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