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Beyond '9/11'

Counter-narratives of grief in post-9/11 literature

Donnelly, Kelsie

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Beyond '9/11': Counter-narratives of Grief in Post-9/11 Literature

Kelsie Donnelly, B.A., M.A.

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Declaration

I declare that the following research is my original work, submitted to the School of Arts, English and Languages at Queen's University, Belfast, for the degree of PhD.

Kelsie Donnelly

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Abstract

This project examines how Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007), Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) and Claudia Rankine's *Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric* (2004) have explored grief in response to the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks. It sets out to answer four key questions: is there anything to be gained — politically, socially, ethically, and aesthetically — from lived experiences of grief? How do the texts engage with the grief of abject and ungrievable bodies — from the censored falling body to the perceived Muslim 'terrorist' Other to brutalised black bodies — and what are the implications of this engagement? How do the texts depart from a now paradigmatic 'trauma' aesthetic to aestheticise loss in new ways? And, finally, to what extent do the texts examined move beyond '9/11', countering the narrative of '9/11' as a national 'trauma' to provide alternative portraits of grief? While there is a plethora of literary studies focusing on trauma in '9/11 fiction', which often conflate or misdiagnose grief as trauma, there is not yet a critical study with a sustained focus on grief in post-9/11 literature. Although there is an emerging trend away from traditional trauma theory as a critical paradigm, few scholars have suggested or applied alternate interpretive frameworks. This study reads literary portraits of grief through a variety of analytical lenses provided by cultural theorists, such as Julia Kristeva, Judith Butler, and Lauren Berlant, to create a critical counter-narrative to literary studies of 9/11 'trauma' and the dominant '9/11' narrative of national 'trauma' and resilience.

Building on a substantial body of scholarship in grief studies and 9/11 literary studies, "Beyond '9/11': Counter-narratives of Grief in Post-9/11 Literature" makes an original contribution to both fields in several ways: it is the first detailed study of grief in post-9/11 literature and twenty-first-century American literature; it is the first to offer an in-depth analysis of what it considers as abject bodies (and the reclamation of these bodies as political agents) in post-9/11 literature; it includes Rankine's *American Lyric*, which is rarely included in studies of 9/11 literature, and departs from established readings of '9/11 novels' to provide new readings; it applies new methodologies to analyse post-9/11 literature, breaking the solidified ties of extant 9/11 literary scholarship to trauma theory, whether in favour of or against; it challenges the dominant medico-psychiatric model of grief to provide an alternate perspective of grief from a literary lens; and, finally, it argues that sustained reflection on the ordinary yet profound experience of grief is (re)productive and filled with the potential to bear various ethical, political, social and aesthetic fruits.

Contents

Introduction

This project examines how a series of literary texts have explored grief responses to the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001. By September 20th, 2001 the US nation had apparently moved beyond grief, as President George W. Bush famously declared 'our grief has turned to anger, and anger to resolution' in the form of a War on Terror ("Congress" n.pag.). Resolving grief within nine days left the nation with little time to reflect on the generative possibilities of loss, leading cultural theorist Judith Butler to pointedly ask: 'What, politically, might be made of grief besides a cry for war?' (*Precarious* xii). Although nineteen years have passed since the attacks, Butler's question remains unanswered. This thesis argues that Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007), Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), and Claudia Rankine's *Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric* (2004) suggest answers to this question through critical and creative representations of the aesthetics, politics, and ethics of grief. The texts are counter-narratives to the dominant state and media narrative of the events of September 11th, 2001, which revolved around resilience and recovery from the alleged 'trauma' the nation collectively suffered. To mark the ten-year anniversary of the terrorist attacks, *TIME* magazine published a special commemorative issue entitled "Beyond 9/11: Portraits of Resilience" (2011), a multi-media sequel to the *New York Times*' "Portraits of Grief" (2001).[1] Both collections of portraits privilege the grief and resilience of white American citizens and reiterate the hegemonic representation of the attacks as an unprecedented trauma inflicted on the entire nation. The underpinning assumption of *TIME*'s "Beyond 9/11" is that loss is an obstacle to psychological and social order and, as such, to be overcome. This thesis, "Beyond '9/11': Counter-narratives of Grief in Post-9/11 Literature", argues against this assumption and seizes the missed opportunity to seriously consider grief and its disruptive potential.

The texts this study examines suggest that dwelling on the complex embodied experience of grief is filled with ethical, political, and aesthetic possibilities. The scope of this thesis moves

[1] The *New York Times*'s series, the "Portraits of Grief", (mis)appropriated personal pain to create a narrative of generalised grief. The "Portraits of Grief" were originally published in the form of a *New York Times* column that ran from September 14th to the end of December 2001, the online version of which is available on the newspaper's website. Each portrait is two hundred words in length and sketches the endearing personality traits and wholesome pastimes of each victim included in the collection, accompanied by a headshot. See: *Portraits: 9/11/01: The Collected "Portraits of Grief" from the New York Times*, ed. Janny Scott (New York: Times Books, 2002). The "Portraits of Resilience" are available online on *TIME*'s website. See: https://time.com/collection/beyond-911/.

'beyond' the events of a singled-out September day to magnify small-scale and marginalised grief narratives, understanding grief not as an unprecedented phenomenon, but as a commonplace experience that permeates embodied existence. The texts consider this dynamic in ways other than traditional trauma theories of 'working through' and building resilience, when larger issues — tied up with power relations involving the state and the subject — are at stake. Cultural and medico-psychiatric trauma theories conceptualise trauma as a universal psychological response to a singular event that resists assimilation into pre-existing cognitive frameworks. There is a plethora of literary studies focusing on trauma in '9/11 fiction', but there is not yet a critical study with a sustained focus on grief in post-9/11 literature. Existing scholarship tends to focus on '9/11 novels' written by white American men with a distinctly white ethnic focus. The dearth of African American representation in these novels and in subsequent critical studies is in part a reflection of the dominant official and media narrative of the attacks. Contrary to the conspicuous absence of African Americans in *TIME*'s "Beyond 9/11", this thesis argues that *Falling Man*, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and *Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric* paint a more diverse critical collection of grief portraits, across a variety of literary genres. Although literary scholars are becoming increasingly critical of applying traditional trauma theory as an analytical paradigm, few have suggested viable alternatives. Reading depictions of grief and abject bodies through a variety of theoretical lenses provided by cultural critics, such as Julia Kristeva, Butler, and Lauren Berlant, "Beyond '9/11': Counter-narratives of Grief in Post-9/11 Literature" provides a critical counter-narrative to literary studies of 9/11 'trauma' as well as the official and media narrative of trauma and resilience.

1. Why '9/11'?

This project revisits literary responses to the events of September 11th, 2001 ahead of the twentieth anniversary, taking into consideration developments in cultural criticism and changes in the political landscape. Following Jacques Derrida's distinction between what *feels* singular and what is unprecedented, this study understands '9/11' as a temporal construct rather than an objective reality ("Autoimmunity" 86). The term '9/11' is used as shorthand for the date, September 11th, 2001, when nineteen terrorists hijacked and crashed commercial American planes into sites of US military, economic, and political power: the North and South Towers of the World Trade Center complex in Lower Manhattan; and the Pentagon. A fourth hijacked plane was bound for Washington D.C. but crashed into a field on the outskirts of Shanksville, Pennsylvania. The attackers used the power of the media as a weapon, orchestrating visual

spectacles of terror that television networks would (predictably) broadcast to the nation (live, in the case of the second plane to hit the Tower) and later replay. This created the perfect script for a 'cultural trauma':

> If the screen industry's most talented scriptwriter had been asked to draft a scenario for a quintessential cultural trauma, that script could not have surpassed the actual drama that occurred on September 11, 2001. Nineteen terrorists — none detected, none apprehended — boarded four commercial airliners at different airports, hijacked them, and turned them toward a mission of destruction and death. (Smelser 264)

Jeffrey Alexander notes that the impression of a 'cultural trauma' depends on a listening audience to (passively) accept the claims of 'carrier groups' (10). The state and US mainstream media played a pivotal collaborative role in hijacking the cultural imagination after the attacks, and together these parties constituted 'the collective agents of the trauma process' (Alexander 10). The media, of course, is not a monolithic entity, but as soon as it carried the state's message of the attacks to the masses, it was only a 'matter of short days, if not hours' until the 9/11 attacks were recognised as a 'national trauma' (Janoff-Bulman and Sheikh 330; Smelser 280). Broadcasting the unfolding events on live television, the media gave the impression that the entire nation was under attack, as Neil Smelser notes: 'in conformity with the perfect script, the events were appreciated almost immediately by the American population as perhaps the greatest trauma in the nation's history' (265). The then mayor of New York City, Rudolf (Rudy) Giuliani, claimed that the 'deadliest attack in history' took place on September 11th, 2001 and his successor, mayor Michael Bloomberg, described it as the day that 'changed our world forever', bringing 'loss and grief on a scale we had never known' (Giuliani, "Speech" n.pag.; Bloomberg 14). Soon the pain of a 'wounded New York' on that day would become the pain of a 'wounded entire world' (Kaplan 136; Annan n.pag.). Subsequent crisis situations and losses thus paled in comparison to the magnitude of the 9/11 attacks, enabling the US government to overlook and subsume these smaller-scale deaths and incidents with relative ease. In contrast, television footage of the planes striking the World Trade Center and subsequent plumes of black smoke billowing in the air was repeated on a loop and burnt into the collective psyche of the audience. This is partly why '9/11', according to Marc Redfield, constitutes a 'virtual trauma', defined as the 'mediated, technically produced, not properly real' characteristic of a collective (culturally constructed) affliction (2).[2]

[2] Redfield qualifies his use of the term 'virtual', writing 'I risk the term "virtual trauma" [...] to denote not a condition of psychological damage, but rather a making-legible, within the medium itself, of a violence inherent to all media technologies, which record and remember the unique only by effacing and forgetting it' (29). Though Redfield rightfully notes that viewers were not traumatised in the medico-psychiatric sense of the term, it is necessary to add that the footage they witnessed substantiated and contributed to the sense of '9/11' as a national 'trauma'. See: Marc Redfield, *The Rhetoric of Terror: Reflections on 9/11 and the War on Terror* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009).

In a similar vein, James Der Derian contends that the repetition of television footage contributed to the sense of collective traumatisation:

> A national state of emergency and trauma reached into all levels of society. It was as if the American political culture experienced a collective Freudian trauma, which could be re-enacted (endlessly on cable and the Internet) but not understood at the moment of shock. (325)

Der Derian does not subscribe to the view that the 9/11 attacks caused national trauma, but rather, a disbelief in 'reality'. While Bush was apparently stunned by the 'unbelievably dramatic event', many onlookers turned to figurative language to describe the voids left by the Twin Towers ("Beyond 9/11: Portraits of Resilience" n.pag.). Into these voids 'there rushed a host of metaphors, analogies, and metonyms, dominated by denial ("It's a movie"), history ("It's Pearl Harbor"), and nonspecific horror ("It's the end of the world as we have known it")' (Der Derian 326). Highly selective psychocultural narratives 'filled with moral superiority claims' emerged, emphasising 'in-group conformity and externalization of responsibility' and offering Americans assurances about the cohesion and strength of the nation (Ross 10). State and media framings of the attacks as an exceptional 'trauma' were accompanied by bellicose reprisals of American exceptionalism, which Byron E. Shafer defines as 'the notion that the United States was created differently—essentially on its own terms and within its own context' (v). Declaring that 'freedom and democracy are under attack', Bush urged the nation to 'unite in steadfast determination and resolve' against its 'enemies of freedom' ("Photo Opportunity"; "State of the Union" 2002 n.pag.). Had it not been for the construction of the attacks as such, the sense of national pride and unity might not have been possible. It is important to note, however, that these feelings were not experienced by all, as will be discussed in more detail later.

2. Trauma and Resilience After '9/11'

Trauma theorist Cathy Caruth contends that trauma victims require assistance with assimilating traumatic memories into a cogent narrative of events, as the 'phenomenon of trauma' demands 'historical awareness and yet denies our usual modes of access to it' (*Trauma: Explorations* 151). Whilst Chapter One considers the controversies surrounding definitions of trauma (including Caruth's), it is important to note that Smelser concurs with Caruth's assertion that cultural narratives (including literature) can 'claim' what is otherwise an unclaimable experience. The state 'claimed' 'trauma' not by unlocking history, but by removing the events from broader historical and geopolitical contexts to convince the public that the history of '9/11' began at 'Ground Zero' on September 11th, 2001, a site that was originally called 'the pile' (Langewiesche

qtd. in Sturken, "The Aesthetics of Absence" 315).[3] Jenny Edkins asserts that renaming 'the pile' 'Ground Zero' was a 'regrettable exaggeration of the destruction' caused as it implied that the 'illimitable response to terrorism' must 'start from square one, from this original penetration of evil, and the response must match the full power of this traumatic rupture, for which no prior guidance, historical limits, or wider political context is appropriate' (Edkins 105). In his address to a joint session of Congress and the American people on September 20th, 2001, Bush stated that the 9/11 attacks were comparable only to one other event in history: 'one Sunday in 1941' ("Congress" n.pag.). That was the day when a US naval base at Pearl Harbor was attacked by a preemptive military strike by the Imperial Japanese Navy Air Service.[4] The following day, the US made its formal entry into the Second World War. Comparing these two events did not contradict claims that the 9/11 attacks were 'so unique and unprecedented as to transcend [their] time', but implicitly reinforced Bush's 9/11 narrative of 'historical exceptionalism' (Edkins 105). Not only did the comparison emphasise American victimhood, it also reinforced the status of the 9/11 attacks as an 'act of war', as the latest in a long line of global conflicts that could only be resolved with the (military) assistance of the US, the wounded warrior. As far as Bush was concerned, the only 'responsibility to history' the US had was to 'answer these attacks and rid the world of evil' ("Prayer and Remembrance" n.pag.).

Thomas Claviez asserts that such statements and claims that 'history won't be the same after 9/11' exemplified attempts by the state 'to start history all over again' (87). To 'declare history starting over' without 'taking recourse to the lessons of history' is a classic American

[3] The term 'Ground Zero' evokes the language used to describe material damage caused by the detonation of nuclear bombs, most famously those US forces dropped over two Japanese cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in 1945. These explosions claimed the lives of approximately 120,000 people. The use of the term 'Ground Zero' in the context of the 9/11 attacks served two functions: it implied that both catastrophes were comparable; and simultaneously minimised US involvement in mass-destruction, as the term is now most commonly known as the location where Americans were attacked and murdered on September 11th, 2001.

[4] Senator John McCain also used this comparison, declaring: 'Complete Destruction. There is no avoiding the war we are in today, any more than we could have avoided world war after our fleet was bombed at Pearl Harbor' ("No Substitute" n.pag.). Noam Chomsky asserts that the use of the attacks at Pearl Harbour as an analogy is misleading, for several reasons: 'On December 7, 1941, military bases in two U.S. colonies were attacked — not the national territory' (*9-11* 43). The national territory, he writes, had not been under attack since 1812, when the 'U.S. annihilated the indigenous population (millions of people), conquered half of Mexico (in fact, the territories of indigenous peoples) [...] intervened violently in the surrounding region, conquered Hawaii and the Philippines (killing hundreds of thousands of Filipinos), and, in the past half century particularly, extended its resort to force throughout much of the world. The number of victims is colossal' and significantly higher than the estimated number of victims killed in the 9/11 attacks (Chomsky, *9-11* 43). What differentiated the 9/11 attacks from the above was that on September 11th, 2001 'the guns [were] directed the other way' (Chomsky, *9-11* 44). See further: Noam Chomsky, *9-11: Was There an Alternative?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2011); John McCain, "No Substitute for Victory: War is Hell. Let's Get on with It." *Wall Street Journal* 26 Oct. 2001, 3 Mar. 2015 <www.opinionjournal.com/editorial/feature.html?id=95001375>.

approach to history (Claviez 94). The foundational myth of America as a nation of 'self-invention and perpetual innovation' intimates that with the breaking of each new dawn there is an opportunity for Americans to break from the past (McIvor, *Mourning in America* xv).[5] Dwelling on the past is thus not only considered a 'waste of precious energy; it is practically un-American' (xv). The depiction of America as a land of (re)creation is intricately related to the idea of America as a prelapsarian paradise. After the 9/11 attacks there was a nostalgic longing for the return of a mythical pre-9/11 America whose innocence had not yet been stolen. In a 2011 article commemorating the tenth anniversary of the attacks, Jeneba Ghatt claimed that '[b]efore 9/11, America was a nation that welcomed all, and was more or less a land of the free, in its truest sense' (n.pag.). Portrayed as an innocent entity, a term associated with purity and virginity, pre-9/11 America was considered a paragon of moral and racial purity until it was suddenly struck by dark-skinned terrorists from the Middle East. Since the attacks, Ghatt writes, 'the country has had to grow up pretty fast, put up some guards and barriers to protect its citizens and inhabitants, ushering a brand-new era of terror' (n.pag.). Ghatt's hesitant claim that the nation was 'more or less' the land of the free is symptomatic of the blindness caused by the whitewashing Edenic myth. This myth is deeply problematic as America is a nation marred by brutal racial history. James Baldwin asserts that investment in this myth means that Americans 'have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it' (5). Baldwin is critical of his compatriots' blatant disregard for the racial crimes committed by US governments throughout history and the subsequent inability to acknowledge (and thus mourn) the victims. Immediately after the 9/11 attacks, the state leant on this myth to cast the past to oblivion, absolving itself of any accountability so that it could start history afresh.

Critical of this decontextualization, Butler situates the attacks within a history of US intervention in foreign affairs and global contexts of religion and poverty. Bush, however, offered the public a simplistic and more politically favourable explanation: 'America was targeted for attack because we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world' ("Attack on America" n.pag.). On September 25th, Bush claimed that the perpetrators were motivated solely

[5] For more detailed analyses of myths in American literature and culture, see the following: Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000); Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998); Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*, ed. Erica J. Gislason (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1996); Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association* (1893): 190-227.

by purely evil intentions: 'the people who did this act on America', and those who may have been planning further attacks, 'are evil people. They don't represent an ideology; they don't represent a legitimate political group of people. They're flat out evil. That's all they can think about, is evil' ("FBI Needs Tools" n.pag.). This simplistic logic echoed that of the then secretary of State, Colin Powell, who stated on 13th September that the motivating factors behind the attacks, though 'very, very complex', could be explained as follows: 'they don't like our value system. They don't like the system that treats every individual as a creature of God with the full rights of every other individual' (n.pag.). Simplistic explanations such as these negated any sense of culpability on America's part and paved the way for the nation's perceived procession from a state of trauma to triumph. In this melodramatic morality tale of sullied innocence and 'good versus evil', Bush declared that American goodness — in the form of retributive justice — would prevail: 'as a nation of good folks, we're going to hunt them down' (Bush, "International Campaign" n.pag.; Bush, "FBI Needs Tools" n.pag.). This hunting metaphor was extended further to depict the enemy as an inhumane predator with 'no regard for human life', who 'hides in shadows' and 'preys on innocent and unsuspecting people' (Bush, "Photo Opportunity" n.pag.).[6] Narrating the attacks in these hyperbolic terms presented them as an unprecedented fall from 'isolationist innocence' caused in part by a clash between 'all freedom-loving people'— especially Americans, as the arbiters of 'freedom and democracy' — and a barbaric culture that advocates 'tyranny and death as a cause and a creed' and sends 'children on missions of suicide and murder' (Sturken, "The Aesthetics of Absence" 311; Bush, "Photo Opportunity" n.pag.; Bush, "State of the Union" 2002

[6] The language of 'hunting' and predation tropes used to describe the 'enemy' also created fear, which, according to Brian Massumi's definition, is 'the anticipatory reality in the present of a threatening future. It is the felt reality of the non-existent, loomingly present as the *affective fact* of the matter' ("Future Birth" 54; emphasis in original). Regardless of whether or not the existence of the evil 'terrorist' threat (as defined by Bush), and, indeed, the notorious Weapons of Mass Destruction, could be proven, the experience of being under attack was a real, lived one. Perpetuating and provoking fear, then, was one way the state, with the assistance of the US media, justified its retaliatory response to the attacks. See: Brian Massumi, "The Future Birth of the Affective Fact: The Political Ontology of Threat" in *The Affect Theory Reader*, eds. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (London; Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) 52-70.

n.pag.).[7] The mass-media propagated the state's uncompromising language and reinforced the binary between 'good' and 'evil', garnering support for a war that was framed as a peace-keeping mission and defence of freedom. These communicative strategies solidified the nation's 'state of exception', enabling the state to act out the sense of national 'trauma' indefinitely through the War on Terror.[8]

3. Resilience

Not only was it imperative for America to be recognised as the victim of the piece (to allow the government to act out trauma indefinitely), it was equally important for it be recognised as a resilient survivor who would bring its attackers to justice. Christina Cavedon notes that resilience was introduced to the trauma narrative to achieve this purpose (10).[9] Brad Evans and Henry A. Giroux argue that the 'doctrine of resilience' has 'become a defining mode of subjectivity for an

[7] This clash evokes the work of Samuel Huntington in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (1996). Huntington argues that a multipolar world order has emerged since the bipolar era of the Cold War, and with it what he considers the world's major civilizations. He predicted that conflict in the post-Cold War era will be caused primarily through cultural and religious clashes between these mutually antagonistic civilizations. His thesis gained traction after the 9/11 attacks, which, for several critics, validated Huntington's claims, whilst others argued that the state and media framed the War on Terror as the 'war of civilizations' that Huntington had predicted, with the intention of furthering pre-existing political aims. See further: Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney: Simon and Schuster, 1996); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 1996); Edward Said, "The Clash of Ignorance," The *Nation* Oct. 2001, 6 Dec. 2016. <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20011022/said>; and Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fear of Barbarians: Beyond the Clash of Civilizations* (Malden: Polity Press, 2008).

[8] See: Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

[9] Resilience has become an increasingly prevalent concept in psychology and politics since the 1980s. The World Bank implemented a policy entitled 'Social Resilience and Climate Change' which uses resilience as the basis for 'growing the wealth of the poor' and strengthening weaker states. As resilient subjects are those who 'survive and thrive in any situation', even in 'global economic meltdowns', resilience has not only become an admirable trait, but also an aspiration (Neocleous 5). There is a section devoted to the topic of resilience on the website for the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the content of which includes the following: 'While DHS is still new to resilience, there has been significant maturation over the past few years. In 2010, it was not uncommon for meetings to be dominated with a discussion of "What do we mean by resilience?" Now, the principles of adaptability, withstanding and rapidly recovering are generally understood and accepted. The focus of the meetings today is on action' (qtd. in Bracke 75). See further: Mark Neocleous, "Resisting Resilience," *Radical Philosophy* 178 (2013): 2-7; Sarah Bracke, "Bouncing Back: Vulnerability and Resistance in Times of Resilience" in *Vulnerability in Resistance*, eds. Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016) 52-75. Various scholars in psychology and psychiatry have introduced the concept of resilience to the study of grief. See: George A. Bonanno, et al., "Psychological Resilience After Disaster: New York City in the Aftermath of the September 11th Terrorist Attack," *Psychological Science* 17.3 (2006): 181-86; Isaac R. Galatzer-Levy, Sandy H. Huang, and George A. Bonanno, "Trajectories of Resilience and Dysfunction Following Potential Trauma: A Review and Statistical Evaluation," *Clinical Psychology Review* 63 (2018): 41–55; Ruth T. Morin, et al., "Do Multiple Health Events Reduce Resilience When Compared with Single Events?" *Health Psychology* 36.8 (2017): 721–28. In these studies, increased resilience is regarded as a productive and positive outcome of the grief 'process'.

age that has normalized catastrophe and its promises of violence', while "Beyond 9/11: Portraits of Resilience" unequivocally states that resilience has been 'the story of the United States [...] so far in the 21st century' (Evans and Giroux 78; "Beyond" n. pag.). The resilient protagonists of the story include Bush (whose portrait is the first of *TIME*'s collection), Giuliani, George Pataki (former Governor of New York), Donald Rumsfeld (former Secretary of Defense), New York City firefighters, a widow, and a Chief Executive Officer of global financial giant Cantor Fitzgerald. These individuals are considered models of resilience as they 'define what it means to meet adversity, and then overcome it' ("Beyond" n.pag.). Americans who either withstood the flames and smoke that engulfed the towers or lost family members were also classified as beacons of resilience and newsworthy role models for the nation.[10] Quoting the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Sarah Bracke notes that resilience has been defined as 'rebounding; recoiling; returning to the original position' and 'tending to recover quickly or easily from misfortune, shock, illness, or the like; buoyant, irrepressible; adaptable; robust; hardy' (Bracke 54). In "Resilience in the Face of Potential Trauma", George A. Bonanno writes:

> Until recently, resilience among adults exposed to potentially traumatic events was thought to occur rarely and in either pathological or exceptionally healthy individuals. Recent research indicates, however, that the most common reaction among adults exposed to such events is a relatively stable pattern of healthy functioning coupled with the enduring capacity for positive emotion and generative experiences [...] both immediately and in the months following exposure to a potentially traumatic event. (135)

Along with colleagues in clinical psychology, Bonanno conducted several studies on resilience after the attacks, noting the proclivity for 'adaptive flexibility' among 'New York City college students in the aftermath of September 11 with flexibility in emotion regulation, defined as the ability to effectively enhance or suppress emotional expression when instructed to do so' ("Resilience" 137). In a separate study, he concludes that '[o]ver 65% in the New York metropolitan area were resilient' following the 9/11 attacks (Bonanno, "Resilience" 136). This psychological approach to resilience focuses on different ways individuals cope with stress and hardship in order to return to a state of psychic wholeness. The mainstream media spoke of

[10] The 2002 True American Heroes Act rewarded the valiant efforts of 'government workers and others who responded to the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in Virginia and perished in the tragic events of September 11, 2001' and 'to the people aboard United Airlines Flight 93 who helped resist the hijackers on board and caused the plane to crash' (n.pag.). Apart from awarding congressional gold medals posthumously to these individuals, the Act ordered the Secretary of the Treasury to 'mint coins in commemoration of the Spirit of America, recognizing the tragic events of September 11, 2001' (n.pag.). See: United States. Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America. *True American Heroes Act of 2002*. 107th Congress, second session. Washington: GPO, 22 July 2002. The US media also bestowed upon family members of 9/11 victims the dual and exemplary status of innocent victim and heroic survivor. See further: Kenneth R. Feinberg, *What Is Life Worth? The Inside Story of the 9/11 Fund and Its Effort to Compensate Victims of September 11th* (New York: Public Affairs, 2006).

national traumatisation and resilience, but it was primarily the US government that emphasised American resilience in the wake of the attacks. In his address to the nation on the evening of September 11th, 2001 Bush declared: 'A great people has been moved to defend a great nation. Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America' or 'dent the steel of American resolve' ("Attack on America" n.pag.). Deep divisions within the nation were allegedly cast aside from September 11th onwards, a 'day when all Americans from every walk of life [were] unite[d] in [their] resolve for justice and peace', going 'forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just' (Bush, "Attack on America" n.pag.). Splitting the world into polar opposites enabled 'the imagining of an American "us" that provide[d] clarity of purpose by directing anger towards "them"— while obscuring the divisions that plague "us"', especially racial divisions (Connor 100). This narrative collapses under the weight of critical scrutiny, as the counter-narratives examined in this thesis emphatically state that America was neither completely innocent nor united either before or after the 9/11 attacks.

While the US government attempted to play multiple roles in this unfolding global drama (the greatest and most moral victim, hero, and power), the mass-media narrowed its arc of vision and furthered the aims of the political right. According to media scholar Brian Monahan, the US media used the language of trauma to write a 'morality tale about patriotism, loss, victimhood and heroes' to convince the American people that the War on Terror was necessary to prevent the nation from suffering another traumatic wound (101).[11] In this tale, the US reprised its role as a heroic survivor, while the role of evil villain was left to Osama bin Laden and those in the 'Axis of Evil'. This narrative imposed 'moral' imperatives and demands for homogeneity and social conformity, such that it became a patriotic duty to accept the government's position. Phrases circulating in the media, such as 'united we stand', a 'nation challenged' and 'America under attack', contributed to the creation of 'a unified public discourse [that] fuelled the illusion of a unified American public—a society of supposed like mind(s) and opinion(s)' (Bloodsworth-Lugo and Lugo-Lugo 20).[12] The circulation of triumphant tales of American resilience and

[11] Separate studies by Michelle C. Bligh, Jeffrey C. Kohles and James R. Meindl, and Patricia L. Dunmire, Richard Johnson, and George Lakoff, for example, investigate the state's propagation of the narrative as a means of garnering support for pre-emptive military action and the suspension of civil liberties through the Patriot Act. See: Michelle Bligh, Jeffrey C. Kohles, and James R. Meindl, "Charisma under Crisis: Presidential Leadership, Rhetoric, and Media Responses Before and After the September 11 Terrorist Attacks," *Leadership Quarterly* 15.2 (2004): 211-39; Patricia L. Dunmire, "'9/11 Changed Everything': An Intertextual Analysis of the Bush Doctrine," *Discourse and Society* 20. 2 (2009): 195-222; Richard Johnson, "Defending Ways of Life: The (Anti-)Terrorist Rhetorics of Bush and Blair," *Theory, Culture and Society* 19.4 (2002): 211-31; and George Lakoff, "Metaphors of Terror," *The Days After* 16 Sept, 15 June 2015 <www.press.uchicago.edu/News/911/lakoff.html>.

[12] Mass-media coverage such as this, and the sense of national unity it invoked, contributed to the rapid and widespread acceptance of the 9/11 attacks as a national trauma. Anthony DiMaggio noted that 79% of Americans

heroism contrasted the censorship of images of bodies jumping from the Twin Towers and fallen soldiers in Iraq. In *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), Susan Sontag noted that 'photographs are a means of making "real" (or more "real") matters that the privileged and the merely safe might prefer to ignore', of revealing the 'outrageousness, the insanity of war' (6; 12).[13] Critic and journalist Jay Rosen reprimanded the mainstream US media for its role in censoring such images and critical discourse, claiming that '[w]ork as a journalist became a specific way of being a patriot: an American first, a professional after that', while Rachel Smolkin, in an article entitled "Are the News Media Soft on Bush?" (2003), asserted that 'the terrorist attacks transformed the nation's mood and heightened media restraint' (Rosen 35; Smolkin n.pag.). The intellectual paralysis suffered by the public and scholars alike and the general acquiescence to the dominant narrative left polarising thought and exclusionary practices temporarily unchallenged (Butler, *Precarious* xiii).

4. Dissenting Voices

Despite the palpable sense of anti-intellectualism, eminent scholars and progressive cultural critics still subjected the 9/11 narrative to critical scrutiny. These critics read the attacks in a wider political and historical context and challenged the exceptionalism and binary divisions underpinning the official narrative. Among them was prolific intellectual Noam Chomsky, who made the following statement on September 18th, when wounds were still very much raw:

> Nothing can justify crimes such as those of September 11, but we can think of the United States as an "innocent victim" only if we adopt the convenient path of ignoring the record of its actions and those of its allies, which are, after all, hardly a secret. (*9/11* 35)

Chomsky does not deny that the attacks were 'major atrocities', but argues that they were not on the same 'level of many others, for example, Clinton's bombing of the Sudan with no credible pretext, destroying half its pharmaceutical supplies and killing unknown numbers of people'

polled in mid-September read the attacks through the interpretive framework of war and described them as 'acts of war' (18). See: Anthony R. DiMaggio, *Selling War, Selling Hope: Presidential Rhetoric, the News Media, and US Foreign Policy Since 9/11* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015).

[13] The most famous of these images was Associated Press photographer Richard Drew's "Falling Man", which captures a man in mid-air moments after his jump from the World Trade Center on September 11th, 2001. The term 'jumper' was rejected in favour of 'falling', while the New York Chief Medical Examiner classified those deaths as homicides. In his article, "The Falling Man", originally published in 2003, Thomas Junod writes: 'if one calls the New York Medical Examiner's Office to learn its own estimate of how many people might have jumped, one does not get an answer but an admonition: "We don't like to say they jumped. They didn't jump. Nobody jumped. They were forced out, or blown out"' ("Falling Man" n.pag.). See: Thomas Junod, "The Falling Man: An Unforgettable Story." *Esquire* 9 Sept. 2016, 1 Oct. 2016 <https://www.esquire.com/news-politics/a48031/the-falling-man-tom-junod/>.

("On the Bombings" n.pag.). Sunera Thobani claimed that 'U.S. foreign policy is soaked in blood', while Sontag raised the question as to whether the attacks were an attack on 'civilisation' or 'an attack on the world's self-proclaimed superpower, undertaken as a consequence of specific American alliances and actions' (Thobani, 284; Sontag, "Talk of the Town" n.pag.). In a rather prescient comment, Sontag denounced the 'disconnect between last Tuesday's monstrous dose of reality and the self-righteous drivel and outright deceptions being peddled by public figures and TV commentators' ("Talk of the Town" n.pag.). She condemned the 'startling' and 'depressing' narrative, reading it as a 'campaign to infantilize the public', and challenged the claim that the perpetrators were cowards, arguing: 'if the word "cowardly" is to be used, it might be more aptly applied to those who kill from beyond the range of retaliation [...] than to those willing to die themselves in order to kill others' (Sontag, "Talk of the Town" n.pag.). Jean Baudrillard and Jacques Derrida further interrogated the logic of the dichotomy between perpetrator and victim. Baudrillard unabashedly read the attacks as 'a global superpower [...] destroying itself, committing suicide in a blaze of glory', while Derrida, more subtly, stated that the 'event' of '9/11' was part of an 'autoimmunitary process' (Baudrillard 4; Derrida, "Autoimmunity" 94).[14] Fredric Jameson asserted that the nation suffered not from trauma but from 'collective delirium' (56). He is particularly critical of trauma theory as an interpretive framework, arguing that '[t]his new inauthenticity casts no little doubt on all those theories of mourning and trauma that were recently so influential, and whose slogans one also finds everywhere in the coverage' (Jameson 57). For Jameson, trauma theory offers a mistaken and misleading conceptualisation of trauma as a naturally occurring event rather than a cultural construction.

Oppositional statements made by Chomsky, Sontag and like-minded critics were either censored or lambasted by mainstream media. Sontag's question, for example, drew the ire of a sickened Greil Marcus, who reprimanded her (alongside Chomsky) for her perceived

[14] The notion of autoimmunity after the 9/11 attacks has become intertwined with 'terror'. In "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides" (2003), Derrida defines the autoimmunitary process as follows: 'As we know, an autoimmunitary process is that strange behavior where a living being, in quasi-*suicidal* fashion, "itself" works to destroy its own protection, to immunize itself *against* its "own" immunity' (94; emphasis in original). The concept of autoimmunity involves the possible destruction of the self as both the object and the subject of suicide or a suicidal event, as well as the compromised integrity of the self. As Derrida writes: 'Autoimmunity is more or less suicidal, but more seriously still, it threatens always to rob suicide itself from its meaning and supposed integrity' (*Rogues* 45). Writing in relation to autoimmunity and the 9/11 attacks, he notes that the Bush administration identified its own fear as an external 'threat', labelled it as 'terrorism' and waged a 'war against the "axis of evil"' (Derrida, "Autoimmunity" 41). See further: Jacques Derrida, "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida" in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*, ed. Giovanna Borradori (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) 85-136; and Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

'imperious, unsurprised, impatient, and ice-cold' words (44). Chomsky was accused of 'shrugging off the Sept. 11 attacks on the United States because [it] commits atrocities just as terrible and often worse' ("On the Afghanistan War" n.pag.). In an article entitled "The Sick Mind of Noam Chomsky'", published on September 26th, 2001, David Horowitz branded Chomsky a 'pathological ayatollah of anti-American hate' and soon 'Chomsky-hating' became a 'national pastime' (Horowitz n.pag.; Bronski n.pag.). Similar to Butler, Michael Bronski asserts that the backlash against these critics was 'not simply, as some have claimed, the panic reaction of a culture that has been deeply shaken by unexpected events in geopolitics', but the 'full flowering of a strain of anti-intellectualism intrinsic to US culture' (n.pag.). Elucidating his understanding of anti-intellectualism, Bronski writes: 'what we are witnessing here is a full assault on the dwindling structures of intellectualism—both academic and public—in American life. It is less about the events of 9/11 than about the ascendancy of a deeply conservative campaign' intended to create a 'national culture that values nationalism over individualism and physical and military might over open-ended dialogue' (n.pag.). Taking a longer view, Evans and Giroux assert that there is 'little doubt that the decade that followed the September 11 attacks was marked by a real sense of resignation', such that 'it simply did not matter how many innocent families and communities were destroyed as the military invasion and occupation pressed onward year after year' (75). Attitudes toward Bush's 'cowboy politics' would later shift and closed narratives open to scrutiny (Renshon 585).[15] Despite a shifting socio-political landscape and changing attitudes toward the US government's strategic response to terrorism, *TIME* magazine's commemorative issue, "Beyond 9/11: Portraits of Resilience", preserved and perpetuated the simplistic narrative that the state and media had propagated a decade earlier.

5. Why Grief?

Nineteen years on, the subject of grief remains relevant, as demonstrated by heated debates about the so-called 'Ground Zero Mosque' and the 2016 presidential preliminaries. With the transformation of grief into anger and then to resolution in nine days, there was apparently less

[15] Christina Cavedon theorises possible reasons for this shift, including rising national debt and the rising number of American soldiers who had either been killed in the War on Terror or returned home with injuries and psychological disturbances. Furthermore, the circulation of images in 2004 depicting the torture of inmates at Abu Ghraib prison by US military personnel cast doubts on the morality of the war. American citizens were arguably left disillusioned by the contrast between the Bush administration's rapid response to the 9/11 attacks and belated response to the impoverished (mostly black) inhabitants of New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. See: Christina Cavedon, *Cultural Melancholia: US Trauma Discourses Before and After 9/11* (Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2015) 186-87.

need to investigate grief than to demonstrate and celebrate triumph and resilience in the face of 'trauma'. The wholesale misapplication of the term 'trauma' to describe the nation's post-9/11 condition conflated personal experiences of pain with a more generalised collective feeling of shock and victimisation. As Christopher Bollas notes, 'many people never experience a trauma following a shock' (qtd. in Araújo 2). The rapid diagnosis of trauma subsumes and disregards other, less politically advantageous, responses to the attacks, including grief. Although often mistaken for each other, grief is not the same as trauma (as theorised by medico-psychiatric scholars and cultural theorists). Grief is understood in this thesis as an experience consisting of an array of sensations and behaviours specific to the individual that are not reducible to a standardised set of diagnostic criteria; grief is neither an unprecedented experience without a history nor a temporal rupture; grief does not render the affected a 'victim'; and grief inspires rather than resists narrative representation. Fulfilment of the psycho-social imperative to display resilience squanders the transformative potential of grief, as it depends on a return to the same and the impact of loss to be left without trace. Investment in resilience is arguably an example of what affect theorist Lauren Berlant calls 'cruel optimism', whereby the subject forms an attachment to a desired object (such as a person, place, thing, or idea) that prevents the subject from flourishing. Attachment to resilience is cruel in the sense that resilience is a symptom of an incapacity to imagine (at an individual and collective level) the opportunities that grief, and its revelation of vulnerability, might present in terms of personal and political transformation rather than a return to the status quo. These possibilities are explored in *Falling Man*, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*.

The etymologic origin of the verb 'to grieve' is the old French verb *grever*, meaning 'to burden' (*Oxford Learner's Dictionary* n.pag.). Grief has since been defined as a 'universal phenomenon' and a 'universal human response' to death that is 'as common as the air we breathe' (Granek, "Mourning Sickness" 61; Holmans 2; Mantel n.pag.).[16] The general consensus amongst scholars is that grief can be 'observed, diagnosed, and treated' (Granek, "Grief as Pathology" 66). This study interprets grief most simply as the human response to the loss of someone (or something) loved or known, a profound yet ordinary experience that is idiosyncratic rather than universal. Although grief can be experienced as a burden, it is a burden that paradoxically awakens, when shared with others. Current research on grief will be discussed in

[16] For further discussions of descriptions of grief as 'universal' see: Paul Rosenblatt, "Grief across Cultures: A Review and Research Agenda," in *Handbook of Bereavement and Practice: Advances in Theory and Intervention*, eds. Margaret Stroebe, et al. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2008) 207-22.

Chapter One, but it is relevant to note here that grief scholarship proliferated in the twentieth century within the 'psy' disciplines: psychology, psychoanalysis, and psychiatry. Studies published by researchers in these fields have been the most influential in terms of conceptualising grief, despite later twentieth-century contributions from sociology, thanatology, and culture studies. Grief has been theorised as: a mode of detachment from the dead (Freud 1917); a syndrome (Lindemann 1944); a process (Parkes 1972); a phenomenon that moves through phases or stages (Bowlby 1980; Bowlby and Parkes 1970; Kübler-Ross 1969); an ongoing process of continuing bonds with the deceased (Klass, Silverman, and Nickman 1996; Stroebe and Schut 2005); and a potentially pathological experience that, when considered prolonged or absent, is classifiable as a 'mental disorder' (Forstmeier and Maercker 2007; M. Horowitz et al. 1997; Lichtenthal, Cruess, and Prigerson 2004; Prigerson et al. 1995; Prigerson et al. 1999; Prigerson et al. 2009; Shear et al. 2011).

Falling Man, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* complicate and expand the dominant medico-psychiatric discourse on grief and challenge its underpinning assumption: that the bereaved is an autonomous and resilient subject, capable of 'recovering' within a prescribed time period. In these texts, grief is an embodied, unruly, and relational experience that cannot be processed in linear stages within a fixed timeframe. The subject is not an independent entity, but always already immersed in material, socio-political, economic, and emotional relationships with others. Although Western theories have 'lost' the body and neglected the 'disembodied dead', the counter-narratives examined in this thesis present grief as an embodied experience, rather than a purely psychological one.[17] In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, experiential responses to loss are spontaneous bodily processes of swell and overflow (over which the subject is not in control), which form the basis of an ethico-politics of responsibility. Moreover, the dead are not disembodied but present in the living tissue of the bereaved and preserved through embodied memories. This is integral to *Falling Man*'s conceptualisation of grief and the living presence of the dead as ordinary sources of wonder and awe, and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*'s and *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*'s respective theorisations of the (re)productive potential of grief.

Literary representations of grief received scant critical attention amidst rallying calls for the American public to stop grieving and 'restore the loss or return the world to a former order'

[17] See: Elizabeth Hallam, Jenny Hockey, and Glennys Howarth, *Beyond the Body: Death and Social Identity* (London: Routledge, 1999); Laura Tanner, *Lost Bodies: Inhabiting the Borders of Life and Death* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2006).

(Butler, *Precarious* 29-30). More critical attention has been paid to the 'taylorization of mourning' rituals and commemorative practices that emerged in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks (Simpson 156). Grief and mourning are often (mis)used as interchangeable terms. Jeffrey Kaufman, for example, defines mourning as follows: the 'psychological response to death', the 'expression', 'communication' and 'exhibition of grief', which is 'normally described as occurring in stages or phases' (311-12). In the 'final phase' of mourning, Kaufman states, 'grief is put to rest' (312). Kaufman conflates the two terms, using 'mourning' to describe a psychological response to death and the external manifestation of that response, and the term grief to describe a psychological response to loss. This thesis understands grief as an umbrella term covering a broad spectrum of experiential responses to loss, with mourning understood as a public expression of grief through customary practices and permissible social attitudes. Writing in relation to mourning rituals and the 9/11 attacks, Marita Sturken notes that posters of the missing were plastered on lampposts and walls, and spontaneous memorials 'quickly incorporated into the media spectacle of 9/11 as the media operated to shape the public aspects of mourning' (*Tourists* 174). Sturken argues that mass-produced memorabilia, such as Twin Tower souvenirs and teddy bears, epitomised a 'culture of comfort', enabling the public to 'confront loss, grief and fear through processes that disavow politics' (*Tourists* 6). In a similar vein, Karen J. Engle contends that purchasing 9/11 memorabilia and laying it at the attack sites created a form of 'kitsch communitarianism' that sent the following message: 'we can all be One, and be united in our common purpose. But this One is totalitarian, and it desires no less than the extermination of its foes' (77). This kitsch style makes a spectacle of mourning and short circuits the possibility of reflecting critically on grief and the grievances of others who 'have suffered arbitrary violence at the hands of the US' (Butler, *Precarious* xiv). This thesis undertakes a critical examination of literary portraits of grief that are neither aesthetic spectacles nor the products of a kitsch communitarianism that promotes a neo-conservative agenda.

6. Counter-narratives

In "In the Ruins of the Future", published in December 2001, DeLillo wrote:

> The narrative ends in the rubble and it is left to us to create the counternarrative.
>
> There are 100,000 stories crisscrossing New York, Washington, and the world. Where we were, who we know, what we've seen or heard. There are the doctors' appointments that saved lives, the cellphones that were used to report the hijackings. Stories generating others and people running north out of the rumbling smoke and ash. Men running in suits and ties, women who'd lost their shoes, cops running from the skydive of all that

> towering steel [...] These are among the smaller objects and more marginal stories in the sifted ruins of the day. We need them, even the common tools of the terrorists, to set against the massive spectacle that continues to seem unmanageable, too powerful a thing to set into our frame of practised response. (n.pag.)

DeLillo called for a counternarrative that would collect and create stories that were more 'marginal' than the 'massive spectacle' of two planes striking the Twin Towers, which then crumbled into rubble amidst plumes of smoke and ash. This description, 'massive spectacle', is also applicable to the 'improvised memorials', which vividly displayed the 'kitsch' style of public performances of mourning: the 'flags, flowerbeds and votive candles, the cardboard John Wayne, the children's drawings of the twin towers', the 'many photographs of missing persons', 'the sculptured flag of rippling copper and aluminium, six feet long', and the 'artefacts on display [that] represent the confluence of a number of cultural tides, patriotic and multidevotional and retro hippy' (DeLillo, "Ruins" n.pag.). Sturken asserts that kitsch such as this 'dictates particular kinds of sentimental responses and emotional registers', excluding the political and public expression of feelings and opinions deemed inappropriate or anti-American, as well as images such as Richard Drew's "Falling Man" (*Tourists* 21). Although the items are various, they are all part of the same univocal narrative of American victimhood and heroism underpinning sanctioned commemorations of the attacks, including "Beyond 9/11: Portraits of Resilience". If there was need in December 2001, when DeLillo first issued his call for counter-narratives to the sentimental and patriotic dominant narrative, there is arguably a greater need now, ahead of the twentieth anniversary of the attacks, to engage with the myriad multiple (and conflicting) perspectives and memories of the events in various contexts. This thesis responds to this need through its analyses of counter-narratives that reveal the repressed and sound the silenced or, as DeLillo put it, 'give memory, tenderness, and meaning to all that howling space' ("Ruins" n.pag.). Contrary to the narratives author(is)ed by the 9/11 perpetrators and the state and mass-media, *Falling Man*, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* do not hijack the imagination with reductive plots, but alert the imagination to alter 'frames of practised response' (DeLillo,"Ruins" n.pag.).

Alex Houen asserts that American novelists received the somewhat paradoxical invitation to produce fiction that was not quite fictional in the immediate aftermath of the attacks:

> Call in the novelists. This was the response of many newspapers in the immediate aftermath of September 11. Call in the novelists — the experts at imagining the unimaginable, the masters of other worlds of possibility. What was remarkable about the novelists' newspaper articles, though, was that fiction is precisely what they were not being asked to produce. What was needed was a restitution of reality as a common principle. (420)

Scenes of passenger planes slicing into the Twin Towers and a clear blue September sky becoming filled with clouds of dust and debris were likened to scenes from a 'movie'. This complicated the nexus of representation and testimony, blurring the line between a 'trauma' witness and a 'spectator' of a cinematic catastrophe. In the face of what DeLillo called a 'massive spectacle', novelists, according to Houen, were tasked with restoring a palatable version of 'reality' and, as Marco Abel noted, asked to 'declare what the event mean[t]' (1236). William Heyen and Ulrich Baer were among the first of the literary responders and in 2002 they published separate anthologies: *September 11: American Writers Respond* (Heyen) and *110 Stories: New York Writes After September 11* (Baer). The contributors offer compelling and diverse perspectives, but the editors affirm the official narrative of '9/11' as an exceptional trauma inflicted on an essentially innocent nation. In his preface to the collection, Heyen quotes the infamous claim of Theodor Adorno: 'to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric' (xi). Although problematic, it is not uncommon for cultural critics to draw uncritical connections between the Jewish Holocaust and the 9/11 attacks, despite differences in the magnitude and repercussions of both atrocities. Such comparisons aggrandised the attacks and contributed to the construction of '9/11' as a major event. Joyce Carol Oates contends that 'September 11 has become a kind of Holocaust subject, hallowed ground to be approached with awe, trepidation, and utmost caution' (n.pag.). Since the 'Americanization of the Holocaust', the Holocaust has become a paradigmatic trauma that can be (mis)appropriated to obscure and overshadow homegrown traumas and violence perpetrated by Americans on fellow Americans (Flanzbaum 35-40). Karyn Ball raises this point, and considers it 'absolutely crucial' to question why a 'national museum would be dedicated to a genocide in Europe before one was erected that portrays the history and aftereffects of slavery, the Jim Crow Laws, and Ku Klux Klan terrorism in this country' (14). Andrew Gross and Mary Ann Snyder-Körber further argue that 'focusing on European catastrophe rather than on slavery or Western expansion' enables Americans to 'bypass their own violent past' (372-73). Implicitly comparing the 9/11 attacks to the crimes committed in Auschwitz, Heyen closes his eyes to a history of American violence. Blinded by white American innocence, he prefaces his anthology with another dangerous claim: 'we must understand that the September 11th hijackers were filled with such hate for American aspirations and were of such fanatical fervor' that 'they would with a sense of great fulfilment have killed all 280,000,000 of us' (Heyen xii). Following this flawed logic, he includes in his anthology fiction that he believes reflects the unflinching victimhood of the nation, fiction that 'cauterizes the wound with uncomfortable questions and unflinching reflection. It sears the event into the collective imagination by embedding the initial shock in narratives, poems, theater, and tales' (Heyen 3). For Heyen, the novelist can represent a

theoretically unrepresentable experience, creating fiction that functions as a form of shock absorption.

The evolving 9/11 literary 'canon' consists of a series of novels, all of which enjoyed commercial success: Jay McInerney's *The Good Life* (2006); Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005); Claire Messud's *The Emperor's Children* (2006); Ken Kalfus' *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* (2006); John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006); DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007); Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007); Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland* (2008); and Amy Waldman's *The Submission* (2011). Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) and Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005) have been read as allegorical '9/11 novels'. Other notable contributions include J.M. Naqvi's *Home Boy* (2009), Porochista Khakpour's *Sons and Other Flammable Objects* (2007) and *The Last Illusion* (2014), and Thomas Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge* (2013), which engage with the 9/11 attacks in less overt ways than earlier fictional responses. Although these novels have been labelled canonical '9/11 novels' and read, primarily, as fictional responses to the events of a single day, the majority were written during the War on Terror and comment (to different extents and in different ways) on the destructive aftermath. There are no specific criteria for defining '9/11 fiction', as the scope of 'canonical' fiction ranges from direct representations of the attacks to critiques of the political landscape since 2001 across time and space. Thomas Paul Burgess' *Through Hollow Lands* (2018), Anissa M. Bouziane's *Dune Song* (2018), and John Wray's *Godsend* (2018) are the most recent novels to engage with the events of September 11th, 2001 and their aftermath in more or less oblique ways. Despite the passage of time and developments in social and geopolitical contexts, Wray's novel perpetuates the common (mis)perception of the Muslim figure as a terrorist Other, while Bouziane's *Dune Song* reifies the exceptional and traumatic status of the attacks.

Literary critics, such as Richard Gray, Kristiaan Versluys, and Martin Randall have expressed disappointment with early '9/11 novels', namely, *The Good Life*, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, *The Emperor's Children*, *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country*, *Terrorist*, and *Falling Man*. Summarising the views of these critics, Arin Keeble reports that there are four main sources of disappointment in these novels: the domestication of '9/11'; the predominance of white wealthy protagonists; the portrayal of the attacks as either unprovoked acts of aggression or as the result of American interference in global affairs; and the tendency to merge individual or familial 'trauma' with collective trauma (*The 9/11 Novel* 55-56). These critiques will be discussed in more detail in Chapter One, but it is worthwhile to note that Gray, Versluys, and Randall are right to point out that these novels are set in a domestic sphere populated, predominantly, by

white wealthy Americans. These critics, however, do not take issue with the general tendency of these novels to reinforce the construction of the attacks as an exceptional trauma. Some of the novels within the canon do attempt to challenge the exceptional status of 9/11 'trauma': *The Submission* refers to the Vietnam War memorial; McInerney's *The Good Life* alludes to the American Civil War; and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* draws parallels between the terrorist attacks and the allied bombings on Dresden and Hiroshima during the Second World War. As noted above, situating the 9/11 attacks within a historical continuum of global conflict — most notably, the Holocaust — decentres the events, but, at the same time, risks elevating them 'to the level of the mythical and the sacred' (Saal 456). The texts included in this study avert this risk as they narrate ordinary experiences of death and grief that are 'more marginal' than the 'massive spectacle' of the terrorist attacks and the mass-death caused by global violence (DeLillo, "Ruins" n.pag.).

The texts under analysis are classified as 'post-9/11 literature' for several reasons. Firstly, they are all published after September 11th, 2001 and engage with the events and aftermath of that day, some more so than others. *Falling Man* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* are novels, whilst *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* is an experimental lyric with a markedly different aesthetic. Together, these texts form a collection of grief portraits that is diverse in both theme and aesthetics. My use of the prefix 'post' is not intended to demarcate the closure of a prelapsarian pre-9/11 era, or the beginning of a new post-9/11 epoch. Contrary to the wave of nostalgia and paranoia that swept the state and the mass-media, the texts are neither future-oriented nor stuck in the past; rather, they are focused on the present. The protagonists of *Falling Man* are suspended in an interstitial time between what is no more and what is yet to come; *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* looks back on the past from the perspective of the present; and *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* calls readers to be present for others and makes present the forgotten dead. The selected narratives resist closure both in terms of fixed temporal parameters and the traumatic wound the nation allegedly suffered on September 11th, 2001, creating a space for the articulation of multiple perspectives, including the censored. Indeed, openness is a motif that runs throughout the texts, from the ambivalence of open-ended narratives eschewing the unequivocal logic of the state and mass media, to the openness of embodied subjectivity that dispels myths of personal and national impenetrability. Opening these narratives to scrutiny, the texts open wounds and metaphorical doors to a brutal past (and present) of racism in America. The selected counter-narratives are thus 'post-9/11' in another sense, as their scope moves 'beyond' — in time, space, politics and aesthetics — the 9/11 narrative told by state officials.

Although the texts are published after 2001, they all narrate experiences of grief predating September 11th, 2001, and do not revolve around the events of a day that has been singled out as an exceptional one. The 9/11 attacks are presented not as the primary source of grief, but as a trigger that reinstitutes and exacerbates chronic grief. In *Falling Man*, the fall of the Twin Towers is not an unprecedented trauma but a reminder of man's incontrovertible mortality, while the novel's female protagonist lives in a state of unresolved grief due to her father's death decades before the 9/11 attacks. The female protagonist of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* laments the loss of a lover who died a year before the 9/11 attacks, while the novel's narrative focaliser laments the precarity, war, and death that has and continues to ravage his native Pakistan. The American lyricist of *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* grieves for African American victims of police brutality who died in the 1990s. Hamid and Rankine treat the 9/11 attacks as a nodal point through which to stage larger political critiques of US foreign policies and systemic racism, as well as a blithe economic indifference to the precarity and suffering caused by globalising and military missions. Decentring the 9/11 attacks, the texts enable hidden histories of suicide, terror, and violence — which are discomfiting to a nation that prides itself on might, and moral and multi-cultural exceptionalism — to come into focus, with unexpected resonances emerging between them.

Contrary to the "Portraits of Grief", "Beyond 9/11: Portraits of Resilience", and most of the canonical '9/11 novels', the selected texts relate the silenced grief (his)stories of abject bodies, which are, in Butler's terms, 'ungrievable': unworthy of public recognition and mourning. Kristeva and Butler theorise the abject body as a source of terror and disruption that must be disposed of or cast-off to protect borders and to maintain psychological and social order.[18] Whilst the depiction of the 'terrorist' as an evil Other — who clashed with the heroism and patriotism of white Americans — established clear boundaries between individual and communal identities, the abject defies such neat delineations as the embodiment of 'the ambiguous, the in-between, the composite' (Kristeva 4). In the selected texts, DeLillo, Hamid, and Rankine depict suffering and abject bodies that have either been censored or demonised by mass-media in the US. *Falling Man* takes its title from a censored photograph called "Falling Man", which froze in time the 'falling' body of one of the 9/11 'jumpers'. The censored body is suspended mid-fall, becoming analogous with the embodied subject in a suspended state of grief. These subjects (aside from model family members) were also absent from media narratives that trumpeted resilience and swift recovery. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* portrays the grief of a vilified Middle Eastern

[18] Definitions of the abject and the differences between Kristeva's and Butler's theorisations will be explored in more detail in Chapter Two.

'terrorist' Other, while Rankine's *American Lyric* portrays the grief of African Americans living in a country with deep roots in racism. I have selected these texts partly because they engage with absent or underrepresented abject bodies in cultural narratives of '9/11' and in '9/11 fiction'.

7. Overview of Chapters

Due to the significance of '9/11' within the American literary as well as the American Studies critical spheres, Chapter One establishes the base co-ordinates of grief and trauma scholarship before examining the flowering and fossilization of 9/11 literary studies over the last nineteen years. The chapter begins by tracing the trends and (incremental) evolution of grief scholarship, from its origins in Freudian theory to its refinement in the psy- and social disciplines to its later development in literary and cultural criticism. The study seeks neither to provide an exhaustive or extensive chronology of grief research, nor a cross-cultural comparative analysis with nations beyond the US, Northern Europe, and Australia. This is partly due to space and scope constraints, but largely because the selected grief narratives counter dominant (and problematic) grief theories of Anglo-American origin. The chapter folds these narratives into its analysis of current grief research before sifting extant 9/11 literary scholarship to point out its misalignments and misperceptions. Although there is a wealth of critical material on post-9/11 literature, much of it follows a trend that has repeatedly returned — if not possessed — the field: trauma. To explain why it is necessary to move beyond 'trauma', the chapter outlines the development and discontents of trauma theory before detailing the theoretical lenses the following readings apply to move beyond trauma and toward new critical territories.

Drawing on Kristeva's theorisation of abjection in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982) as the subjective experience of the porosity between self and other, and of what is cast out of the symbolic order, Chapter Two examines DeLillo's engagement with abject art in *Falling Man*. Beginning with an analysis of the titular "Falling Man's" performance art, which brings censored bodies back into public focus, the chapter considers what DeLillo means by his description of the performance artist's 'awful openness' — of the 'falling figure that trails a collective dread', simultaneously merging with the ash that still hangs in the air after the 9/11 attacks, and with ethereal images of the angelic and divine (*Falling* 164; 33). Departing from established analyses of the novel, this chapter focuses on *Falling Man*'s marginal, overlooked stories, particularly that of Lianne (the novel's protagonist) who has lived in a state of suspended grief since her father's suicide several years before the 9/11 attacks. For Kristeva, the abject is

accompanied by a 'massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness' (2). For Lianne, the uncanny experience of the "Falling Man's" abject art is indicative of its revelatory power, which invokes a sense of *déjà vu* along with feelings of revulsion and fascination associated with grief, her father and his death. DeLillo once said in an interview that 'the extraordinary wonder of things is somehow related to the extraordinary dread, to the death fear we try to keep beneath the surface of our perceptions' ("Outsider" 63). Chapter Two argues that *Falling Man* suggests that grief and the aesthetics of abjection reveal the 'extraordinary wonder' of ordinary life.

Chapter Three sets out to answer the question Butler poses in *Precarious Life*: 'is there something to be gained from grieving, from tarrying with grief?' through a reading of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (xii). The novel provides a scathing critique of the US government's hasty transmutation of grief into a war cry, and paints two nuanced portraits of abject bodies in grief, one of which is a melancholic withering white female, and the other a grieving Pakistani male and eventual American reject. Drawing on recent theorisations of precariousness by Butler and Isabell Lorey, the chapter argues that Hamid proposes an ethico-political model of grief that refuses to conform to existing modes of post-9/11 mourning. The novel suggests that tarrying with grief and its revelation of the reality of porous borders has the (re)creative potential to produce new subjectivities and ethico-political movements, charting new affective cartographies.

Drawing on Berlant's conceptualisation of crisis ordinariness in *Cruel Optimism* (2011), Chapter Four explores the collage of pre- and post-9/11 counter-narratives of grief portrayed in Rankine's *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*. It follows the text's journey through a metaphorical American wasteland scattered with black bodies and the terminally ill. The analysis reads the lyricist — who is writing a book on the liver — as the personification of the liver in a dual sense: the anatomical organ that absorbs and breaks down the substances that pass into its permeable surface; and someone who lives on, surviving the crises and grief of ordinary life, which are experienced as intense physical pain and pangs of exhaustion. The lyricist then translates her embodied response into a lyrical poethics of loss that is both responsible and responsive to the suffering of abject bodies. The final section of the chapter argues that *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* is, in turn, a work that metaphorically weeps for the abject and ungrievable bodies portrayed on its pages, awaiting in (waning) hope that numbed senses will be altered and alerted to the co-existence of ordinary life with death for these bodies. Finally, a series of conclusions will be drawn in response to the key research questions of this thesis: is there anything to be gained — politically, socially, ethically, and aesthetically — from lived experiences of grief? How do the texts engage with the grief of abject and ungrievable bodies, and what are the implications of this engagement?

How do the texts depart from the paradigmatic 'trauma' aesthetic to aestheticise loss in new ways? And, finally, to what extent do the texts examined move 'beyond 9/11', countering the narrative of 9/11 as a national trauma to provide alternative portraits of grief?

Chapter One

Reading Grief; Reading '9/11'

There is an abundance of scholarship in grief studies and 9/11 literary studies, but, despite the quantity of critical work, these fields are not as dynamic or developed as might be expected. This chapter traces the slow progression, and arguable stagnation, of both, revealing the need for innovation, intervention, and a theoretical bridge to close the extant gap between these critical spheres. Examining the state (and staleness) of grief research before turning to critical readings of 9/11 literature, this chapter contextualises this thesis, demonstrating why and how it makes a significant and original contribution to these fields. To date, grief is most commonly conceptualised within a disease model, while the belief that 'grief is intrinsically traumatic and causally pathogenic is generally accepted among psychologists who study grief today' (Granek, "Grief as pathology" 66). Grief became a topic of psychological and scientific study in the West at the turn of the twentieth century, a century that witnessed the rise of modernism, secularism, and a narrative that promoted progress, reason, productivity, and individuality.[19] The growing prominence of the psy-disclipines (psychology, psychiatry, psychoanalysis, and the medical profession) coincided with a simultaneous decline in religious faith.[20] The 'intense emotionality of grief', which had been a celebrated condition of 'the human spirit or soul', was subsequently replaced by a 'modernist and medical' model that encouraged the bereaved to 'recover from their state of intense emotionality and return to normal functioning and effectiveness as quickly and efficiently as possible' (Stroebe et al., "Broken Hearts" 1206). The origin of the modernist and medical perspective has been traced back to Sigmund Freud's 1917 essay, "Mourning and Melancholia". Although this essay has now assumed a 'seminal' status as the 'locus classicus' of grief scholarship, its primary concern is not grief, but melancholia, a 'pathological' form of mourning (Woodward, "Freud and Barthes" 93; Foote and Frank 157). For Freud, mourning is

[19] See: Ernst Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press, 1973); Geoffrey Gorer, *Death, Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain* (London: Cresset Press, 1965); Allan Kellehear, *A Social History of Dying* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Clive Seale, ed. *Researching Society and Culture* (London: Sage, 2017).

[20] See: Mary-Frances O'Connor, "Bereavement and the Brain: Invitation to a Conversation between Bereavement Researchers and Neuroscientists," *Death Studies* 29.10 (2005): 905-22; Nikolas Rose, "The Human Sciences in a Biological Age," *Theory, Culture and Society* 30.1 (2013): 3-34.

a teleological process that concludes with the 'severance' of psychological bonds with the lost object, other, or ideal, and the 'withdrawal of cathectic energy' on the part of the bereaved ("Mourning and Melancholia" 243). Although Freud stated that his hypotheses were based on 'conjecture' and 'insufficient' empirical testing, they played a foundational role in the 'entire intellectual and clinical paradigm [of] experiences of loss, grief and mourning' within a predominantly 'psychological set of understandings and interventions' until the 'closing decades of the twentieth century' (Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" 255; 243; Clark ix). Despite subsequent interventions, Freudian phantoms still loom over — if not possess — grief research, including literary studies of grief.[21]

1. Freudian Followers

In "Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-Depressive States" (1940) Melanie Klein notes the 'close connection' between Freud's theorisation of 'normal mourning' and the 'early processes of the mind', such as the weaning process (126). For Klein, this process is a form of mourning that is potentially 'psychotic in content' (129). Following Klein, Erich Lindemann, in his 1944 essay "Symptomatology and Management of Acute Grief", pursued Freud's investigation into 'pathological' responses to loss to offer a 'systematic analysis of bereavement' (Stroebe et al., *Handbook of Bereavement* 9). Conducting his research in psychiatric hospitals, where he trained doctors to become 'masters of death', Lindemann established a set of symptoms for diagnosing 'acute' or 'morbid grief': '(1) somatic distress, (2) preoccupation with the image of the deceased, (3) guilt, (4) hostile reactions, and (5) loss of patterns of conduct' (105). Lindemann's diagnostic criteria and his concept of 'grief work' are 'still today reflected in assessments of bereaved persons' (Stroebe et al., *Handbook of Bereavement* 9). Margaret Stroebe and colleagues explain that grief work consists of specific tasks that 'have to be confronted and systematically attended to before normality is reinstated. Reducing attention to the loss is critical, and good adjustment is often viewed as a breaking of ties between the bereaved and the dead' ("Broken Hearts" 1206). For practitioners and scholars who endorse this view, the successful completion of grief work ensures 'emancipation from the bondage to the deceased, readjustment to the environment in which the deceased is missing, and the formation of new relationships' (Lindemann 143). The idea that the gradual detachment of bonds, or the withdrawal of 'cathectic energy' as Freud put

[21] For an indication of the volume of grief scholarship, see: Robert A. Neimeyer, "Research on Grief and Bereavement: Evolution and Revolution," *Death Studies* 28 (2004): 489-90.

it, would allow the bereaved to return to, or 'reinstate', 'normal' cognitive functioning gained momentum in the 1960s with the introduction of stage theories.

John Bowlby, in collaboration with Colin Murray Parkes, identified four successive stages or phases of grief: 'numbness'; 'yearning, searching and anger'; 'disorganisation and despair'; and finally, 'reorganisation' ("Separation and Loss" 197-216). Bowlby's theory, which was later developed by Parkes and Robert Stuart Weiss, is responsible for establishing a standardised model of grief commonly used in medical practice.[22] The most prolific stage theory was published in Elisabeth Kübler-Ross' best-selling book, *On Death and Dying* (1969), which categorises the dying experience into five succinct and sequential stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Although it was never intended to be a 'study of grief and bereavement', the five-stage theory outlined in *On Death and Dying* is commonly applied, or misapplied, in studies of grief (Kellehear, "Introduction" viii). Since its publication, it has become a pillar in popular perspectives of grief and in bereavement care and research. As literary critic Tammy Clewell notes, it is the 'single most popular understanding of mourning in contemporary culture' (*Mourning* 20). Although scholars such as Stroebe have argued that stage models should be 'relegated to the shelves of history', Western conceptualisations of grief and its 'pathological' forms are still very much influenced, and limited, by the need to progress through rigid stages within a fixed time-scale (Stroebe, Schut, and Boerner, "Cautioning Health-Care Professionals" 468). Qualitative studies published in the 1990s were considered to herald a 'new dawn' in grief scholarship (Rothaupt and Becker 13). Among the most influential were Dennis Klass, Phyllis Silverman, and Steven L. Nickman's 1996 edited collection, *Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief*, and Tony Walter's article, "A New Model of Grief: Bereavement and Biography", published in the same year. These studies contradicted the 'intellectual schemata' of Freudian models insisting on severing bonds, proposing instead the continuation of 'healthy, enduring bonds' with the dead (Klass, Silverman, and Nickman 3). Despite the contribution of these scholars, the distinction between melancholia and mourning prevails, while continuing attachments to the dead over a prolonged period is still viewed as a pathological symptom. The combined work of Freud, Lindemann, Bowlby, and Kübler-Ross constitutes the 'dominant model' of grief within the psy-disciplines and clinical practice while the 'reconstitution of an autonomous individual' as 'rapidly as possible' is considered the most desirable outcome of treatment (Klass, Silverman, and Nickman 4; Walter, "New Model" 7; 8). *Falling Man*, *The*

[22] See: Colin Murray Parkes, *Bereavement: Studies of Grief in Adult Life* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972); Colin Murray Parkes and Robert Stuart Weiss, *Recovery from Bereavement* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

Reluctant Fundamentalist, and *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* are counter-narratives to this teleological and 'mysteriously smooth narrative', as they portray grief as a permeating and idiosyncratic experience that exceeds the confines of timelines and categorical stages (Tanner 94).

2. Complicating Grief

By 1999, grief scholarship in the West had reached a state of 'considerable conceptual and empirical ferment' (Clark ix). The same can be said of grief scholarship in the twenty-first century: in 2001, psychologist John Archer remarked on the 'theoretical vacuum' that plagued the field; in 2007, Jeanne Rothaupt and Kent Becker claimed that the 'theoretical foundations of bereavement' remained 'in a state of flux'; and in 2010, Leeat Granek stated that the 'modernist and medical' model of grief still dominates despite claims of a revolution (Archer 555; Rothaupt and Becker 13; Granek, "Grief as Pathology" 46). There has, however, been one intervention in the field that has had a considerable impact: the classification of 'complicated grief' as a psychological disorder. Stroebe and her collaborators consider 'complicated grief' to be the 'most important contemporary topic of concern, both for the scientific community of bereavement researchers and for health care professionals supporting bereaved people' (*Complicated Grief* 3). Complicated grief is defined not as 'a self-limited process', but as a 'harmful dysfunction' consisting of 'chronic and unremitting', 'delayed, inhibited or absent' responses to loss (Prigerson et al., "Complicated Grief" 23; Shear et al. 105; Zisook and Shear 69; Stroebe et al., *Handbook of Bereavement* 8). Leading psychiatrists in the field classify grief that 'goes on for the specified 6- to 12-month duration' as a sign that the 'normal healing process has been derailed' (Wakefield 104; Shear el al. 105). Critical of the classification, Walter explains that 'complicated' grief effectively means that grief is 'too intense, too long, and impairs functioning' ("What is Complicated Grief" 75). Symptoms include the following:

> Intrusive thoughts about the deceased, yearning for the deceased, searching for the deceased, loneliness as a result of the death, feelings of futility about the future, numbness, feeling life is empty, feeling that part of oneself has died, impaired functioning in social, occupations or other important areas. (Walter, "What is Complicated Grief?" 74)

While these experiences are common, what apparently 'qualifies this cluster of experiences as indicative of complicated grief is that they last, at any one time, for more than two months' (Walter, "What is Complicated Grief?" 74). The duration of the experience has become the

locus of scholarly interest, especially since the inclusion of 'complicated grief' in the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (2013).[23] If the bereaved subject is still grieving for 'an atypically long period of time following the loss (more than six months)', then it is (apparently) a sign that the individual is suffering from 'prolonged grief disorder' (Reed et al. 9). This is consistent with the 'cultural injunction to move *through* grief' on the 'tireless march towards mental health' (Tanner 13; 93; emphasis in original). The march to a (mythical) post-bereavement state of 'recovery' is limiting, however, as it not only denies the 'rich' 'emotional' lived experience of grief, but also the fruits of the labour it often entails (Woodward, "Grief Work" 97).

This study contends that a refusal or inability to let go of the lost other is not necessarily a symptom of psychological disturbance, but a reflection of the desire to keep the other alive in the present. This desire, especially in cases where the death is ungrievable, is ethical; it keeps memories of the dead alive, enabling the bereaved to experience the living presence of the dead in the present. Such a response to loss facilitates a reconsideration of what it means to live with death. Freud's theory of melancholia describes the incorporation of a lost object, person, or idea that is otherwise external to the subject. The texts examined in this thesis suggest that grief is not simply about the loss (and internalisation) of the other: it is also about the loss of the other that already existed within the subject. When the subject is affected by others, traces of those others come to exist within the subject, consciously or otherwise. As Sara Ahmed writes, 'each of us, in being shaped by others, carries with us "impressions" of those others', including bodily gestures, turns of phrases and 'certainly memories of this or that others' (*Cultural Politics* 160). Whilst the dominant medico-psychiatric model relegates the dead to the past and renders them other or abject, the counter-narratives examined are not in favour of such relegation or abjection of the

[23] The classification of 'complicated grief' as a mental disorder was met with criticism from a variety of sources. Robert D. Stolorow considered it a declaration of 'war on grief', while an editorial in the *Lancet* concluded that 'doctors would do better to offer time, compassion, remembrance, and empathy rather than pills' (Stolorow n.pag.; *Lancet* 589). See: Robert D. Stolorow, "The War on Grief," *Psychology Today* 1 Feb. 2014, 20 Nov. 2016 <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/feeling-relating-existing/201402/the-war-grief>;"Living with Grief," *Lancet* 379 (2012): 589. Leeat Granek and Meghan O'Rourke note the widespread resistance to the classification of 'complicated grief' as a mental disorder, reporting that several American psychiatrists 'spearheaded a movement to include ongoing grief as a disorder', while 'more than 10,000 mental health professionals, concerned about the credibility of the science behind several proposed additions to the manual' signed a petition requesting an independent review of the *DSM-V*. See: Leeat Granek and Meghan O'Rourke, "Is Mourning Madness? The Wrong-headed Movement to Classify Grief as a Mental Disorder," *Slate* Mar. 2013, 4 Nov. 2017 <http://www.slate.com/articles/life/grieving/2012/03/complicated_grief_and_the_dsm_the_wrongheaded_movement_to_list_mourning_as_a_mental_disorder_.html>. Despite ongoing disputes over the definition, categorisation, and validity of 'complicated grief', 'Prolonged Grief Disorder' was included in the eleventh edition of the World Health Organisation's *International Classification of Diseases* (*ICD-11*). See: Paul A. Boelen and Geert E. Smid, "Disturbed Grief: Prolonged Grief Disorder and Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder," *British Medical Journal* 357 (2016): 1-10; and Paul K. Maciejewski and Holly G. Prigerson, "Prolonged, but Not Complicated, Grief is a Mental Disorder," *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 211 (2017): 189-91.

dead; rather, they suggest that maintaining attachments is, in some ways, favourable, as it keeps 'impressions' of the dead alive. This serves an ethical purpose in Claudia Rankine's *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*; and, in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, the lingering presence of the dead in the living body reveals the sanctity of the quotidian. Building on this point, *Falling Man* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* present the experience of grief as a time of suspension and deep feeling — distinct from the circuitous loop of traumatic repetition and fast-paced progress — during which the bereaved subject dwells reflectively on (and with) the dead. Together with Rankine's *American Lyric*, these novels reject the political and medico-psychiatric imperatives to get over grief and get on with the future, advocating instead the experiential realm of being suspended in grief.

The prescriptive grief 'process' is one that normalises. Catherine E. Foote and Arthur W. Frank note that the 'abnormal is what can be brought back to normal by means of therapeutic fixing', while Philippe Ariès contends that 'sadness and mourning have been banished' because of commitments to 'returning abnormal minds to normal in the shortest possible time' (Foote and Frank 164; Ariès 33; 99). The definition of 'normal grief' rests on several assumptions, the most problematic and predominant of which is that the self is primordially autonomous. The prevailing assumption in Western psychology is 'that humans are by nature asocial individualists' (Page-Fiske 689). This is partly why a successful 'recovery' from grief is determined by the capacity (and assumed willingness) to return to 'efficient and autonomous functioning' (Walter, "New Model" 8). As Klass, Silverman, and Nickman write, 'the model of grief that began with Freud is based on a view of the world that stresses how separate people are from each other' and values '[i]ndependence rather than interdependence' (14). The experience of bereavement is itself, however, a measure of the interdependency of the self, as it emphasises the extent to which the subject is bound to others and enmeshed in socio-political and economic networks. The dominant grief model advises the bereaved subject experiencing 'complicated' or 'abnormal' forms of grief to seek the help of healthcare professionals. This approach favours the privileged as it assumes that the bereaved subject has sufficient social and economic support to avail of the recommended therapeutic and medical services. Thus, although the medico-psychiatric discourse of grief espouses autonomy, the recovery process, somewhat ironically, reveals the inherent interdependency of the subject.

3. (Multi)Disciplinary Perspectives

Since the 'majority of psychologists researching grief today are entirely empirical in their orientation' and share 'the belief that grief is intrinsically traumatic and causally pathogenic', it is necessary to consider grief from different perspectives (Granek, "Grief as Pathology" 65; 66). Sociologists offer critical insights into topics ranging from the social management of grief to the 'hierarchy' of grief to the diversity of cultural customs of grief.[24] These studies tend to either maintain the established view of grief as a multifaceted yet universal response to loss, or validate the claim that grief is not a 'real' or natural response but a product of social norms. Kenneth J. Doka's theorisation of disenfranchised grief, one of the most influential sociological theories of grief, posits that grief is 'disenfranchised' when 'survivors are not accorded a "right to grieve"' (5). One proponent of this theory, Martha R. Fowlkes, notes the role of social norms in determining what constitutes a legitimate loss, as well as who can, and how one should, grieve. She contends that the differential distribution of enfranchisement establishes a 'hierarchy of grief'. Post-9/11 media discourses such as the *New York Times*' "Portraits of Grief" and *TIME*'s "Portraits of Resilience" are underpinned by a grief hierarchy, as both publications privilege the stories of firefighters over office workers, policemen over security guards, those with economic capital over those without, and traders over janitors (Sturken, "Memorialising Absence" 383-84).[25] Whilst these collections of portraits reinforce hierarchies of grief, several mourning movements, such as September Eleventh Families for Peaceful Tomorrows, aim to challenge, if not change, the social norms rendering particular lives and deaths ungrievable in a post-9/11 context. [26]

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[24] See: Kenneth J. Doka, ed. *Disenfranchised Grief: Recognising Hidden Sorrow* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1989); Martha R. Fowlkes, "The social Regulation of Grief," *Sociological Forum* 5.4 (1990): 635-52; Glennys Howarth, *Death and Dying: A Sociological Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007); Nina R. Jakoby, "Grief as a Social Emotion: Theoretical Perspectives," *Death Studies* 36.8 (2012): 679-711; Robert Neimeyer, "Defining the New Abnormal: Scientific and Social Construction of Complicated Grief," *Omega – Journal of Death and Dying* 52.1 (2006): 95-97; Patricia Robson and Tony Walter, "Hierarchies of Loss: A Critique of Disenfranchised Grief," *Omega – Journal of Death and Dying* 66.2 (2013): 97-119; Paul C. Rosenblatt, "Grief across Cultures: A Review and Research Agenda," in *Handbook of Bereavement Research and Practice: Advances in Theory and Intervention*, eds. Margaret Stroebe, et al. (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2008) 207-22; Jan E. Stets and Jonathan H. Turner, eds. *Handbook of the Sociology of Emotions* (New York: Springer, 2006); Walter, "Grief and Culture," *Bereavement Care* 29.2 (2010): 5-9.

[25] For detailed analyses of these publications and the hierarchy underpinning them, see: Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London and New York: Verso, 2004); Karen J. Engle, "Putting Mourning to Work: Making Sense of 9/11," *Theory, Culture and Society* 24.1 (2007): 61-88; Carolyn Kitch and Janice Hume, *Journalism in a Culture of Grief* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012); Nancy K. Miller, "'Portraits of Grief": Telling Details and the Testimony of Trauma," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 14.3 (2003): 112-35; Marnie Ritchie, "Spectacular Resilience: Visualizations of Endurance in *TIME* Magazine's "Beyond 9/11," *Visual Communication Quarterly* 25.3 (2018): 168-80.

[26] See: *September Eleventh Families for Peaceful Tomorrows* 29 June 2004, 3 Oct. 2016 <https://peacefultomorrows.org/>.

As the politics of mourning and the mobilisation of mourning movements have already been well documented, this thesis examines how literary counter-narratives of grief (rather than mourning) respond to lost abject bodies in ways other than public activism and calls to activism.[27] The texts work on a much more nuanced level to challenge the stereotypes and social frames of reference influencing the recognition, misrecognition, and non-recognition of abject bodies. Whilst there is a risk that mourners will blindly follow mourning movements, the aims of which are not always as noble as they might appear, the texts open the reader's eyes to the limitations of blind following through their equivocal and complex aesthetics. Activating the imagination and inviting the reader to plumb the depths of embodied feeling, *Falling Man*, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and *Don't Let Me Be* attempt to generate embodied recognition and more ethically engaged responses to abject bodies. These counter-narratives are not only responsive (and responsible) on a social and an ethical level, but, crucially, they also work without the activist impetus and political didacticism of mourning movements.

4. Literary Theories of Grief

Neil Small concludes that 'theoretical self-consciousness is rare' among grief scholars from the fields of psychology and psychiatry who have adopted 'reductive and mechanistic' approaches to human experience (37). As these 'scientific measures' are not applicable to an experience that is 'not amenable to measurement', there is an urgent need to 'leave such approaches behind' (Small

[27] Butler, Bonnie Honig, Athena Athansiou, and David McIvor have variously considered the politics of mourning: Athansiou examines the agonistic mourning of the Woman in Black movement; Butler recalls the work of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) led by queer activists Douglas Crimp and Michael Moon; McIvor contends that Black Lives Matter is an instantiation of the 'democratic work of mourning' (McIvor, *Mourning* xv). While David Eng and David Kazanjian argue that loss is 'a condition and necessity for a certain sense of community', Honig warns against the universalising politics of 'mortalism', and Nancy Luxon warns against political theories of mourning such as these, arguing that they either 'elevate certain tragedies to heightened political status' or 'legitimize a claim to a past of some kind' (Eng and Kazanjian 468; Luxon 1). See: Athena Athanasiou, *Agonistic Mourning: Political Dissidence and the Women in Black* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017); Douglas Crimp, "Mourning and Militancy," *October* 51 (1989): 3-18; David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Bonnie Honig, *Antigone Interrupted* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Nancy Luxon, "Beyond Mourning and Melancholia: Nostalgia, Anger, and the Challenges of Political Action," *Contemporary Political Theory* 15.2 (2015): 139-59; David W. McIvor, *Mourning in America: Race and the Politics of Loss* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017); David W. McIvor and Alexander Keller Hirsch, eds. *The Democratic Arts of Mourning: Political Theory and Loss* (New York and London: Lexington Books, 2019); Simon Stow, "Agonistic Homegoing: Frederick Douglass, Joseph Lowery, and the Democratic Value of African American Public Mourning," *American Political Science Review* 104. 4 (2010): 681-97.

37; 39). Several cultural figures have attempted to do so, such that there now exists a substantial and growing body of memoirs (such as Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking* [2005]), journalism, and critical personal essays on grief in popular culture. In *Death's Door: Modern Dying and the Ways We Grieve* (2006), Sandra M. Gilbert states her realisation that 'grief — or at least the expression of grief — [i]s at best an embarrassment, at worst a social solecism or a scandal' (xix). These sentiments are shared by the poet Meghan O'Rourke, who remarked that grief has become 'strangely taboo' (n.pag.). Similarly, the journalist Kiran Sidhu spoke about her ongoing experience of grief nine months after her mother's death and expressed her discontentment that others had expected her to '"move on"' with 'bewildering haste', which left her with no other option than to 'conceal her sorrow' as if it were a 'dirty little secret' (n.pag.). These assessments, along with Kathleen Woodward's assertion that grief scholarship is 'inapt — *unfeeling*', reveal the (negative) influence of grief scholarship and its 'erroneous assumptions' on popular conceptualisations of grief (Woodward, *Statistical Panic* 2; emphasis in original; Breen and O'Connor 200). Concurring with these views, this study asserts that there is a need to move beyond dominant grief discourse and to come to terms with grief in new ways.

Several literary critics have stated the need for a 'more expressive' vocabulary for grief than that 'provided by psychoanalysis' (Woodward, "Freud and Barthes" 94). In *The Ends of Mourning: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Film* (2003) Alessia Ricciardi contends that an adequate 'hermeneutics of loss' has yet to be established, while Jahan Ramazani argues that the 'complex experience' of grief requires a more 'resonant yet credible vocabulary' (Ricciardi 4; Ramazani ix). This is partly due to an overreliance on Freudian theory, which has narrowed the thematic and methodological focus of literary scholarship on grief. Several scholars have identified a renewed interest in mourning, with some critics challenging the Freudian model and its focus on the individual subject. Ricciardi attempts to reclaim 'the ethical and political significance of loss', while Ramazani reads literary texts that defy 'social taboos on intimate grief' through the lens of Derridean theory (Ricciardi 2; Ramazani 290). Clewell also draws on Jacques Derrida, who, she claims, 'has raised the possibility for an ethics of mourning more insightfully' than any other scholar ("Consolation Refused" 207). Derrida theorises an 'ethics of mourning' based on a deliberate failure to work through loss (*Mémoires: For Paul De Man* 3). In *Mémoires: For Paul De Man* (1986), he advocates 'impossible mourning', whereby the subject, 'leaving the other to his alterity, respecting thus his infinite remove, either refuses to take or is incapable of taking the other within [...] as in the tomb or vault of some narcissism' (6). Nouri Gana's 2011 study *Signifying Loss: Towards a Poetics of Narrative Mourning* applies Derridean philosophy and

Freudian theory to read the fiction of James Joyce and Elias Khoury. Gana makes the passing yet perceptive point that 'misguided calls for inconsolability' after the 9/11 attacks 'wittingly or unwittingly end[ed] up condoning certain forms of violence and retaliation' (45). Eric Santner, however, argues that the Derridean logic and theory these critics adopt is 'ahistorical, aridly abstract, lacking in an emotional connection to lived experience' (110). While these critics magnify the ethical, activist, and political roles of loss, they overlook the ethical and political potential of everyday intimate experiences of grief. In *Modernism and Mourning* (2007), for example, Patricia Rae presents recent history as an age of catastrophe — characterised by prolific 'traumatic' events — set apart from the global cataclysms of previous eras (13). In contrast, the counter-narratives in this study set 9/11 'trauma' beside 'marginal stories' to unsettle the privileged position of the attacks in the hierarchy of suffering, while emphasising how overlooked (and ongoing) crises permeate everyday contemporary living. This project departs from Derridean and Freudian readings of mourning to examine how the selected texts theorise the ethico-political role of 'emotional connections' associated with the affective experience of grief, without 'condoning certain forms of violence and retaliation' (Santner 110; Gana 45).

5. The 'Affective Turn'

Since the mid-1990s, several scholars within the humanities and social sciences have taken an 'affective turn', described as a 'willingness to return to questions of readers' affective responses', where affect encompasses, broadly (though not uncontentiously), 'passions, moods, feelings, and emotions' (La Caze and Lloyd 2; 1). Although there is a lack of conceptual clarity in affect studies and 'no single, generalizable theory of affect', there are two main strains of thought (Gregg and Seigworth 3). Affect theorists inspired by the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari conceptualise affect as an autonomic reaction to social, environmental, or cultural stimuli. Drawing primarily on the 'brain sciences' and the biological 'sciences of emotion', these scholars conceptualise an affect as an intensity that is, in Ruth Ley's words, 'not about empathy or emotive identification', but 'disconnected from the subjective, signifying, functional-meaning axis to which the more familiar categories of emotion belong' (Leys, "The Turn to Affect" 434; 441). Brian Massumi asserts that affect is 'not ownable or recognizable' and theorises emotions as 'subjective content': the 'qualified, the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into narrativizable action-reaction circuits, into function and meaning' ("The autonomy of Affect" 88). Steven Shaviro asserts that affects 'elude cognitive definition or capture', while Ley Spinks describes them as a set of 'inhuman or

pre-subjective forces and intensities' (Shaviro 4; Spinks 24). Elaborating on the distinction between affect and emotion, Lawrence Grossberg asserts that 'our emotional states are elicited from within the affective states in which we already find ourselves. Unlike emotions, affective states are neither structured narratively nor organized in response to our interpretations of situations' (81). Patricia Clough, privileging non-intentional 'bodily matter' over matters of the 'mind', contends that affect and emotion point to 'the subject's discontinuity with itself, a discontinuity of the subject's conscious experience with the non-intentionality of emotion and affect [...] The turn to affect points instead to a dynamism immanent to bodily matter and matter generally' (206). Massumi similarly 'privileg[es] the "body" and its affects over the "mind" in straightforwardly dualist terms' (Leys, "The Turn to Affect" 468). These theorists effectively take two affective turns: firstly, they turn away from the Cartesian mind-body dualism; and secondly, they turn toward the body more than the 'mind'. If, as these scholars suggest, affect is autonomous and 'independent of signification and meaning', then it is comparable to the irrational and unintentional phenomena of the Freudian unconscious (Leys, "Turn to Affect" 443). The affective turn therefore comes full circle, as it was taken primarily by scholars seeking to overcome the limitations of Freudian theory.[28]

Although these affect scholars have made a distinction between emotion and affect, the selected counter-narratives — especially Rankine's *American Lyric* — vividly illustrate that biology and society are not mutually exclusive phenomena. Rather than reinforcing the Cartesian split between the mind and body, the rational and irrational, and thought and feeling, Rankine's stance is more closely aligned with the strand of affect theory that focuses on politics, subjectivity and the 'irreducible entanglement of feeling and thinking' (Zerilli 266).[29] The readings in this study draw on the work of Lauren Berlant, who contends that 'affect theory is another phase in the history of ideology theory' that explores 'the encounter of what is sensed with what is known and what has impact in a new but also recognizable way' (*Cruel* 53). For Berlant, affect is an

[28] Woodward reproaches Freud and his followers for neglecting the affective aspects of grief, alleging that they sought 'not so much to give affect voice — a subtle vocabulary, a rich poetics' but 'to purge it once it has been remembered' ("Grief Work" 94). See: Kathleen Woodward, "Grief-Work in Contemporary American Cultural Criticism: Psychoanalytic Theory of Mourning and Discourses of the Emotions: From Freud to Kristeva," *Discourse*: *The Emotions, Gender, and the Politics of Subjectivity* 15.2 (1992-1993): 94-112.

[29] See: Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004) and *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010); Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011); Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012); Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); Eva Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003); Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

intersecting force that enables the relations between the embodied subject and the structures organising its existence to come into focus. She explains that 'affective atmospheres are shared, not solitary, and that bodies are continuously busy judging their environments and responding to the atmospheres in which they find themselves' (*Cruel* 15). This focus allows for detailed discussions about the body as an interface, situated in a shared affective space and influenced by attachments to others as well as cultural, socio-economic, and political forces.

Although the 'veritable explosion' of research on affect is said to have marked a new 'cultural moment' and the creation of a 'new economy of emotions', it has not made a significant contribution to grief scholarship, but this thesis will (Woodward, *Statistical Panic* 235; Athanasiou, Hantzaroula, and Yannakopoulos 6). Although affect studies have focused on anger, rage, shame, happiness, and sadness, they have yet to focus on grief, even though it is, according to Gail Holst-Warhaft, 'the most powerful emotion we ever feel' (9). It is with good reason, therefore, that Marguerite La Caze and Henry Martyn Lloyd contest 'claims that the "turn" constitutes an "epistemological shift"', while Linda Zerilli argues that the scholarly turn to affect is simply a return to concerns that feminist scholars had already explored decades before but in more depth (La Caze and Lloyd 10; Zerilli 269). This study is interested in the role of affect (understood as an umbrella term for embodied sensations, inclusive of feelings and emotions) in the constitution of subjectivity and the relationship between grief, the body and the environment it shares with others. Drawing on affect and embodiment theory to analyse grief narratives, this thesis bridges the gaps between critical studies of affect and medico-psychiatric studies of grief, which currently exist in separate spheres. Whilst there has been a renewed interest in mourning in literature and mourning in politics, there is a surprising lack of literary studies with a sustained focus on grief.[30] As there is not yet a literary study of grief narratives (or counter-narratives) in post-9/11 literature, or twenty-first century literature, this project makes a significant contribution to academic grief scholarship and, as the next section demonstrates, to 9/11 literary studies.

[30] Desirée Henderson's *Grief and Genre in American Literature, 1790-1870* (2013) examines the role of genre in the formation of dominant theorisations of death and dying in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America, examining the work of writers such as Frederick Douglass, Emily Dickinson, and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps. In *Culture and the Rites/Rights of Grief* (2013), Zbigniew Białas, Paweł Jędrzejko and Julia Szołtysek explore how 'globalization has affected modes of grieving, how it has altered the subjects/objects over which we grieve, and finally, how grievances have come to adopt the shape of ultimatums' (iv). The term 'grief' is misused in this anthology, however, as the majority of the essays focus not on grief specifically, but on trauma and melancholia. Dana Luciano's *Grief: Sacred Time and the Body in Nineteenth-Century America* (2007) traces developments in conceptualisations of grief and temporality in nineteenth-century America. Drawing on Foucauldian and psychoanalytic theory, Luciano reads the mourning manuals, sermons, poetry and fiction of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, Susan Warner, and Harriet Beecher Stowe.

6. Reading '9/11': Early Responders

The thematic and aesthetic concept of 'trauma' has been the common critical thread connecting much post-9/11 literary scholarship. The earliest studies tend to assume the validity of trauma theory as an interpretive framework, applying the term and concept too loosely to describe '9/11 novels' that are not necessarily about 'trauma'. Although open to new developments, the field has been monopolised by an established critical approach that asks two main questions: how do the novels imbue the 'traumatic' events and their aftermath with meaning?; and how does the assumed traumatic shock of the attacks impede processes of understanding, representing, and interpreting the events in fiction? Arin Keeble notes that the critical significance assigned to cultural expectations 'actually reinforced George W. Bush's assertion that "on September 11 night fell on a new world"', as novelists were charged with reading and representing a world that was allegedly without precedent with a new 'terrorist' Other ("Why the 9/11 novel" n.pag.). This posed pertinent questions for writers and critics: if American innocence is already assumed, then how can literature 'ethically evaluate the ideological beliefs of the other when the binary of innocent victim and violent aggressor is so firmly established in one's foundational imagery?' (DeRosa, "Alterity and the Radical Other" 158). For Aaron DeRosa, a more productive critical analysis cannot be produced until this binary is deconstructed. This is not the same as finding justification for the attacks; rather, it reconsiders the innocent subject position assumed by America and the West. Fiction writers and literary critics are not exempt from reinforcing these assumptions or the dominant narrative of '9/11'.

Although difficult to pinpoint an exact start date, the emerging field of 9/11 literary studies gained traction from 2007 onwards following the publication of canonical '9/11 novels'. The most influential studies tended to validate the conceptualisation of the attacks as a traumatic temporal rupture that stunned the nation and brought an end to the era of American innocence. Studies with titles such as *After the Fall* (Gray 2011) and *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel* (Versluys 2009) appeal to this sense of 'lost innocence' (DeRosa, "Analyzing Literature" 608). Kristiaan Versluys' monograph was one of the first published on post-9/11 literature and made a significant contribution to the formation of the 9/11 literary canon. Drawing on trauma theory, he contends that in 'a time of globalized witnessing and shared vicarious experience, an event like 9/11 is a rupture for everybody' and, as such, 'there is a globalized need to comprehend, to explain, to restore' (Versluys 4). This is possible, he suggests, through the creation of soothing narratives: 'the discursive responses to 9/11 prove, over and beyond their inevitability, that the

individual is not only made but also healed — made whole — by the necessary mechanisms of narrative and semiosis' (Versluys 4). Similarly, Ewa Kowal's *The "Image Event" in the Early Post-9/11 Novel* (2013) argues that '9/11 novels' published between 2004 and 2007 'fulfil a therapeutic role — for the readers and the authors alike — by contributing to the discourse on terror, and "domesticating" it, even when calling it "inexplicable"' (143-44). Both critics assign the role of therapist to authors and attribute healing properties to novels that 'affirm and counteract the impact of trauma' (Versluys 13). Jonathan Safran Foer's *Incredibly Loud and Extremely Close* is considered one of these novels, as it 'testifies to the shattering of certainties and the laborious recovery of balance', whilst DeLillo's *Falling Man* is considered the opposite, offering nothing but an 'account of endless re-enactment or acting-out of a traumatic experience that allows for no accommodation or (symbolic) resolution' (Versluys 13; 15). This study argues, however, that the premise of *Falling Man* is to produce a counter-narrative that opens, rather than closes, wounds.

Anne Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn's *Literature After 9/11* (2008) was one of the earliest and most extensive anthologies to focus on representations of trauma in post-9/11 literature. Although the editors claim that the 'first novels about 9/11 featured formal innovations — self-reflexive meta-narratives, disrupted temporality, and multiple viewpoints', these formal features are not 'innovations', but the conventions of an already substantial body of trauma fiction (Keniston and Quinn 4). Whilst the anthology attempts to trace a shift in perspectives, it ultimately falls back on trauma theory (whether in favour of, or against) in its study of representations of trauma.[31] Christina Cavedon is critical of *Literature After 9/11*, arguing that it is remiss of Keniston and Quinn not to 'refer to the importance of pre-9/11 cultural discourses for the interpretation of post-9/11 discourses' (27). Cavedon's point is astute, and in *Cultural Melancholia: US Trauma Discourses Before and After 9/11* (2015), she draws connections between DeLillo's and Jay McInerney's pre-9/11 and post-9/11 fiction to identify a cultural malaise pre-dating the 9/11 attacks. Although this thesis does not examine texts published before September 2001, it reads texts that juxtapose the 9/11 attacks with pre-9/11 experiences of grief and identifies aesthetic and thematic patterns of continuity between the pre-, post- and post-post-9/11 work of the authors under analysis.

[31] The first essays of the anthology maintain that the events of September 11th presented a 'fundamental challenge to notions of time, witness, loss, and privacy', whilst others laud 'the power of narrative to restore temporal disruptions, to counter the suspension of history that visual representation sometimes invites, and to restore the links between private memory and public history' (3; 14-15). The final essays suggest that 'literature offers a way beyond binary thinking', as it 'complicates and even transcends the events of a single day' (6; 9).

7. Prescriptive Models

Tracing the evolution of critical scholarship on '9/11 fiction', Paul Petrovic identifies an incremental movement from 'a descriptive model of literary criticism to a prescriptive model' (x). Pankaj Mishra's 2007 article, "The end of Innocence", one of the earliest and most cited of these descriptive critiques, argues that 'most of the literary fiction that self-consciously addresses 9/11 still seems underpinned by outdated assumptions of national isolation and self-sufficiency' (n.pag.). Although he expresses his disappointment with American authors, especially DeLillo, who, he claims, struggles to 'define [the] cultural otherness of Islam', Mishra does not offer a definition that would overcome this perceived 'struggle' (n.pag.). He concludes by suggesting that 'uncertainty and confusion in the public sphere may quicken the sense of aesthetic possibility — or, at least, release literary novelists from the dominant American mood of 9/11 commemoration' (Mishra n.pag.). This is another ambiguous statement that leaves unspecified how exactly 'uncertainty and confusion' might 'quicken the sense of aesthetic possibility' (Mishra n.pag.). Beneath such vague assertions, it would appear that Mishra has in mind a set of criteria or expectations for measuring the success of '9/11 fiction'. Whilst he does not explain or outline the logic informing his critical expectations, Richard Gray offers one of the most prescriptive critiques. Gray, who concurs with several of Mishra's criticisms of DeLillo's *Falling Man*, published two of the most influential literary studies on '9/11 fiction': "Open Doors, Closed Minds: American Prose Writing at a Time of Crisis" (2009) and *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11* (2011). Gray interprets the 9/11 attacks as 'a turning point in national and international history' and expresses his dissatisfaction with novels that 'simply assimilate the unfamiliar into familiar structures' such that the 'crisis is, in every sense of the word, domesticated' ("Open" 134; *After* 134). *Falling Man*, Mclnerney's *The Good Life* (2006), and Ken Kalfus' *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* (2006) are the sources of his disappointment and, in his view, symptomatic of writers 'traumatized by accelerating social change and political crisis' (*After* 17; 147). Gray's misdiagnosis of 'trauma' pathologises novelists who choose to focus more on the domestic sphere than the 'syncretic character of American culture' ("Open" 134). Elsewhere, however, Gray, who endorses Cathy Caruth as an 'authority on the subject', suggests that traumatised subjects (including traumatised writers) are revolutionary figures:

> Trauma, as one theorist [Kirby Farrell] of the subject has put it, is a "mind-blowing experience that destroys a conventional mindset and compels (or makes possible) a new worldview" [...] We are still, perhaps, waiting for a fictional measure of the new world view. (*After* 53; 27)

Gray's conflicting (mis)use of the terms 'trauma' and 'traumatised' misinforms his readings and weakens the strength of his critique. The novelists who 'get it right' in his view are those that adopt a deterritorialized approach to the 'otherness' of trauma and represent America as a 'transcultural space in which different cultures reflect and refract each other' ("Open" 141; 146; 5). This critique is reductive as it privileges the efforts of writers who have fulfilled Gray's prescriptive demands, whilst discrediting the aesthetic innovation and originality of novels set in the domestic sphere. With *Falling Man* in mind, Gray claims, '[w]hat we are left with is symptom: in this case, the registering that something traumatic — perhaps too dreadful for words, unsusceptible yet to understanding — has happened' ("Open" 132). Gray's blithe misreading of the novel reflects his reduction of '9/11 fiction' to a single temporal and affective genre: trauma fiction, a problematic genre that will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. His expectation of authors to provide (prescriptive) radical literary responses to the attacks and new imaginative structures reflects his uncritical acceptance of the exceptional status of 9/11 'trauma'. Together with his 'strategy of deterritorialization', he endorses (even if unwittingly) the dominant 9/11 narrative, while indulging the mythical status of America as an exceptional melting pot ("Open" 5).

Michael Rothberg shares Gray's expectations of 'post-9/11 fiction' as well as the presupposition that the events of September 11th marked an 'epochal change' (Rothberg, "Failure of the Imagination" 155). Rothberg outlines his requisites for successful '9/11 fiction' in his 2009 article, "A Failure of the Imagination: Diagnosing the Post-9/11 Novel, A Response to Richard Gray". For Rothberg, the perceived lack of novels exploring 'international relations and extraterritorial citizenship' is symptomatic not only of a 'failure of the imagination', but also a failure to 'acknowledge' trauma on the part of American authors: 'Once writers have acknowledged the shock and trauma of 9/11, an intellectually and politically mature literature must leave national-domestic space behind for riskier "foreign" encounters' ("Failure of the Imagination" 153; 157). Accordingly, the domestication of '9/11' is a political safety net that offers readers protection from 'foreign' encounters. In *9/11 and the Literature of Terror* (2011), Martin Randall rehearses the arguments of Gray and Rothberg, reiterating '9/11' as an 'epochal event that has had a profound effect on global politics' (7). Following Gray and Rothberg, he lauds 'hybrid forms' that 'reveal the profound difficulties of representing such a visually resonant, globally accessible and historically significant event' (Randall 3). Richard Crownshaw repeats these claims, asserting that trauma is 'a domesticating concept by which the events of 9/11 are incorporated into sentimental, familial dramas and romances with no purchase on the

international significance of the terrorist attacks and the US's response to them' (757). Crownshaw still accepts the status of the attacks as a national trauma, though, and laments the wasted opportunity for American authors to use trauma to undertake the colossal task of closing the 'divide between a wounded US and global suffering' (757). Elizabeth Anker expresses a similar disappointment with the overuse of overdetermined trauma tropes in '9/11 fiction', claiming that it 'extinguishes the ambiguities that riddle 9/11 as a socio-cultural and political reality, ironically purifying it of indeterminacy through hyperbole' (473). While Anker makes an admirable turn toward the 'ideological landscape of late capitalism and many species of speculation that sustain' '9/11 fiction', she fails to see how the novels already engage with these political and economic contexts, as well as contexts of trauma (474). These critics read literary fiction as a predominantly political venture, a reading with which Catherine Morley disagrees. In "'How Do We Write About This?' The Domestic and the Global in the Post-9/11 Novel'" (2011), Morley, responding to Mishra, Gray, and Rothberg, writes:

> These critics are effectively asking American writers to turn their gaze away from home, away from peoples and communities which have, up to now, dominated their fiction. At some basic level, Rothberg et al. are asking writers to write about what they don't really know. Yet when they attempt to do this [...] the results are often weak, and they are inevitably pilloried for the limitations of their vision. (720)

Although Gray calls for an 'enactment of difference', a call echoed by Rothberg, their critiques are based on the same assumption underpinning the dominant narrative of '9/11': that the attacks irrevocably changed the geopolitical landscape of the globe and the socio-politics of America (*After* 29). Furthermore, as John N. Duvall and Robert P. Marzec point out, Gray and Rothberg are 'unwilling to look very closely at what 9/11 fiction sets out to do because they are sure that they know what 9/11 fiction ought to be doing' ("Narrating 9/11" 384). According to the flawed logic of these critiques, the successes of a '9/11 novel' and a writer's imagination depend on the extent to which the prescriptive demands of critics are satisfied. This is not a sign of success but of a limited imagination, which leads, as Morley argues, to 'weak' results.

8. A New Decade; A New Dawn?

Several more anthologies, articles, and monographs were published in 2011 to mark the tenth anniversary of the attacks. In "Compromised Critique: A Meta-critical Analysis of American Studies after 9/11" (2011), Lucy Bond writes: '9/11 remains subject to a crisis in criticism, resulting from the failure of certain strains within American studies to sufficiently separate their

modes of critique from the ideological means of 9/11's manipulation' (733). Although there has been an overreliance on trauma themes and theories in studies of '9/11 fiction', Bond's claim is not applicable to the entire field of American Studies after September 2001. Over the passage of time, a more critical discourse has emerged. Several political scientists remain dubious of claims that the 'world changed as a result of these attacks' (Lazarus 10). John Dunham Kelly contends that scholars 'can and should attack the premise that history reset on September 11, by remembering all that led to, as well as from, the terrorist attacks and the quintessential U.S. responses to them' (348). Sharing this view, Neil Smith argues that 'September 11 did not change the world':

> Horrific as the loss of life was when those symbols of the military and economic power of the American empire were leveled, they were exceptional events only for sweeping away the global insularity of the vast majority of the population cocooned within the national borders of the world's one remaining superpower. People in most other parts of the world had faced similar if not far larger traumas. (263)

Several more cultural studies have fiercely contested the prelapsarian trope and questioned the history of violence in the US, such as Mary Dudziak's *September 11 in History: A Watershed Moment?* (2003) and Stanley Hauerwas and Frank Lentricchia's *Dissent from the Homeland* (2002). In "Policing the Globe: State Sovereignty and the International in the Post-9/11 Crime Novel" (2011), Andrew Pepper problematises the American-centric view that 'something changed on 9/11,' that the attacks and the resultant mass death 'were on such a scale that a return to normality was not possible' (405). Pepper asserts that this view 'overlooks the fact that countries elsewhere have been dealing with terrorist attacks for years' and 'fails to acknowledge that little changed as a consequence of the events of 9/11': for example, 'the rolling out of the state in the form of an enhanced security apparatus augmented a process already in motion prior to September 11, 2001' (405). Rarely is the same dissenting tone of these critics found in literary studies of '9/11 fiction' published before 2011.

Duvall and Marzec, the editors of a special ten-year anniversary issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* entitled "Fiction After 9/11", adopt an anti-prescriptive approach and a critical stance against trauma theory. Taking issue with the ubiquity of trauma theory in the essay proposals they received, they write that the 'problem with so many of the submissions we received was that they seemed primarily to confirm a truism of trauma studies': 'the notion that trauma is unknowable and that, whatever novel was under consideration, it finally underscored the inability of any narrative to mediate 9/11 in a way that would make it knowable to others' ("Narrating 9/11" 396). Scholars confirmed this truism in other anthologies published in the same year, such as

Portraying 9/11: Essays on Representations in Comics, Literature, Film and Theatre (2011), which explores how 'difficult it is to mediate or even represent the overwhelming intensity of traumatic events' (1). The editors of the anthology assign more critical value to literary scholars than to the writers under examination, arguing that it is the role of critics, not writers, to 'expand on the various commemorative tensions that 9/11 creates' and to 'problematize' and 'criticize' the 'incompleteness' of binary models (Bragard, Dony, and Rosenberg 5). Designating these roles in this way risks overlooking the myriad ways that writers fulfil this task and no less adeptly than critics. Another 2011 anthology, *Ground Zero Fiction: History, Memory, and Representation in the American 9/11 Novel*, edited by Birgit Däwes, engages with the pervasive use of trauma theory as a critical paradigm in studies of '9/11 fiction'. Däwes suggests that the prevalence of trauma theory explains why the following novels have been categorised as 'trauma literature': *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, *The Good Life*, *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country*, *Terrorist*, *The Emperor's Children*, and *Falling Man* (68). She critiques the suitability of compartmentalising and analysing literary responses to the attacks within the framework of trauma studies and concludes that it is 'ultimately too limited to do justice to the fictional field' (Däwes 19). This thesis concurs with the assertion that an overreliance on trauma theory has limited critical readings of novels, especially *Falling Man*. Although Däwes points out the flaws of trauma theory, she does not explore how the texts themselves critique the assumption that the events of September 11th constituted a national trauma, an assumption that was largely uncontested at the time the most prolific literary responses were written. There are occasional slips in her critique where she lends inadvertent support to this assumption, such as her suggestion that '[w]e may even come to redefine Ground Zero as a blank space, a starting point in the simplest sense' (414). Redefined as a 'starting point', Ground Zero is positioned as the site where history began, overwriting history before September 11th, 2001. Thus, although Däwes steers 9/11 literary criticism into new waters, there are some inconsistencies in her arguments. Sven Cvek takes the same direction as Däwes: *Towering Figures: Reading the 9/11 Archive* (2011) suggests that fictional responses should offer more trenchant challenges to the exceptional status of '9/11'. His unfavourable analysis of *Falling Man*, however, undermines the significance of the novel's domestic setting in unsettling the fixed and elevated status of 9/11 'trauma'.

Diana Gonçalves sets out to critique this elevated status in *9/11: Culture, Catastrophe and the Critique of Singularity* (2016), but presumes that the overarching concern of novelists, such as Foer and DeLillo, is the representation of the 'traumatic' fall out. Her claim that the stylistic conventions of 'trauma fiction', such as 'multiple perspectives and narrative styles, nonlinearity,

[and] intertextuality', can 're-make the images of that day and convey the effect they had, the emotions they provoked on people', is implausible (Gonçalves 15). This claim has been refuted by critics of trauma theory, such as Alan Gibbs, who asserts that it is 'clearly absurd to elide this categorical difference between the experience of a trauma sufferer, a witness, and the second-hand reader' (28-29). Gonçalves, however, accepts this claim and uses it to critique '9/11 fiction'. She reads Foer's references to the Dresden bombings and Hiroshima in *Incredibly Loud and Extremely Close* as challenges to the assumed singularity of the 9/11 attacks. Her logic is flawed, however, as both events are renowned large-scale catastrophes within a global context. As Cavedon remarks, '9/11 to some extent inherited from the Holocaust the top rank at the hierarchy of suffering within an American context' (155). Although Foer does not explicitly compare the 9/11 attacks to the Holocaust, he does little to topple them from the top spot they share with the Holocaust in the hierarchy of historical 'trauma'. Gonçalves' reading of Foer's novel is thus somewhat misguided, as is her consideration of what constitutes a convincing challenge to the singular status of the 9/11 attacks. Arguing against these readings, this study analyses the ordinary or, in DeLillo's words, the 'marginal' stories that are necessary to counter the 'massive spectacle' of the attacks ("Ruins" n.pag.).

9. Otherness

Slavoj Žižek asserts that in 'the days after September 11, the media reported that not only English translations of the Koran but also books about Islam and Arab culture in general become instant bestsellers: people wanted to know what Islam is' (33). This well-meaning but somewhat naïve effort is 'a gesture of ideological mystification *par excellence*' and, according to Žižek, '*not* the way to grasp the political dynamics which led to the September 11 attacks' (34; emphasis in original). The conflation of 'different cultural traditions' with a motivation and explanation for the attacks was, as Judith Butler notes, 'doubtless easier to hear than that of individuals dispersed across the globe [who] conjured and implemented this action in various ways' (Žižek 34; Butler, *Precarious* 5). This simplistic explanation and the association of Islam with terrorism have shaped creative and critical approaches to ethics and Otherness in post-9/11 literature. DeRosa contends that Versluys, along with Gray and Randall, saw the future of '9/11 fiction' in 'an ethical move toward the Other' ("Analyzing Literature" 616). What they failed to see, however, is that the post-9/11 work of Hamid and Rankine — published before the critiques of these three scholars — had already taken such an ethical turn. In *Plotting Justice: Narrative Ethics and Literary Culture After 9/11* (2012), Georgia Banita, reiterating claims of exceptionalism, argues that 'September 11

marked a change' and above all 'a moment of introspection, a moment that inspired the tremendously salutary condition called disorientation' and a 'new transnational era' that exhibited a 'profoundly ethical anxiety' (299). Contrary to Banita's argument, this study argues that the US government's profound *lack* of ethical anxiety for vulnerable populations and victims of violence across the globe was revealed on September 11th and in the following weeks and months. Banita notes that literary critics have at their disposal a series of theoretical approaches, but she does not express a strong critical opinion on any of these or engage with the trauma debate. *Plotting Justice* still makes a substantial contribution to the field, however, as it examines the ethical impulses of a wide selection of texts including William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* (2003), Lorraine Adams' *Harbor* (2004), and Pat Barker's *Double Vision* (2003). Chapters Three and Four of this thesis further the discussion, exploring the ethical role of grief in recognising and responding to abject bodies. Following Banita, Tim Gauthier's *9/11 Fiction, Empathy and Otherness* (2015) explores otherness in relation to empathy and ethical recognition, arguing that 'opening oneself up to the other's story allows for the exercising of empathy and a potential recognition (and appreciation) of that which makes him same but also [...] that which makes him different' (255). This study further investigates the idea of 'opening oneself' to Others, but in relation to the ethico-political role of grief rather than empathy. The purview of studies of 'otherness' in post-9/11 literature rarely extends beyond portrayals of Muslim and Middle Eastern figures of terror, but Lenore Bell's *The "Other" in 9/11 Literature: If You See Something, Say Something* (2017) is an exception. Bell argues that novels such as John Updike's *Terrorist* and Amy Waldman's *The Submission* (2011) challenge assumptions that racial tensions exist only between 'Americans' and 'terrorists' in post-9/11 literature. This thesis builds on Bell's research, considering the impact of US neo-colonial practices on ungrievable lives in Iraq and Afghanistan — who fall under the bracket of 'terrorists' — and examining Rankine's exposition of deep-rooted racism in her *American Lyric*.

10. Remapping '9/11'

Several scholars have adopted transatlantic, transdisciplinary, and transnational approaches to analyse cultural responses to the attacks. In her analysis of the transatlantic pre- and post-9/11 fiction of Colum McCann, Sinéad Moynihan explores how the 'interrelatedness of spatial and temporal dimensions of trauma offers a radical critique of the way in which much post-9/11 fiction and criticism leaves unchallenged trauma's temporal aspects' (270). Writing before Gray's

critique and call for deterritorialization, contributors to Cara Cilano's *From Solidarity to Schisms: 9/11 and After in Fiction and Film from Outside the US* (2009) examine 'how different peoples and cultures may represent and understand their post-9/11 worlds in non-US centred ways' (Cilano 17). Kristine Miller's *Transatlantic Literature and Culture After 9/11: The Wrong Side of Paradise* (2014) is more US-centric than Cilano's anthology and applies trauma theory and poststructuralism to examine connections between 'past and present representations of civilian violence' in the US and Britain (2). Susana Araújo's *Transatlantic Fictions of 9/11 and the War on Terror: Images of Insecurity, Narratives of Captivity* (2015) argues that 'discourses about trauma, fueled by the media, have not been too readily applied to literary responses to this event', but, rather, too simplistically (2). Duvall and Marzec expand critical discussions of insecurity and violence in their edited 2015 anthology, *Narrating 9/11: Fantasies of State, Security, and Terrorism*, arguing that 'contemporary narrative can make legible a moment in US history when, in the aftermath of the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, the forces of nationalism, the media, and capital' combined to mobilise 'public support for the notion of just wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and for curtailed civil rights at home' (1). The anthology thus moves beyond trauma and provides an original contribution to the field of 9/11 literary studies.

This thesis develops the work of scholars who have examined how literary responses decentre the attacks and their aftermath. Dunja M. Mohr and Däwes' *Radical Planes? 9/11 and Patterns of Continuity* (2016) investigates representations of disruption and continuity from an interdisciplinary and transnational perspective. Contributors to the anthology consider how literature (the novel, in particular), performance, and the visual arts 'negotiate the discourse of change that pervaded the media for quite some time after the terrorist attacks and [...] how far we can observe patterns of continuity of pre-9/11, post-9/11, and post-post-9/11 issues' (Mohr and Däwes 9). In a similar vein, Victoria M. Bryan and Heather Pope's *Reflecting 9/11: New Narratives in Literature, Television, Film and Theatre* (2016) situates the attacks 'on a trajectory with a past and a future, as part of a continuity paradigm' and a 'traceable path of violence in American history' (4). Taking a transdisciplinary approach, Christian Kloeckner, Simone Knewitz, and Sabine Sielke's anthology *Beyond 9/11: Transdisciplinary Perspectives on Twenty-First-Century U.S. American Culture* (2013) identifies connections and continuities between various historical conflicts and catastrophes including, but not limited to, the 9/11 attacks. This thesis examines texts that move the central focus beyond the 9/11 attacks, not by comparing them to major spectacles of violence or global conflicts but rather, by focusing on pre-9/11, post-9/11, and post-post-9/11 understated or silenced stories of violence and death that are not publicly recognised. Oana-Celia Gheorghiu also attempts to move discussions beyond trauma and

searches for new interpretive frameworks in *British and American Representations of 9/11 Literature, Politics and the Media* (2018). She takes a 'neorealist' approach, which serves her main thesis that literary fiction is not inseparable from journalism and political discourse, a thesis that is not particularly new. Engaging with trauma, she argues that post-9/11 novels such as *Falling Man* revolve around a 'smaller, far less significant scale of personal trauma' and 'what remains safely representable' (Gheorghiu 2). She does not explain why she considers these depictions to be 'safely representable', or what constitutes such a 'safe' representation. Regardless, her intimation that the 'personal' and the small-scale are synonymous with the 'far less significant' neglects DeLillo's call for 'more marginal stories' and his subsequent inclusion of them in *Falling Man*. Departing from the concept and aesthetics of 'trauma', these marginal stories, I argue, reveal the overlooked significance of the domestic and the wonder and awe of everyday life. Finally, in *Narratives of Hurricane Katrina in Context: Literature, Film, and Television* (2019), Keeble ventures into new critical territory, examining 'the fraught intersections and reverberations between two "cultural traumas" that have punctuated early twenty-first-century history' (1). Although this thesis is not a comparative study, and the selected counter-narratives reposition '9/11' alongside marginal stories rather than prolific cultural 'traumas', it shares with Keeble's study a recognition of the 'important challenges to trauma studies as an interpretive framework' (*Narratives* 1). Building on this recognition, it departs from trauma as a theoretical and analytical concept. Before parting ways, however, it is necessary to explain why 9/11 literary scholars need to move beyond trauma theory, which has, since its origins, been a flawed critical paradigm.

11. Trauma and its Discontents

Although the dominant contemporary model of trauma in cultural theory and mainstream thought is predominantly American, European psychologists and psychiatrists were among the first to theorise trauma. Various theorists have contextualised the need for trauma as a cultural and psychological phenomenon, such as science philosopher Ian Hacking, who contends that trauma plays a 'major role in group identity' as it controls 'communal memory', while political scientist Benedict Anderson asserts that traumas are either 'remembered/forgotten as "[the nation's] own"' (Hacking 210; Anderson 206). The growing significance of trauma in Europe was partly due to the increasing number of soldiers suffering from 'shellshock' after the First World War and the rising prominence of psychoanalysis at the turn of the twentieth century. European research on trauma would not make waves, or even ripples, on American shores until the late

1970s, with the increasing prevalence of neuroses suffered by Vietnam War veterans.[32] Initially, the idea of classifying trauma as a mental disorder in the *DSM-III* (1980) was met with reluctance and even resistance but, following the publication of Robert Jay Lifton's *Home from the War: Vietnam Veterans – Neither Victims nor Executioners* (1973), the *DSM* committee conceded and eventually classified trauma as a separate mental disorder.[33]

Controversy has haunted the diagnosis, definition, and validity of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) since the publication of the *DSM-III*, which defines trauma as a 'psychologically distressing event outside the range of usual human experience' that arouses 'intense fear, terror, and helplessness' (236-38). There were concerns that 'PTSD was more of a political or social construct, rather than a medical disease discovered in nature', while doubt was cast on the (socio-political) motivations of the Vietnam veteran advocacy groups that called for its inclusion in the *DSM-III* (McNally 1). The published definition has been widely criticised for its narrow perspective, limiting human experience to 'what is normal and usual in the lives of men of the dominant class: white, young, able-bodied, educated, middle-class, Christian men' (Brown 101). Rothberg notes that the definition is not applicable to (post-)colonial experience, as it posits trauma as 'a singular event — while colonial and postcolonial traumas persist into the present' ("Decolonizing Trauma Studies" 230). Indeed, as indicated in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, potentially traumatic stressors and intense feelings of 'fear, terror, and helplessness' are not extraordinary but constitutive of ordinary life for those suffering from chronic conditions of racism and colonialism. The *DSM-IV* (2000) — the most recent and prominent edition in September 2001 — broadened the scope, expanding the parameters of the term to include any individual who 'experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others', and responded with 'intense fear, helplessness, or horror' (427-28). The *DSM-IV* added two new requisites for a trauma diagnosis: firstly, that 'the full symptom picture must be present for more than 1 month'; and secondly, that 'the disturbance must cause

[32] The first edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM-I*) published by the American Psychiatric Association listed a condition called "Gross Stress Reaction", which prepared the path for the concept of PTSD. See: John P. Wilson, "The Historical Evolution of PTSD Diagnostic Criteria: From Freud to *DSM-IV*," *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 7.4 (1994): 681-98.

[33] The Veterans Administration feared that veterans suffering psychological disturbances would be diagnosed with post-traumatic-stress-disorder (PTSD) and subsequently demand compensation, while members of the *DSM* editorial board considered the classification unnecessary on the basis that 'the disorder's symptomatology coincided entirely with the symptoms of already established diagnoses — depression, generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, and paranoid schizophrenia — and would thus be superfluous' (Young 110). See further: Allan Young, *The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning' (463). Accordingly, spectators who watched in horror and fear as the 9/11 attacks unfolded (on television or otherwise) could be classified as witnesses to an event that 'involved actual' death and 'serious injury'. If the intensity of helplessness and horror persisted for more than a month, then the spectator/witness would theoretically meet the diagnostic criteria for trauma. The *DSM-IV* definition could thus be (mis)used as evidentiary support for the narrative of '9/11' as a nationwide trauma.

The delineation of PTSD in the *DSM-III* and *DSM-IV* contributed to the exponential growth of trauma studies in the 1990s. Cultural trauma theory is informed by the *DSM*'s explanatory framework as well as Freudian psychoanalytic theory and late-twentieth-century neurobiology. Psychoanalytic studies of hysteria and shock conducted by Freud, Joseph Breuer, and Pierre Janet in the nineteenth century formed the basis of trauma theory in the psychoanalytic tradition. Freud developed his earliest writings on trauma in one of the foundational texts of trauma theory, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). In it, Freud writes: 'We describe as "traumatic" any excitations from the outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield [...] with a breach in an otherwise efficacious barrier against stimuli' (*Beyond* 33). Freud noted a 'compulsion to repeat' in traumatised patients who 'cannot remember the whole of what is repressed' but feel 'obliged to repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, remembering it as something belonging to the past' (*Beyond* 18). Freud implies that confronting a repressed traumatic memory in a psychoanalytic setting facilitates narrative recall. He later used the term 'latency' (or, in the original German, *Nachträglichkeit*) to describe the delayed quality of physical and psychological responses to traumatic experiences. These aspects of Freudian trauma theory informed the influential work of trauma theorists such as Caruth, Shoshana Felman, and Geoffrey Hartman, who rose to prominence in the 1990s.

By 1991, Caruth had built a reputation as an expert in trauma studies following her stint as editor of two special issues of *American Imago* on trauma. Caruth's writings in these issues would later feature in one of her most prolific studies, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995). She begins with a delineation of her conceptualisation of trauma:

> While the precise definition of post-traumatic stress disorder is contested, most descriptions *generally* agree that there is a response, *sometimes* delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and

> avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event [...] the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event. (*Trauma: Explorations* 4; emphasis added)

Caruth's definition (at times tentative) is an idiosyncratic mix of extant medico-psychiatric and literary theories, or more precisely, her understanding of these theories.[34] Drawing on psychoanalytic theory, she offers a rather speculative summary of Freud's position, suggesting that he '*seems* to describe the trauma as the successive movement from an event to its repression to its return', a return that, she adds, is a 'literal return of the event' (Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations* 7; 59; emphasis added). Caruth also relies on research conducted by psychiatrists Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart. In "The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma" (1995), van der Kolk and van der Hart propose a universal neurobiological response to trauma, characterised by a distinction between narrative and traumatic memory:

> When people are exposed to trauma, that is, a frightening event outside of ordinary human experience, they experience "speechless terror." The experience cannot be organized on a linguistic level, and this failure to arrange the memory in words and symbols leaves it to be organized on a somatosensory or iconic level. (172)

Accordingly, the traumatised subject cannot narrate the traumatic experience: they can only gain limited access to it through the 'reappearance of traumatic memories in the form of flashbacks, behavioural re-enactments' (van der Kolk and van der Hart 176). The role of the therapist is thus to assist the patient in working through traumatic memories, the 'unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experiences, which need to be integrated with existing mental schemes, and be transformed into narrative language' (van der Kolk and van der Hart 176). This claim has had a significant impact on subsequent writings on the value of literary narratives, discussed below in more detail.

Caruth's theorisation of trauma, though widely accepted, has been contested by critics from various disciplines. E. Ann Kaplan asserts that 'the victim is conscious of trauma', while Richard McNally claims that 'victims are seldom incapable of remembering their trauma' (Kaplan 38; McNally 2).[35] In *The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress*

[34] In the acknowledgements section of *Unclaimed Experience*, Caruth thanks 'Shoshana Felman for her inspiring work on testimony, for her astute listening, and for her deeply resonant responses to my writing' (ix). See: Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996).

[35] In *Remembering Trauma*, McNally writes: 'The evidence points to three conclusions. First, people remember horrific experiences all too well. Victims are seldom incapable of remembering their trauma. Second, people sometimes do not think about disturbing events for long periods of time, only to be reminded of them later. However, events that are experienced as overwhelmingly traumatic at the time of their occurrence rarely slip from

Disorder (1995), Allan Young asserts that the trauma phenomenon has been uncritically accepted as something self-evident. Referencing the work of Ludwig Fleck, Young reduces the 'perceived timelessness of facts to a "harmony of illusions" that emerges in the course of successful research' and considers 'traumatic memory' a 'man-made object' (9; 141). Ruth Leys, one of the most vociferous of Caruth's critics, contends that there is 'no consensus in the field of memory research regarding such a claim', noting that 'the history of trauma itself is marked by an alternation between episodes of remembering and forgetting, as the experiences of one generation of psychiatrists have been neglected only to be revived at a later time' (*Trauma: A Genealogy* 15). Drawing on psychological studies that invalidate van der Kolk and van der Hart's claims about traumatic memory, Leys contends that Caruth's theory is based on a series of untenable assumptions that are not substantiated by scientific evidence.[36] Caruth is not necessarily interested in the veracity of claims made by her predecessors; rather, she is interested in tailoring them to suit the needs of her literary theory of trauma.[37] She applies the work of Freud, van der Kolk and van der Hart to trauma on both an individual and collective level. However, Kai Erikson, in his contribution to Caruth's *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, makes a distinction between collective and individual levels of trauma: 'By individual trauma I mean a blow to the psyche that breaks through one's defenses so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively' and '[b]y collective trauma, on the other hand, I mean a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of community' (187). Theorised as such, the force of the traumatic experience overwhelms the individual, and precludes the possibility of narrative recall. Erikson implies that it is possible,

awareness. Third, there is no reason to postulate a special mechanism of repression or dissociation to explain why people may not think about disturbing experiences for long periods. A failure to think about something does not entail an inability to remember it (amnesia)' (2). See: Richard McNally, *Remembering Trauma* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2003).

[36] She further alleges that Caruth and van der Kolk take a biased approach to trauma: 'Caruth's performative theory of traumatic repetition as the literal return of reference finds its alleged scientific validation here. Taken together these passages show that van der Kolk and Caruth are committed to the widespread and post-Holocaust assumption according to which any attempts to represent trauma (specifically the trauma of the camps, but here generalized to include any massive trauma) is distortive' (252). See: Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000).

[37] To exemplify, Caruth assumes the validity of 'traumatic memory' and equates it with Freud's concept of latency, writing: 'The traumatic nightmare, undistorted by repression or unconscious wish, seems to point directly to an event, and yet, as Freud suggests, it occupies a space to which willed access is denied. Indeed, the vivid and precise return of the event appears, as modern researchers point out, to be accompanied by an amnesia for the past' (152). See: Cathy Caruth, ed. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995).

however, for the memory of a collective trauma to be repressed, especially in cases where breakages in social bonds are politically inconvenient.

For Caruth, specific communities and cultures are haunted by returning yet repressed remnants of traumas which form the constituents of a 'traumatic history' that cannot be easily accessed. She claims that the traumatic experience, 'beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain paradox: the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness' (Caruth, "Traumatic Awakenings" 208). This is what Roger Luckhurst has termed the 'flat contradiction in trauma theory' (82). In the context of the 9/11 attacks this contradiction was exemplified by the proliferation of narratives almost as soon as the first plane struck the World Trade Center and burst into flames. As David Holloway notes, '9/11' and the 'War on Terror' were 'so appropriated by storytelling and mythmaking that the events themselves became more or less indivisible from their representation, or simulations, in political rhetoric, mass media spectacle and the panoply of other representational forms' (5). The creation of such myth-laden narratives called into question the validity of the description of '9/11' as a 'trauma', as well as the very definition of 'trauma', which has been theorised as an experience 'preventing linguistic value other than a referential expression' (Balaev 1). Arguably, the parameters of the term 'trauma' in 9/11 discourse have become elastic, such that the term is as applicable to a psychiatric disorder as it is to interpretive 'processes of meaning-making' (Eyerman 9). Summarising Ron Eyerman's theorisation, Keeble writes that 'cultural traumas' are 'characterized by intense and ongoing public reflection and debate over meaning. In other words, the inability to understand or agree on the specific nature of the event is what is traumatic' (*Narratives* 8). This thesis understands '9/11' as the *product* of (reductive) meaning-making processes and considers dissenting voices and contentious debates over 'meaning' necessary — rather than traumatic — to prevent critical paralysis.

If, as Caruth claims, 'the phenomenon of trauma' both 'urgently demands historical awareness and yet denies our usual modes of access to it', then it begs the question: what is the role of narrative, especially literary narratives, in relation to trauma? (*Trauma: Explorations* 151). Caruth's oft-cited claim implies that the traumatic experience is inherently unknowable and, as such, narrative representation is not only ineffective but an affront to understanding. Although this became the orthodox view of trauma from the mid-1990s onwards, it was not exempt from criticism or challenge. In *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), Judith Herman assigns therapeutic value to trauma narratives, arguing that they provide an 'organized, detailed, verbal account, oriented

in time and historical content' (177). In *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992), Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub comment on the difficulties of witnessing and testifying to trauma, especially the 'historic trauma of the Second World War, a trauma we consider as the watershed of our times' (xiv).[38] The authors assign a specific role to literary trauma narratives:

> The specific task of the literary testimony is, in other words, to open up in that belated witness, which the reader now historically becomes, the imaginative capability of perceiving history – what is happening to others – in one's own body, with the power of sight (of insight) usually afforded only by one's own immediate physical involvement. (xiii)

For Felman and Laub, literature compels the reader to identify with the victim and to share the traumatic experience. The most problematic presumption that underpins this argument is that the reader will identify with the trauma victim and be moved in a particular way. Dominick LaCapra's concept of 'empathic unsettlement' problematises the (over-)identification of witness with victim. LaCapra asserts that the witness should not assume the position of the victim, but experience empathic unsettlement, an experience that 'poses a barrier to closure in discourse and places in jeopardy harmonizing or spiritually uplifting accounts of extreme events from which we attempt to derive reassurance or a benefit' (41-42). There is thus a critical distance between the trauma victim and the empathically unsettled reader. LaCapra's theory has had a direct impact on critical discussions about 'trauma fiction' and reader response.

In *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* (2002), Laurie Vickroy asserts that 'trauma fiction' attempts to 'lure readers into uncomfortable or alien material, sharing victims' pain with readers, shifting between what can and cannot be revealed, or appealing to readers through popular forms of writing (memoir and fiction)' (3-4). Vickroy cautions writers against representing the perspective of perpetrators in fiction, arguing that it 'promote[s] forgetting' and enables perpetrators to potentially 'defend themselves through secrecy, silence, denial, rationalizing, and undermining the victim's accusations' (19). Däwes also exercises caution, arguing that 'depictions of the perpetrators' are 'dangerous because they create a sense of sympathy and silence the traumatized victims' (*Ground Zero Fiction* 242). These cautious

[38] In the introduction to the study, the authors discuss the ethics and (im-)possibilities of bearing witness: 'Through an alternation of a literary and a clinical perspective, the present study strives to grasp and to articulate the obscure relation between witnessing, events and evidence, as what defines at once the common ground between literature and ethics, and the meeting point between violence and culture, the very moment when, precisely, the phenomenon of violence and the phenomenon of culture come to clash — and yet to mingle — in contemporary history' (xiii). See: Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

assessments are reductive as they curtail the freedom of writers to imagine and explain the potential motives of the terrorists with the possibility of suggesting more nuanced answers to Bush's question: 'Why do they hate us?' (Bush, "Congress" n.pag.). For Vickroy, 'authentic trauma fiction' has the potential 'to convey specific lived experience as well as some critical distance', except, of course, for the lived experience of perpetrators (21). Theorised as such, the function of 'authentic trauma fiction' is to create empathic unsettlement and, in turn, 'social action' (Vickroy 22). This theory, however, is problematic, as it assumes that all readers will be unsettled by the reading experience and fails to consider that readers with a taste for tales of trauma will consume trauma fiction with pleasure. As Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw note in *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony, and Community* (2002): 'In a culture of trauma, accounts of extreme situations sell books. Narratives of illness, sexual abuse, torture or the death of loved ones have come to rival the classic, heroic adventure as a test of limits that offers the reader the suspicious thrill of borrowed emotion' (2). Vickroy is oblivious to the fact that the US publishing industry and networks of distribution and reviewing are ruled, not by noble ideas about literature, but by the laws of profitability.

In *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (1996), Kalí Tal takes a more interrogative approach and asks a series of pertinent questions, such as the following: 'what is the connection between individual psychic trauma and cultural representations of the traumatic event? What does the act of testimony, of "bearing witness," mean to an individual survivor, to a community of survivors?' (3). Tal cautions against the misappropriation of literary testimonies of trauma survivors and interrogates the ethics of trauma fiction, asking: 'what happens when a survivor's story is retold (and revised) by a writer who is not a survivor? How are survivor's [*sic*] stories adapted to fit and then contained within the dominant structure of social, cultural and political discourse?' (3). These stories include stories of trauma that ostensibly pale in comparison to the Holocaust, a paradigmatic traumatic event that has become 'a yardstick to measure trauma in contemporary culture' (Tal 8). In *Trauma Fiction* (2004), Anne Whitehead grapples with the contradiction of 'trauma fiction': 'if trauma comprises an event or experience which overwhelms the individual and resists language or representation, how then can it be narrativized in fiction?' (3). She suggests that the answer might lie in trauma theory, which, she claims, 'has provided novelists with new ways of conceptualising trauma and has shifted attention away from the question of what is remembered of the past to how and why it is remembered' (Whitehead 3). The question of how trauma should be represented has been answered by cultural trauma theorists advocating a particular ethical aesthetic that aims to 'transmit or convey

trauma rather than represent it' (Gibbs 26). If the writer insists on representing trauma, then they are expected to do so 'according to the most indirect and experimental aesthetic forms possible' (Gibbs 26). The 'melancholic vocabulary' of trauma theory — exemplified by theorists' frequent use of terms such as 'absence, holes, deferral, crises of meaning, unknowing and dissociation' — describes the desired effect of the trauma aesthetic (Mengel and Borzaga xiii). The various literary and narrative strategies used to 'formally represent the symptom' include 'analepses; digressions, diversions and prevarications in narrative trajectory; and dispersal or fragmenting of narrative personae' (Gibbs 17). The prevalence of the 'melancholic vocabulary' of trauma theory in literary studies of trauma sets in motion a repetitive cycle that validates the relevance and suitability of trauma theory as an interpretive framework. In recent years, however, literary scholars have attempted to break this cycle.

The Caruthian aporetic approach remained prevalent in literary trauma theory from the mid-1990s to the first years of the new millennium. Since 2008, several literary critics have been less sympathetic to, and even rejected, the idea that the transmission of 'unmediated trauma' in its 'literal totality' is the most ethical and effective literary approach (Rothe, "Irresponsible" 188). In his award-winning study, *Contemporary American Trauma Narratives* (2014), Gibbs considers it 'absurd' to 'elide this categorical difference between the experience of a trauma sufferer, a witness, and the second-hand reader', and points out that the reception of trauma narratives depends not least on the disposition, context, and personal history of the reader (29). Gibbs questions the alleged 'experimentalism' of the trauma aesthetic, referring to it as a 'facile bricolage of accepted representational practices disingenuously masquerading as experimental and avant-garde' (48). Luckhurst notes too that this aesthetic has become 'highly conventionalised', while Kaplan and Ban Wang call it 'a mistake to think that investment in the abysmal, unrepresentable quality of trauma is the only way to be fair to the traumatized and injured' (Luckhurst 89; Kaplan and Wang 12). Indeed, the aesthetic is not as radical as its proponents claim, as it adheres to the tenets of the dominant Euro-American-centric trauma model. As Gibbs notes, the established 'trauma genre' draws in 'relatively unquestioning ways upon a simplified and restricted range of those aspects of trauma theory most widely disseminated into European and, especially, American culture' (24). Postcolonial literary scholars Stef Craps and Gert Buelens share these complaints, arguing that 'it has become all but axiomatic that traumatic experiences can only be adequately represented through the use of experimental, (post)modernist textual strategies' (5). The widespread acceptance of this strategy in creative and critical circles 'marginalises' non-western representations, which often adopt

realist and indigenous literary practices to eschew the 'Western discourse of unspeakability, recourse to which is seen as politically debilitating' (Craps and Buelens 5). The grief narratives examined in this thesis depart from this aesthetic of, and emphasis on, debilitation.

The selected counter-narratives depict some of the ways the bereaved stay attached to others (both dead and alive) and life itself, setting themselves on what Berlant calls a 'long migrating trail of actions bouncing off of various points on a chronologically heterogeneous grief', which 'makes possible new genres of reciprocity' (*Cruel*86). Berlant explains that genres organise the heterogeneity of lived experience, complete with its constellation of affects, contingencies, and struggles. This thesis argues that the texts under analysis do not adhere to the conventions of one single genre, including the 'trauma genre'. Rather, they demonstrate how the 'heterogeneity of grief' inspires the creation of new genres for literature as well as navigating ordinary life. Although *Falling Man* has been widely read as a canonical 9/11 trauma novel, Chapter Two argues that it is a novel that aestheticises abjection and suspended grief, and features elements of ekphrastic fiction (featuring verbal representations of visual artworks in content and form) and the domestic novel. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* draws on aspects of the thriller (a genre not traditionally associated with trauma), Sufi poetry, and the dramatic monologue. The novel's hybrid form continues its thematic exploration of the hybridity of the self and the traces of otherness at its core. Most hybrid, however, is *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, which juxtaposes lyrical passages, prose, cultural documents, and images. Using diverse strategies, these texts depart from the idea of trauma as both an exceptional event and aesthetic, focusing instead on chronic grief and ongoing deaths.

Drawing upon Laura Brown's concept of 'insidious trauma', a chronic condition of suffering, Craps and Buelens note: 'Routinely ignored or dismissed in trauma research, the chronic psychic suffering produced by the structural violence of racial, gender, sexual, class, and other inequities has yet to be fully accounted for' (Brown 107; Craps and Buelens 3-4). These scholars attempt to account for these inequities by calling for the 'decolonisation' of trauma studies, with the aim of attracting critical interest to the chronic psychic suffering of minority groups and non-western cultures currently underrepresented in literary studies of trauma.[39] The call for post-colonialist literary scholars to decolonise trauma theory was issued in 2008 in a

[39] The project of decolonisation is arguably a belated response to Jill Bennett and Roseanne Kennedy's suggestion in 2003 that trauma studies should engage more with 'the multicultural and diasporic nature of contemporary culture' (5). See: Jill Bennett and Roseanne Kennedy, *World Memory: Personal Trajectories in Global Time* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

special edition of *Studies in the Novel*, co-edited by Craps and Buelens. In his contribution to the issue, Rothberg notes that the event-based model of trauma 'distorts the histories it addresses (such as the Holocaust) and threatens to reproduce the very Eurocentrism that lies behind those histories', as it fails to account for or consider chronic traumatic conditions of colonialism and racism ("Decolonizing Trauma Studies" 225). With this in mind, he calls for new formulations of trauma to undertake the 'simultaneously intellectual, ethical, and political task of standing against ongoing forms of racial and colonial violence' (Rothberg, "Decolonizing Trauma Studies" 232). He suggests considering trauma as 'collective, spatial, and material (instead of individual, temporal, and linguistic)' in an attempt to break 'the hold of the category of trauma as it had been developed by Caruth, Felman, Laub, and others' (228). In *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* (2012), Craps reiterates Rothberg's call, opposing four particular strands of the founding texts of the field and the work of trauma theorists (including Caruth): firstly, the tendency to 'marginalise or ignore traumatic experiences of non-western or minority cultures'; secondly, that trauma theorists 'generally disregard the connections between metropolitan and non-western or minority traumas'; thirdly, that they 'take for granted the universal validity of definitions of trauma and recovery that have developed out of the history of western modernity'; and finally, they 'often favour or even prescribe a modernist aesthetic of fragmentation and aporia as uniquely suited to the task of bearing witness to trauma' (2). Subsequently, trauma theory — rather than advocating cross-cultural bonds — risks perpetuating the beliefs, power structures, and practices that produce extant injustices and inequalities.

The implications of this risk are noted by Ewald Mengel and Michela Borzaga, who contend that the 'melancholic vocabulary' of trauma theory forecloses 'any possibility for healing for individuals or entire nations' (xiii). Luckhurst argues similarly, observing that Caruth's framework emphasises the crippling effects of trauma and situates 'memory entirely under the sign of post-traumatic melancholia' (210). Luckhurst reads this as 'a kind of injunction to maintain the post-traumatic condition', which reduces the post-traumatic subject to a passive state of weakness and victimisation (210). Such an injunction disavows the possibility of creating a post-melancholic state of renewal and socio-political activism, as described in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. The apolitical status trauma theories assign to the victim and the traumatic event has also been noted by Anne Rothe, who argues that promoting 'teary-eyed sentimentality' on television talk shows and, indeed in melodramatic 9/11 literature, produces 'trauma kitsch' (*Popular* 45). Trauma kitsch, she argues, removes the 'socio-economic contexts of oppression, victimization, and violence by representing these quintessentially political subjects as individual

strategies', and thus strengthens the 'power structures that have created the represented injustices' (Rothe, *Popular* 45). Scholars seeking to decolonise trauma studies focus specifically on contexts of oppression and the role power structures play in producing and perpetuating traumatic conditions. The call to decolonise trauma has produced several responses. Contributors to Sonya Andermahr's *Decolonizing Trauma Studies: Trauma and Postcolonialism* (2014) examine fiction that neither conforms to the paradigmatic trauma aesthetic nor privileges the suffering of white Europeans and North Americans. Buelens, Sam Durrant, and Robert Eaglestone's *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism* (2013), Michelle Balaev's *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory* (2014), and Lucy Bond and Stef Craps' *Trauma* (2019) point out the limitations of Euro-American-centric trauma theory and argue against its applicability to postcolonial contexts.

The emerging movement away from established trauma theory remains nascent, however, in post-9/11 literary scholarship. Although scholars re-state the need to steer trauma studies into a new, uncharted direction, they are less willing to provide robust alternatives to trauma theory as a critical paradigm.[40] Gibbs and Rothberg are among the minority of scholars who have suggested alternatives. Gibbs offers readings of contemporary American trauma narratives with a neorealist and neonaturalist thematic and aesthetic focus, while Rothberg turns his attention toward realist representations of trauma. Anna Hartnell, realising that trauma 'often conceals the slow, non-spectacular and human-engineered violence', evokes Rob Nixon's concept of 'slow violence': a form of violence that is 'neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive' (Hartnell, *After Katrina* 173; Nixon 2). Nixon's concept evokes Berlant's theorisation of 'slow death': 'the physical wearing out of a population in a way that points to its deterioration as a defining condition of its experience and historical existence' (*Cruel* 95). Slow death prospers not in 'traumatic' events, but in 'temporally labile environments whose qualities and whose contours in time and space are often identified with the presentness of ordinariness itself' (Berlant, *Cruel* 100). Keeble engages with these theoretical offerings to explore 'moments where traumatic ruptures eventually reveal systemic or slow violence' (*Narratives* 123). He reads narratives of 9/11 and Katrina primarily through the lens of

[40] Gert Buelens, Samuel Durrant and Robert Eaglestone note that the number of studies criticising Caruthian trauma theory are 'becoming a field' of their own (4). These critics add that it is 'very easy for a series of complex ideas to become a concrete "method", and so to lose both the capability of self-reflection and the original questioning, investigative (and in this case, ethical) impulse' (4). See: Gert Buelens, Samuel Durrant, and Robert Eaglestone, eds. *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism* (London; New York: Routledge, 2013).

Rothberg's *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (2009), which adopts a comparative and global approach to examine the connections between public memories of the Holocaust and colonialism.

Whilst postcolonial trauma scholars draw attention to non-European or American-centric traumas, there is still a need to examine ongoing situations of suffering and grief within America. These situations are not single 'traumas', whether cultural or psychological, and do not adhere to Caruth's event-based trauma model. Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* suggests that (neo-)colonial phantoms loom over America and Pakistan (pre- and post-9/11), while Rankine's *American Lyric* explores the chronic conditions of racism in America and the grief that characterises everyday life for African Americans. Building on the work of trauma critics, this thesis adopts an oppositional stance to the established trauma model and the approved (and now formulaic) trauma aesthetic. The following chapters are not predicated on pointing out the flaws and rehearsing the limitations of trauma theory, as critics have already done so with aplomb. Instead, the chapters focus specifically on grief, an experience that has often been mistaken for, conflated with, or overshadowed by trauma in scholarship of post-9/11 literature. This is due in part to the mis- and over-use of the terms 'trauma' and the 'traumatic' (both in popular and academic discourses), such that these concepts have lost specificity and suffered their own crisis of meaning. Departing from the amorphous concept of 'trauma', this thesis draws mainly on the work of Kristeva, Butler and Berlant to examine counter-narratives of grief.

12. Beyond Trauma Theory

My understanding of grief is informed by Butler's conceptualisation of grief, which she outlines as follows:

> One cannot say, "Oh I'll go through loss this way, and that will be the result, and I'll apply myself to the task, and I'll endeavour to achieve the resolution of grief that is before me". I think one is hit by waves, and that one starts out the day with an aim, a project, a plan, and finds oneself foiled. (*Precarious* 21)

Butler's position contrasts the medico-psychiatric theorisation of grief as a problem to be resolved through specific tasks, the success of which is typically measured by progression through rigid stages within an inflexible timeline. Contrary to this model, Butler neither assumes the ontological autonomy of the embodied subject nor aspires to autonomy, contending instead that autonomy is not 'an accomplishment, not a presupposition, and certainly no guarantee'

(*Precarious* 27). The subject is not independent, as it is entangled within multiple interconnecting personal, social, political, and economic relationships. As Butler notes:

> What grief displays is the thrall in which our relations with others holds us, in ways that we cannot always recount or explain, in ways that often interrupt the self-conscious account of ourselves we might try to provide. (*Precarious* 23)

Due to the incontrovertible relationality of the subject, it is always 'attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure', and thus, vulnerable (Butler, *Precarious* 20). According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term *trauma* is derived from the Greek *trauma*, meaning 'wound', while the etymological origin of the term *vulnerability* is the Latin verb *vulnerabilis*, from Latin *vulnerare* 'to wound', from vulnus 'wound' (n.pag.). It is notable, if not coincidental, that behavioural demonstrations of vulnerability are often mistaken for trauma symptoms, while events that expose the reality of human vulnerability and mortality (such as the 9/11 attacks) are labelled traumatic. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, to be vulnerable is to be 'exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally; [or] (of a person) in need of special care, support, or protection because of age, disability, or risk of abuse or neglect' (n.pag.). Defined as such, vulnerability connotes a somewhat negative state of being. According to Butler's definition, however, vulnerability is not synonymous with susceptibility to injury; rather, injury is caused by the exploitation of the subject's 'primary vulnerability' (*Frames* 61). Butler tells her readers that 'we cannot [...] will away this vulnerability. We must attend to it' (*Precarious* 29). This imperative is not as simple as it might initially appear, however, as it runs the risk of perpetuating a cyclical loop of exploitation. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the US government 'attended to' the stark exposition of US vulnerability by exploiting the primary vulnerability of ungrievable others. Whilst Butler does not suggest how one can 'attend to' vulnerability without further exploitation, the selected texts suggest how grief can be used to attend to the vulnerability of ungrievable abject bodies in ways that are both ethically responsive and responsible.

The differential allocation of grievability decides 'what kind of subject is and must be grieved, and which kind of subject must not', while frames of recognition 'produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human' (Butler, *Precarious* xiv-xv). For Butler, different media 'use persons (position them, endow them with perspective, and establish the trajectory of their action); they frame and form anyone who enters into the visual or audible field, and accordingly, those who do not' (*Frames* xii). While Richard Drew's "Falling Man" photograph was excluded from US frames of recognition, images of the passenger planes striking the Twin Towers were framed repeatedly because they were agents of terror, whilst individual or

multiple bodies (whether terrorist or passenger or victims in the Towers) were concealed. The following chapters draw on and develop Butler's conceptualisation of 'frames', investigating the role of embodied grief in responding to the stifled cries of ungrievable others. To assist this investigation, the chapters incorporate affect and embodiment theory into their analyses, understanding affect not as a force divorced from cognitive processes and critical thought in moments of impact, but as an emergent and interconnecting force between the mind and body, and the environment it shares with others. Although Butler is rarely recognised as an affect scholar, she joins notable affect theorists, such as Ahmed, Berlant, and Ann Cvetkovitch, in calling for 'a critical focus on and appreciation of affect' (Hemmings 148). Butler asserts that 'a wide range of affects: pleasure, rage, suffering' are 'not just the basis, but the very stuff of ideation and of critique' (*Frames* 34). This study reads Butler's writings on the body in *Precarious Life* and *Frames* as a theory of affect. If, as Butler states, the body is 'fundamentally dependent on, and conditioned by, a sustained and sustainable world', then it is a plausible suggestion that responsiveness and responsibility can be 'located in the affective responses to a sustaining and impinging world' (*Frames* 34). The chiasmic structure of affect reveals the contingency of the experiential realm of being and emphasises the openness of embodied subjectivity. In the counter-narratives examined, this openness is represented as the precondition for responding to and for others in ethical ways. Grief reveals this openness, as a combination of embodied sensations that traverse the porous boundary of the body, leaving the subject feeling 'dispossessed', 'undone' and 'beside oneself' (Butler, *Precarious* 28; 23; 24). According to Butler, porousness and the unravelling of subjectivity are 'essential to the possibility of persisting as human' (*Precarious* 33). If so, then embodied experiences of grief are profound assertions of the humanity of the bereaved subject and the deceased. Through various aesthetic strategies, *Falling Man*, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* challenge media framings of socio-political reality and make palpable the ongoing dynamic between the embodied subject and the environment in which it is enveloped. Drawing on these elements of Butler's writings will thus further my investigation of grief and the extent to which the texts crack dominant narrative frames.

As well as the work of Butler, this thesis will draw on Berlant's concept of 'crisis ordinariness'. Thus far, opponents of trauma theory have turned to postcolonialism, neo-realism, and neo-naturalism, but this study turns to Berlant's work in *Cruel Optimism* (2011). There, Berlant sets aside the 'fundamentally ahistoricizing logic of trauma' to focus on the concept of 'crisis ordinariness', which posits that crisis refers not only to a momentous catastrophe, but also

to a chronic condition of injury and exhaustion (*Cruel* 10). This concept informs my readings of post-9/11 narratives that reposition the terrorist attacks within ordinary life alongside 'marginal' (and marginalised) stories of ongoing death and loss. Importantly, Berlant retains the necessary level of cynicism about affective attachments that Butler's work lacks. Affect is equivocal; affective ties to others are as potentially damaging as they are ethically responsive. Indeed, Butler leaves several questions unanswered, such as how, why, and in what conditions can ethical responsibility become an affective demand, and how can a potential affective ethics withstand lasting divisions along the lines of race and nation? Engaging with and developing these theoretical paradigms, this study considers these questions in the readings that follow. The following chapter draws primarily on the third main theoretical paradigm this thesis employs: Kristeva's conceptualisation of abject bodies and abjection. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982), Kristeva defines the abject as that which 'disturbs identity, system and order' (4). Butler, following Kristeva, asserts that the abject is embodied by those who are 'not yet "subjects"' (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 3). More so than Hamid and Rankine, DeLillo refines these theorisations of abjection, as the next chapter demonstrates in its reading of *Falling Man*.

Chapter Two

The Powers of Horror: Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*[41]

In his essay "In the Ruins of the Future: Reflections on Terror and Loss in the Shadow of September", published in December 2001, Don DeLillo wrote: 'The Bush Administration was feeling a nostalgia for the Cold War. This is over now. Many things are over. The narrative ends in the rubble, and it is left to us to create the counternarrative' (n.pag.). This chapter argues that DeLillo's 2007 novel *Falling Man* emerges from the rubble and engages with the physical, psychological, and aesthetic abject to create a counter-narrative that disrupts the pre-existing systems of signification and dualistic rhetoric that characterised state and media responses to the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001. The significance or purported meaning of the attacks was constructed from 'frames of practised response': simplistic structures that rendered geopolitical reality a battle of good versus evil, and us against them (DeLillo, "Ruins" n.pag.). Writing at a time when America was once again splitting the world into diametrical opposites, DeLillo had reason to state that the Bush Administration was 'feeling a nostalgia for the Cold War'. Unlike the military struggles of the War on Terror, the Cold War was an ideological, international power struggle. Obliquely referencing Francis Fukuyama's claim that the collapse of the Berlin Wall signalled the 'end of history', a successful conclusion to the world's teleological progression towards globalised capitalism, DeLillo notes that the post-Cold War euphoria that settled into American culture in the nineties 'summoned us all to live permanently in the future, in the utopian glow of cyber capital' ("Ruins" n.pag.).[42] DeLillo banishes the apocalyptic impulses of the Cold War and refutes Fukuyama's triumphalist claim, aestheticising the suspension of time in *Falling Man* to illustrate that he and his readers are now living in the 'ruins of the future'. Claiming that '9/11' is 'too powerful a thing to set into our frame of practised response', DeLillo argues that if artists are to continue to grapple with the meanings of '9/11', then they must depart from nostalgic Cold War narratives and discourses of tragedy and triumph ("Ruins"

[41] Earlier versions of parts of this chapter appear in Kelsie Donnelly, "The Power of Horror: Abject Art and Terrorism in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*," *Contemporary Aesthetics* 7 (2019): n.pag. 31 Oct. 2019 <https://contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=874>.

[42] See: Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

n.pag.). Radical responses should be embraced instead, and the aesthetic power of terror considered. Daring to break this socially tabooed topic, *Falling Man* engages with abject art and grief to create a counter-narrative.

The Tate Museum defines abject art as art that covers 'all the bodily functions, or aspects of the body, that are deemed impure or inappropriate for public display or discussion' (n.pag.). DeLillo theorises a specific form of abject art that inspires terror in several ways: it exposes a body that has been banned from public view; it transgresses the boundaries of embodied subjectivity; it forces the audience to confront the evisceration of the human condition; and it presents rather than represents horror. In her seminal text, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982), Kristeva defines the abject as 'the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite' that 'does not respect borders, positions, rules' (4). DeLillo's eponymous "Falling Man" refuses to conform to social 'rules' and prohibitions as he stages 'falls' from elevated structures in New York City. The jolt of his jump is followed by a sudden moment of suspension, during which he dangles in mid-air with nothing but a safety harness to secure him. Suspended in a liminal space between life and death, he is abject: a life bordering on death. His performances are particularly disturbing because they recreate the final moments of those who jumped from the burning Twin Towers on September 11th. Images of falling bodies were quickly removed from all media outlets in the US, due in part to their transgression of cultural values and myths of American invulnerability. As noted in Chapter One, the Bush administration sought to conceal the nation's vulnerability under the auspices of defending America's 'God-given values' of freedom, morality and liberty from barbarous forces of evil (B. Woodward 131). Neither this moralistic viewpoint nor the narrative of trauma and resilience could explain or comprehend the 9/11 'jumpers" decision to jump to death under duress. Images of bodies hanging on the edge of death from Tower ledges were, in Kristevean terms, 'jettisoned objects', and quickly replaced with images of New York City firefighters that captured the resilience of the American spirit in the face of adversity (2).[43]

[43] Marita Sturken notes that a 'cult' of heroes quickly emerged as the media circulated images conveying the selfless bravery of New York firefighters and police officers willing to risk their lives to save others (*Tourists* 188). Elaborating further, Warren Spielberg writes: 'Like the mythic hero [the fireman] returned from the land of the dead, having saved others and the community from greater destruction. He stood for resilience, sacrifice, and continuity in the face of experienced vulnerability' (n.pag.). The celebration of firemen and iconic 'manly men' (such as John Wayne) — who rescued damsels from distress on September 11th — had a symbolic and political function (Noonan n.pag.). Flaunting the 'manly virtues' of Americans, the mass-media attempted to compensate for or deflect attention from the symbolic castration of two phallocentric buildings: the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center (Noonan n.pag.). See: Marita Sturken, *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumer from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007); Warren Spielberg, "Trauma in 9/11's Wake: The Objectification of New York City Firefighters," *Tikkun* 8 Sept. 2011, 1 Feb. 2014 <https://www.tikkun.org/trauma-

DeLillo's "Falling Man" establishes a dialectical relationship between abject art and terrorism. The aesthetic power of his performance art does not rely on logic and reason but on sheer visual impact. Through a compelling combination of shock and suspension, he figuratively assaults the sensorium of his unsuspecting audience members while silencing what DeLillo calls 'disarticulations': the linguistic codification and reification of 'us' and 'them', and 'good' and 'evil' that induce a 'righteous fever in the brain' ("Ruins" n.pag.). The "Falling Man" intensifies 'brain fever' as his abject art is not tethered to pre-conceived notions of reason or morality, and sends an ineffable rush of awe, fascination, and repulsion pulsing through the veins of his captivated victim, Lianne Glenn. Tearing the veil that obscured falling bodies and rousing feelings considered forbidden or socially unacceptable at that time, the "Falling Man" reveals the simplicity and inaccuracy of the widespread assumption that falling bodies, and falling towers, traumatised the nation.

Departing from established analyses of the novel, this chapter will then focus on the 'marginal' story of Jack Glenn, a story not of resilience, but of abjection and suicide. DeLillo emphasises the importance of 'marginal stories', which are needed to counter 'the massive spectacle' of '9/11' ("Ruins" n.pag.). Although the story of Jack is 'marginal' in comparison to the magnitude and infamy of '9/11', it is arguably the most significant narrative in the novel. Since her father's suicide several years before the 9/11 attacks, Lianne has lived in a state of suspended grief. Her life revolves around her father's death, influencing everything from her choice of husband to her interpretation of the events of September 11th and the "Falling Man's" abject art. Projecting the sight of the falling body back into her memory, body, and being, Lianne demonstrates that embodied vision privileges lived experience over media frames of recognition. She perceives the "Falling Man" as an uncanny cipher for her father, while his performance triggers a complex idiosyncratic mix of sensations intimately related to her grief. Suspended in mid-air, the artist temporarily stills life, compelling his audience to look at the overlooked: the unnoticed profundity and mystery of the marginal, the censored, the abject, and grief. For Lianne, grief is a time of suspension and deep feeling — distinct from the circuitous loop of traumatic repetition and fast-paced progress — that ruins the future. Although scholars from the medico-psychiatric tradition would theoretically diagnose Lianne's grief as pathological or 'complicated', DeLillo theorises it as a blessing, an experience that reveals the sanctity of everyday life.[44]

in-911s-wake-the-objectification-of-new-york-city-firefighters>; Peggy Noonan, "Welcome Back, Duke: From the Ashes of September 11 Arise the Manly Virtues," *Wall Street Journal* 12 Oct. 2001, 13 Sept. 2015 <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB1224511747986500 85>.

Therefore, he draws on tropes that have become synonymous with '9/11' in the popular imagination, such as abject rubble, to tell another story: the 'marginal' story of Jack's death and Lianne's grief that moves beyond the purported exclusivity and exceptionalism of '9/11' trauma to reveal the marvels of the mundane.

Despite claiming in 1997 that 'what's almost never discussed is [...] the language in which a book is framed', scant critical attention has been paid to DeLillo's use of language, especially how it works in *Falling Man* ("Exile" 47).[45] This chapter will finally undertake an examination of the novel's form and structure, arguing that the aesthetic principles of the "Falling Man's" performances and the concept of the abject ruin or 'rubble' suffuse the novel as stylistic phenomena. The novel's abject aesthetic transforms the conceptual into the perceptual, assaulting the senses and the imagination to elevate consciousness of the embodied self and its openness to others, including the dead. Refiguring the abject as wondrous, the marginal as mysterious, and the artist as terrorist, *Falling Man* transcends 'disarticulations' and 'frames of practised response' to create a counter-narrative constructed from metaphorical ruin and rubble ("Ruins" n.pag.).

Falling Man follows Lianne Glenn and Keith Neudecker who temporarily rekindle the embers of their collapsed marriage in the wake of 9/11. Contrary to the *New York Times*' "Portraits of Grief" — which collectively form a 'microcosm of family life, of community values, of a valiant and, though wounded, above all, happy America' — the novel paints a portrait of a family falling apart, and a home divorced from the bliss and sanctuary traditionally associated with the domestic sphere (N. Miller 122). Following his narrow escape from the North Tower, Keith returns home to Lianne and their son, Justin. The attacks have not changed everyone and everything, as Keith returns to his cheating, drinking and gambling ways almost as soon as he returns home. Although he walks away from the ruin and rubble at Ground Zero, he finds himself in another wasteland by the end of the novel. Drifting further away from his family, he moves West, gravitating toward the vapid world of the Las Vegas desert, where he wastes the rest of his days playing in professional poker tournaments. Arguably, Keith attempts to (re)create himself in the image of the mythical 'American Adam', who R.W.B. Lewis defines as an

[44] In a state of 'suspended' grief since her father's death several years ago, Lianne theoretically meets the diagnostic criteria for 'complicated grief', defined as a chronic response to loss that lasts longer than a six-month period. See: M. Katherine Shear et al., "Review: Complicated Grief and Related Bereavement Issues for *DSM-5*," *Depression and Anxiety* 28.2 (February 2011): 103-17.

[45] David Cowart has examined language and structure in twelve of DeLillo's novels. As *Falling Man* was published in 2007, it is not included in Cowart's analysis. See: David Cowart, *Don DeLillo: The Physics of Language* (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2002).

'individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling' and 'emancipated from history' (5). Keith, however, is not free from history, as he attempts to recreate in Las Vegas the poker nights and male camaraderie he enjoyed with his friends before the attacks. While the American Adam succeeds without 'ever fully submitting to any of the world's determining categories', Keith, rather ironically, attempts to create and control his own (Manifest) destiny by submitting to the rules of poker games, the outcomes of which are determined by skill, luck, and the laws of probability (Lewis 5). Lianne, meanwhile, struggles with the primary source of grief in the novel: her father's suicide, which predates 9/11. Short episodes intercut the main narrative, which follow Hammad and his progression from a mosque in Hamburg to his violent death in the cockpit of a hijacked plane on September 11th. The teleological plot of terror and Jack Glenn's suicide plot end in rubble, leaving Keith and Lianne to pick up the pieces and live in the ruins.

True to his word, DeLillo's counter-narrative begins in the rubble. The opening scenes depict the immediate aftermath of the 'fall': 'It was not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night [...] The roar was still in the air, the buckling rumble of the fall. This was the world now. Smoke and ash came rolling down streets' (3). Amongst the 'rubble and mud', there are 'things on fire', 'bodies [...] clothes, pieces of metal like metal parts, things just scattered', a 'man scaled in ash, in pulverised matter', and a car 'half buried in debris' (58; 3). The towering inferno, the ruin, wreckage and wafting ash recall the sights surveyed by Walter Benjamin's 'Angel of History':

> His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise [...] This storm is what we call progress. (*Illuminations* 257-58)

In the eyes of the Angel, progress produces corollary mounds of rubble: mass death and destruction. Blown backwards, the Angel cannot 'make whole' all that has fallen apart. Although Benjamin wrote these words in 1940, they speak to the fall of the World Trade Center on September 11th, 2001. The Twin Towers were monuments to capitalism and America's steadfast devotion to progress. When they fell, the progress they stood for ground (temporarily) to a halt, their ruins representing what was and what is no longer. Whilst the wreckage that Benjamin's Angel surveys piles skyward, the metaphorical ruins of the future leave DeLillo's characters teetering on the edge of what is over and what is yet to come. From the novel's opening, therefore, DeLillo sets out the main thematic and aesthetic concerns of his counter-narrative: the accumulation of catastrophes, from the marginal to the monumental; the suspension of progress,

which leaves the future in ruins; the dead, whose pulverised bodies hang in the ashen air; and the embodied experience of (still) life in a wasteland.

1. Critical Reception

Throughout his literary career, DeLillo has explored themes of terrorism and spectacle in contemporary America. His fictional response to the fall of the World Trade Center, the terrorist spectacle *par excellence*, was eagerly awaited by critics and readers alike. Kristiaan Versluys, for instance, anticipated an 'indexical landmark' from the 'Man who invented 9/11' (183). When *Falling Man* was published, however, it was met with, at best, a mixed critical reception. Elizabeth Anker identifies a nostalgic impulse in *Falling Man*, arguing that DeLillo 'encodes sentiments at once idealised and regressive' and longs 'to return to a bygone era of American omnipotence wherein white, heteronormative, patrician masculinity was still sacrosanct' (468). Her contention that *Falling Man* longs for a former era of masculine power conflicts with DeLillo's critique of the 'Bush administration['s] [...] nostalgia for the Cold War' in "Ruins." There, DeLillo does not indulge the desire to return to a lost era of American exceptionalism, stating blatantly that '[t]his is over now. Many things are over. The narrative ends in the rubble and it is left to us to create the counternarrative' ("Ruins" n.pag.). The gestating counter-narrative that becomes *Falling Man* is neither regressive nor progressive: it focuses instead on a suspended present. While the US media sanctified 'manly men' after the attacks, Anker's claim that *Falling Man* is devoted to white masculinity is somewhat unfounded (Noonan n.pag.). Together with the fall of the phallocentric Twin Towers and the fall of the (self-made) businessman pictured in Richard Drew's photograph, all of *Falling Man*'s male characters fall and fail in various ways. Keith, whose character best represents the 'white, heteronormative, patrician masculinity' of which Anker speaks, is far from 'sacrosanct'. His exaggerated performance of masculinity is destructive as well as conflicted. As the family patriarch, he wishes to regain 'contact' with his estranged wife and son but, at the same time, finds 'domesticity confining' (Kauffman, "Bodies" 139). True to his philandering self, he falls quickly into the arms of Florence Givens, another 9/11 survivor, upon his return to the family home. Following one of many evenings spent gambling and drinking with his male buddies, he arrives home with a 'boyish and horrible' grimace on his face, a look that for Lianne signals his readiness to 'break up a table and burn it so he could take his dick out and piss on the flames' (103; 104). Keith's grotesque display of masculinity is far from 'sacrosanct': it is 'twisted', 'cruel', and verging on the comedic (104).

In his oft-cited examination of '9/11 fiction', Richard Gray includes *Falling Man* in his prognosis that the early '9/11 novel' suffers from the tendency to 'assimilate the unfamiliar into familiar structures' ("Open" 134). As noted in Chapter One, Gray holds that novelists writing about '9/11' need to invent a particular imaginative structure, a somewhat conservative argument conforming to the widespread view that '9/11' was an exceptional 'trauma'. Responding to Gray's disagreement with DeLillo's use of 'familiar' tropes, this chapter later identifies recurring political, ontological, and aesthetic patterns in *Falling Man* and DeLillo's pre- and post-post-9/11 fiction. Several critics have commented on the stylistic trajectory of DeLillo's oeuvre, classifying novels such as *Mao II* (1991) and *Underworld* (1997) as 'middle period' or 'major DeLillo', and novels such as *The Body Artist* (2001), *Falling Man*, and *Point Omega* (2010) as his 'late style' or 'bare-skinned' novels (Harding 66; Boxall, "Edge of the Future" 160). Significantly, DeLillo's markedly different style was not a response to the 9/11 attacks, as it was debuted in *The Body Artist*. Despite stylistic differences, there are thematic threads that knit together DeLillo's oeuvre. The purpose of pointing them out is not to support Gray's argument, but to illustrate that DeLillo does not treat the 9/11 attacks as an unprecedented departure point that occasioned (and required) the creation of a novel of exception to reflect the exceptional status assigned to the events. Rather, for DeLillo, the attacks constitute a point of crisis and continuity in aesthetic and thematic terms. For Gray, however, engaging with the attacks in this way is unacceptable. As noted in the previous chapter, he devotes much time and space to lamenting the thematic and aesthetic 'failures' of *Falling Man*, claiming that the events of September 11th are in 'every sense of the word, domesticated' ("Open" 134). Pankaj Mishra supports Gray's trenchant remarks, accusing DeLillo of depoliticising the attacks by 'retreating to the domestic life' (n.pag.). For these critics, successful fictional responses explore the intricacies of post-9/11 geopolitics and otherness, such as Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, discussed in the next chapter. Although these scholars reprimand DeLillo's artistic choices, they fail to seriously consider *why* DeLillo might have chosen to focus his gaze on 'domestic life'. Furthermore, such patriarchal critiques mistakenly assume that the domestic sphere is not political. This chapter asserts that DeLillo's engagement with everyday life in the domestic sphere is part of his counter-narrative and its project of suspension, of stilling life.

Art historian Norman Bryson explains that still life paintings portray 'the everyday world of routine and repetition, at a level of existence where events are [...] the small-scale, trivial, forgettable acts of bodily survival and self-maintenance' (14). Catherine Gander applies Bryson's theory of still life in her perceptive reading of *Point Omega*, and this chapter applies it to *Falling*

Man, where DeLillo works like a still life painter to look at the overlooked extraordinariness of quotidian, 'small-scale' or 'marginal stories', such as the story of Jack Glenn (Gander, "Art of Being" 131; Bryson 14; DeLillo, "Ruins" n.pag.). Lianne's close encounter with the "Falling Man", coupled with her search for the meaning of Jack's suicide, reveals the strangeness of the familiar, and the wonder and awe of the ordinary. Meditating on the mysteries of the ordinary, she wonders whether 'things were ordinary' or 'maybe nothing was' (67; 105). The experiential process of loss awakens DeLillo's characters to the wonder of ordinary phenomena, a wonder that is encapsulated in Justin's favourite fact: 'the sun is a star' (187). In his epic novel, *Underworld*, DeLillo still celebrates the extraordinariness of daily life in the domestic, noting that 'everyday things represent the most overlooked knowledge', while the term quotidian is considered a 'gorgeous Latinate word, an extraordinary word that suggests the depth and reach of the commonplace' (542). DeLillo continues his investigation of still life *in extremis* in *Point Omega*: 'it takes work, pious effort, to see what you are looking at', to see 'the depths of things so easy to miss in the shallow habit of seeing' (13). Arguably, critics like Gray have themselves suffered from a 'failure of the imagination'. Having missed the 'depths' that lie beneath *Falling Man*'s sparse prose and minimalist language, Gray's reading exemplifies the 'shallow' habits of seeing that DeLillo critiques.

Ronan McKinney reads *Falling Man*'s engagement with art through the lens of trauma, contending that 'art mediates trauma by constructively repeating it', a constructive repetition that leads Lianne to an epiphany: that vulnerability is not a 'threatened violation of her psychic or bodily integrity', but its 'fundamental condition' (111). This chapter shares McKinney's interest in *Falling Man*'s exploration of vulnerability and art but argues differently. The "Falling Man's" abject art is not a mediation or repetition of what McKinney has diagnosed as trauma; instead, it is an unmediated presentation of horror that elicits an unsettling mix of fascination, fear, repulsion, and awe. His abject performances resist assimilation into symbolic systems of representation and mediation, causing a collapse of conventional modes of comprehension. The "Falling Man" does not traumatise Lianne; his performance is not inassimilable but absorbed and subject to critical reflection. In her investigation of trauma and contemporary art, Jill Bennett consults the work of Gilles Deleuze and Benedict de Spinoza to consider how affect, emotions and embodied sensations generate a 'jolt' that 'thrust[s] us involuntarily into a mode of critical inquiry' (11). For Deleuze, 'more important than thought [...] is "what leads to thought" [...] impressions which force us to look, encounters which force us to interpret, expressions which force us to think' (95). For Lianne, the body and cognition are inseparable. Sustained engagement

with the 'jolting end' of the "Falling Man's" 'fall' triggers a complex sensory response that stimulates her senses, enabling her to imagine why her father killed himself (168). The "Falling Man's" art is, contrary to McKinney's claim, not a 'constructive repetition', therefore, but a work of creative destruction that enables Lianne to confront her unresolved grief (111).

In her scathing *New York Times* review, Michiko Kakutani contends that *Falling Man* is 'terribly disappointing', as it 'leaves us with two paltry images: one of a performance artist re-enacting the fall of bodies from the burning World Trade Center'; and another of a 'self-absorbed man, who came through the fire and ash of that day and decided to spend his foreseeable future playing stupid card games in the Nevada desert' (n.pag.). Frank Rich criticises DeLillo's characterisation of the "Falling Man", arguing that his suspended 'fall' masks the horror of the 'real thing' (n.pag.). Andrew O'Hagan argues similarly, claiming that 'intellectual escapism' — a 'turn from the real to the figural' — underpins the "Falling Man's" performance art and, ultimately, DeLillo's 'moral' 'failure to do justice to the event' (n.pag.). In both critiques, there is an underlying assumption that DeLillo is morally obliged to capture an elusive 'real thing', something which both critics fail to define. However, the "Falling Man's" abject performance art is an eruption of the Lacanian Real, that which 'resists symbolization absolutely' (Lacan 66). Arguing against O'Hagan and Rich, this chapter contends that the "Falling Man's" abject performances transcend the realm of 'figural' representation. DeLillo's abject artist presents his audience with unmediated access to the falling body and its revelation of the reality of mortality. Developing Anne Longmuir's contention that the "Falling Man" 'offers a strategy for re-imagining and re-presenting the attacks outside the boundaries established by the media and government', the "Falling Man" is read as the fulcrum of DeLillo's counter-narrative (49-50).

One of the main charges levelled against *Falling Man* is that it reinforces stereotypical views of the 'terrorist' Muslim Other. Hossein Piranajmuddin and Abbasali Borhan assert that the novel's depiction of terrorism 'has a/n (New-) Orientalist propensity to identify the signifier terrorism with the orient, or more precisely saying, with Islam as the signified' (120). For Linda Kauffman, however, Hammad is 'particularly memorable because he secretly harbours doubts about jihad. He wants marriage and children. He has an overwhelming desire simply to be "normal" — which he knows he must resist' ("Wake of Terror" 355). Aaron Mauro is less convinced, arguing that 'DeLillo offers Hammad's internal monologue as evidence of his confusion, but the terrorist rationale is so absurd that even Hammad struggles to believe it' (592). *Falling Man* does not equate Islam with terrorism or locate the source of all terror in the Muslim body; rather, it explores the 'primal terror' that exists 'before politics, before history and religion'

to broaden the scope of conceptualisations of terror ("Ruins" n.pag.). DeLillo does not detail the theology of Islam or Islamic fundamentalism; rather, he imagines the hijackers' interpretation of the 'sword verses of the Koran', an interpretation with which he does not necessarily concur (83). He is more concerned with the dangers of reductive patterns of perception and death-driven plots than with the particularities of Islamic fundamentalism. The novel implies that reductive reading practices and the subsequent creation of equally reductive narratives stir violent impulses and stimulate desires for exceptionalism and masculine potency, desires which also underpinned '9/11' discourse in the US. Hammad, DeLillo writes, 'had to fight against the need to be normal', and looks later at Amir, seeing 'a life too intense to last another minute, maybe because he never fucked a woman' (83; 176). Although these descriptions would appear to conform to Orientalist representations of the Muslim Other as a figure of dysfunctional sexuality, these traits also infuse DeLillo's portrayals of white Western terrorist figures in his earlier works.[46]

In *Libra* (1988), Lee Harvey Oswald is driven in part by a semi-Oedipal complex to seize control of the global narrative. DeLillo continues his exploration of plotters and terror in *Mao II* (1991) which follows *Libra*'s investigation of 'men in small rooms': novelists and terrorists, who 'can't get out and who have to organize their desperation and their loneliness' ("Outsider" 57). Emphasising the connection between reading, writing and terrorism, Bill Gray, the terrorist/novelist protagonist of *Mao II*, claims that 'there's a curious knot that binds novelists and terrorists' (41).[47] Two years later, in a 1993 interview originally published in *Paris Review*, DeLillo stated that 'military leaders, totalitarian leaders, terrorists, men dazed by power' had seized authorial control of the world narrative ("Art of Fiction" 101). He speaks again of terrorist narratives in "Ruins", writing that terrorism 'reduces the world to a plot' (n.pag.). Led by Mohammad Atta (known as Amir), the jihadists of *Falling Man* devise a plot that follows an equally reductive logic:

[46] In *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Jasbir Puar contends that the discourse of the War on Terror incorporated discourses of race and sexuality to position the US as a nation that no longer excluded the homosexual body from enjoying the rights and status of a 'good citizen' (4). The consolidation of homonormativity, Puar contends, garnered support for the nation's latest imperial exploits, while reinforcing orientalist perspectives of 'Muslim sexuality'. Contrary to the sexual tolerance of what was cast as a secular and enlightened America, the male 'terrorist' was associated with perversion, failed masculinity, polygamy, bestiality, and sexual repression (9; 14). See: Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (London and Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

[47] *Mao II* was not the first of DeLillo's novels to explore 'plots'. In his 1985 novel, *White Noise,* he writes: 'All plots tend to move deathward. This is the nature of plots. Political plots, terrorist plots, lovers' plots, narrative plots, plots that are part of children's games' (26). See: *White Noise* (New York: Penguin, 1985).

> Amir said simply there are no others. The others exist only to the degree that they fill the role we have designed for them. This is their function as others. Those who will die have no claim to their lives outside the useful fact of their dying. (176)

For Amir and his fellow plotters, the purpose of life is death. Convinced by Amir's brand of nihilism, Hammad asserts that 'there is no purpose, this is the purpose [...] shock and death' (177). For DeLillo, then, the figure of the 'terrorist' is defined not by a fundamentalist devotion to Islam, but by a capacity to imagine and realise a plot that results in shock and death. The capacity to shock is one that unites Hammad with an abject artist/terrorist who looks nothing like the Muslim Other: the "Falling Man". The latter, however, moves beyond the flawed logic of reductive plots to expand the horizons of the imagination. Although he pushes his audience members to the brink of death, he does not annihilate their existence. Instead, he stirs their senses, enabling them to find new ways of looking and living with the reality of death.

Lianne, albeit ashamedly, has swallowed the media and state's delineation of terrorism along race and religious lines. Martin, she feels, is not a threatening figure of terror because 'he was one of ours, she thought, and the thought chilled her, shamed her — one of ours, which meant godless, Western, white' (195). Martin Ridnour is the pseudonym of art dealer Ernst Hechinger, a member of a 1960s' German radical group that 'set off bombs' in response to 'the German state, the fascist state' (146). Martin, a dealer of art and terror, challenges popular perceptions of who, and what, constitutes a terrorist. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, he attempts to imagine (and explain) to his partner, Nina, the mindset of the Muslim 'terrorist' Other. She later informs Lianne, her daughter, that Martin 'thinks these people, these jihadists [...] have something in common with the radicals of the sixties and seventies', namely, 'they're all part of the same classical pattern. They have their theorists. They have their visions of brotherhood' (147). In his eyes, jihadists are not the sole embodiment of terrorism; rather, they are but another group of radicals who, ironically, follow conventions and 'classical' patterns. These men adapt theories of selected thinkers to write a reductive narrative of terror that promises brotherhood and belonging for the small-minded men that join together in 'small rooms'.

One thread of enquiry that connects studies of *Falling Man* is DeLillo's engagement with 'trauma' and whether the novel conforms to a prescribed ethical trauma aesthetic. Although Alan Marshall argues that *Falling Man* is poised on the moment 'when the subject begins to say goodbye to grief', at times he teeters on the edge of conflating grief and trauma, writing that '*Falling Man* explores the inevitability of forgetting as a vital part of the recovery from trauma' (628; 631). Whilst he contends that grief in the novel is 'organized around an exceptional

historical event' — not 'a man's suicide' — this chapter argues precisely the opposite (Marshall 635). Anthony Lack reiterates the rhetoric of exceptionalism, reading *Falling Man* as a response to a 'traumatic event erupted from out of the blue, global in scope, with a magnitude that reverberates through time and history' (2). Sonia Baelo-Allué analyses 'the literary techniques and means of representation used in the novel to reflect the effects of traumatic memory', arguing that DeLillo, 'despite [his] previous interest in cultural issues', 'chose to write a 9/11 psychic — rather than cultural — trauma novel' (63). David Brauner asserts that the novel offers a 'double vision', that is, a 'doubling of perception as a response to trauma', focusing on the reparation of a ruptured domestic sphere (75). However, as this reading argues, DeLillo eschews the narrative resolution and closure that is symptomatic of working through 'trauma'. Hamza Karam Ally supports trauma readings, arguing that DeLillo intended 'to write a 9/11 novel that was muted, almost sullenly silent, with the event itself already receding into a memory too traumatic to understand or even describe' (357). The novel's 'muted' quality is not symptomatic of 'trauma' or an attempt on DeLillo's part to 'transmit' trauma through a conventional 'ethical' aesthetic.[48] Refusing to conform to 'frames of practised response', the novel theorises an art form that metaphorically terrorises its audience by breaking with convention and forwarding a radical aesthetic (DeLillo, "Ruins" n.pag.). Like the eponymous performance artist, DeLillo triggers a crisis in frameworks of comprehension to spark the reader's imagination to alter perception. Versluys considers this an aesthetic failure. Following Cathy Caruth's assertion that traumatic memory must be integrated into pre-existent narrative schemes to facilitate closure, he criticises *Falling Man* for its failure to 'restore the broken link', to repair the alleged trauma of '9/11' (4). However, DeLillo does not seek to restore, but to break away from, pre-determined (political) narratives of '9/11' trauma. Arguably, the nation, especially the state and media, did not experience 'trauma'; rather, they engaged in processes of selective remembering, labouring under the pretext of reconsolidating the shattered foundations of national identity. For the purposes of this chapter, I wish to focus briefly on one image from the '9/11' archive that was selectively forgotten in the name of national recovery from 'trauma': the notorious photograph of Richard Drew's "Falling Man".

On the morning of September 11th, Drew captured the sight of a man 'falling' from the North Tower of the World Trade Center. Drew's photograph, titled "Falling Man", was published on the cover of the *New York Times* on 12th September, 2001 much to the outrage of

[48] As noted in Chapter One, proponents of trauma theory make the implausible (and impossible) claim that the trauma aesthetic — characterised by formulaic postmodernist literary techniques, such as non-linear chronologies, repetition, and shifts in narrative voice — enables the reader to experience trauma.

readers. Unsurprisingly, other media outlets in the US did not reprint Drew's image or similar images of falling bodies. Despite attempts to supress the images, they reappeared in various forms, often as a form of resistance to political censorship in the aftermath of the attacks. The image inspired several works of visual art, all of which were met with public consternation. Eric Fischl's sculpture of a nude woman in free fall, titled "Tumbling Woman", was exhibited in September 2002 at the Rockefeller Center in New York. In a matter of days, the statue was covered and eventually removed on 18th September following a public outcry. Sharon Paz's installation, "Falling: Window Project", was exhibited at the Jamaica Center for Arts in Queens to mark the first anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. It consisted of several silhouettes, all of which depicted people free-falling from different altitudes. Convinced that 'the media concentrated in using the building of nationalism for memory and left the human side out of the event', Paz decided to 'explore the moment of falling to bring the psychological human side of the event, the moment between life and death' into public focus (n.pag.). Her installation was not well-received, however, which led to its early removal. The work of Kerry Skarbakka bears the most striking resemblance to the performance art of DeLillo's "Falling Man". Skarbakka staged his most controversial performance in 2005, when he performed thirty 'falls' from the rooftop of Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art. Faced with a public backlash, Skarbakka explained that he 'wanted to be able to respond intelligently, conceptually, responsibly to what was going on' (qtd. in Marlan n.pag.). The *New York Daily News* thought very little of Skarbakka's 'intelligent' response and advised its readership to 'KICK HIM IN THE ARTS' (qtd. in Camper n.pag.; emphasis in original). DeLillo's "Falling Man" receives an equally inflammatory response from the media, with one newspaper headline screaming: 'MAYOR SAYS FALL MAN MORONIC' (222; emphasis in original). New York City's then mayor, Michael Bloomberg, was just as incensed as DeLillo's fictional mayor, slamming Skarbakka for his 'nauseatingly offensive' performance (Skarbakka n.pag.). Paz, in response to similar charges, explained: 'I didn't mean in any way for it to be offensive or insensitive, people react different, this was my way to confront the event. I believe fear will not disappear if you will close your eyes' (n.pag.). The public largely disagreed, choosing to turn away from images of falling bodies and the artworks they inspired. Instead, the eyes of the nation turned toward 'tolerable' images: most notably, images of New York City firefighters that signalled the unwavering resilience of the American spirit; and the ruins of the Twin Towers, which testified to the wounds that the brave yet victimised America had been forced to bear (Lurie 50). Removing images of falling bodies and related artworks from the public gaze was not necessarily a benevolent attempt to safeguard the public from trauma. Rather, it was symptomatic of a wilful cultural (and politically advantageous) amnesia: a willingness to

forget memories of national fragility and insecurity to protect hegemonic ideals of US invulnerability and relentless resilience. DeLillo's "Falling Man" is a living reminder of mortality. Contrary to sanctioned cultural commemorations of the attacks, his performances refuse the 'erasure of non-representative traumatised bodies' (Cvek 49). Enacting man's primal fear of falling, his abject body provides an affective and sensory basis for challenging Caruth's poststructuralist conceptualisation of trauma. As *Falling Man* has been read predominantly through the lens of trauma theory, a flawed critical paradigm, it is necessary to adopt a new methodological approach. Responding to this need, this chapter draws on Kristeva's theorisation of the abject to provide a new critical response to DeLillo's counter-narrative.

2. The Abject

In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva defines the abject as a 'jettisoned object' that is 'radically excluded' from the symbolic order, the social network of linguistic communication, 'draw[ing] [the subject] toward the place where meaning collapses' (2). The meaning assigned to the events of September 11th, as propagated by the Bush administration, was determined by pre-existing interpretive frameworks of good and evil. The "Falling Man" compels his audience to encounter, or temporarily inhabit, the space at the limits of understanding. Suspended in mid-air, he occupies a liminal space and time: although he appears to jump to certain death, he is not yet dead. His performance makes visible the moment of imminent death, the experience of which usually occurs only once and cannot be recorded. The "Falling Man" performs the experience of near-death, making the ostensibly unimaginable imaginable. Kristeva asserts that the abject confronts the individual with the insistent materiality of death. She makes a clear distinction between knowledge of death and the meaning of death, both of which can emerge from the symbolic order, and the experience of confrontation with the materiality of death:

> The corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall), that which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance. A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not signify death. In the presence of signified death—a flat encephalograph, for instance—I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. (3)

The "Falling Man" 'violently' upsets his unsuspecting audience because he proves that art is presence rather than mere representation: he is not an image, but the physical embodiment of a

body that has 'irremediably come a cropper'. His performance transgresses social as well as corporeal borders: it brings back into public focus a body that had been banned from sanctioned responses to the events. Whilst Kristeva asserts that the abject must be thrust aside to live, DeLillo suggests that engagement with the abject is integral to life. The "Falling Man" compels his audience to engage with uncanniness, 'the form of something strange and unfamiliar unexpectedly arising in a familiar context' (Royle 1). To experience something as uncanny is to engage with something unfamiliar which is, at the same time, familiar. The "Falling Man" is an uncanny double of the 9/11 'jumpers', but he also confronts his audience with another familiar yet unfamiliar phenomenon: the inevitable yet unknowable experience of death. Although death is a fact of life and thus familiar, the embodied experience of death is unfamiliar to the living subject. Although the "Falling Man" presents his audience members with the inevitability of their own deaths, he also reminds them that this fate has not yet befallen them. Thus, to engage with the abject body and to discard it simultaneously is to recognise not only the inevitability of one's own death, but also the reality that one is still very much alive, and to live more fully as a result. Surviving a perilously close encounter with death elicits an exhilarating mix of fear and 'awe', stimulating Lianne's 'extremely strange' desire for sexual 'contact' with her estranged husband (168; 35). For Kristeva, the subject responds to the abject not only with pre-lingual 'spasms and vomiting' and 'repugnance', but also with 'joy' (2; 9). This ambiguous feeling is symptomatic of *jouissance*, a feeling that explains why 'victims of the abject are its fascinated victims—if not its submissive and willing ones' (Kristeva 9). This somewhat paradoxical statement implies that the subject is repeatedly drawn to the abject despite the revulsion it elicits. If the unsuspecting audience members are 'victims', then the "Falling Man" is a terroriser of sorts. Contrary to 'frames of practised response', however, he does not draw clear-cut lines between 'terrorist' and 'victim' but blurs them through the affective response his art produces (DeLillo, "Ruins" n.pag.).

In his exploration of trauma and the abject, Hal Foster reads abject art in relation to a shift in conceptualisations of the Real during the 1980s and 1990s: 'from the Real understood as an effect of representation to the Real understood as an event of trauma' ("Obscene" 107). For Lacan, the Real is 'impossible' as it 'resists symbolization absolutely' (66). The Real precedes the subject's separation from the maternal body and entrance into the symbolic order. As the abject dismantles the border between self and (m)other, it is associated with the eruption of the Real. For Foster, the abject artist compels his audience to experience the Real not as an effect but as 'an event of trauma' ("Obscene" 107). Although they are related, trauma and the abject are not

synonymous. Rather, trauma is one of many possible responses to abject material: it is symptomatic of the subject's confrontation with the abject, including abject art. While a traumatic experience is a 'missed encounter with the Real', an encounter with the abject makes present the otherwise absent presence of the Real (Foster, *Return* 132). Abject artists do not represent the Real but, rather, they compel their audiences to feel the presence of the Real, which is, for some, a traumatic experience. For *Falling Man*'s Lianne, however, the eruption of the Real is an experience of terror, rapture, and communion.

Caruth suggests that trauma is an unassimilable 'history that literally *has no place*, neither in the past, in which it was not fully experienced, nor in the present' (*Trauma: Explorations* 153; emphasis in original). Although the "Falling Man's" performance is not represented in photographs, films, or language, it does have a place: it exists as a living, embodied memory 'absorbed' and 'recorded' within the flesh of Lianne (223). Bennett refers to embodied memory as 'sense memory', a form of memory that is comparable to theorisations of 'traumatic' memory. She contrasts sense memory with 'common memory', representational memories that are 'connected with the thinking process and with words [...] so that they can be communicated to, and readily understood by, a general audience' (Bennett 25). In *Falling Man*, 'sense memory' and 'common memory' are not opposites. Embodied memory is neither unspeakable nor lodged in the unconscious, but coterminous with conscious thought and cognition. Lianne feels the falling body cut deep beneath the permeable 'photosensitive surface' of her skin, probing unsutured wounds and rousing her pervasive fear of humanity's ephemerality (223). The "Falling Man's" performance invokes the Real as its affective power pierces her skin, violating the boundary that distinguishes self from other. Without the differentiating border between subject and object, viewer and artist, Lianne is faced with the threat of a return to the Real, a return to a state of wholeness, where the illusion of autonomous subjectivity is dispelled. The "Falling Man" thus bears the hallmark of what DeLillo calls a 'true terrorist', someone who 'infiltrates and alters consciousness', as his abject art leaves an indelible mark on Lianne's embodied consciousness ("Dangerous" 84).

DeLillo's literary practice is underpinned by a politics of resistance. In a 1993 interview, he states, 'we need the writer in opposition, the novelist who writes against power, who writes against the corporation or the state or the whole apparatus of assimilation' ("Art of Fiction" 97). DeLillo's position in 1993 anticipated his response to the official narrative of '9/11'. The abject artist that was urgently needed in 1993, a time when literature was 'too ready to be neutralised, to be incorporated into the ambient noise', was also needed in the post-9/11 era, a

historical scene also replete with crisis (DeLillo, "Art of Fiction" 96). Foster describes America's post-9/11 reactionary jingoism as 'a new order of totalitarian kitsch' that has come to 'pervade this society' (*Bad* 72). He contends that academics, having been bullied by 'conservative commentators', 'no longer stress the importance of critical thinking for an engaged citizenry [...] and critical debate' (Foster, *Bad* 115). Foster was not the only critic to voice these concerns: Judith Butler stated that the US suffered from intellectual paralysis in the years that immediately followed the 9/11 attacks (*Precarious* 8). This paralysis was characterised by a complacent acquiescence to the deliberate censorship of 'taboo' subjects, images, and totalising categories of identity. Whilst twentieth-century artists, such as Robert Gober and Mike Kelly, sought to present the Real, several post-9/11 artists felt the need to neutralise the abject. Charlie Lee-Potter notes that 'misleading anxiety about being disruptive extended to removing pre-2001 images of the Twin Towers from films' (86). Like the images of falling bodies, the Twin Towers became abject, existing as deletions from the space they had once inhabited.

DeLillo's *Falling Man* embraces the abject in order to disturb official narratives of trauma and resilience and social frames of reference. The "Falling Man's" performance, which reveals 'what is irrational in the great schemes of being', throws the logic and meaning of '9/11' narratives into crisis (163). Waging a global War on Terror, the Bush administration attempted to protect the nation's sovereign position and conceal its constitutive fragility. As cultural theorist Susan Buck-Morss claims, '[w]hat disappeared on September 11 was the apparent invulnerability, not only of US territory, but of US, and, indeed, Western hegemony' (22). The desire to restore the nation's lost (imagined) invulnerability partly explains why Drew's "Falling Man" photograph was banned from public view. DeLillo's "Falling Man," however, resists the US government's political imperative to conceal 'how a great power can be vulnerable', and the market apparatus that commodifies art (DeLillo, *Falling* 46). Whereas Skarbakka's 'falls' are photographed, DeLillo's performance artist is 'resistant to the photographic image and the whole market apparatus of mediazation that allows a single performance, a fall, to become a visual commodity bought and sold on the art market' (Zuber 208-09). His powerful abject art exerts the power of horror, a counter-hegemonic power that shatters the symbolic 'reality' of post-9/11 America. Dispelling grandiose illusions of American invincibility and moral superiority, he makes the nation's precariousness palpably Real. Whilst trauma theory implicitly supports the sanctioned interpretation (and appropriation) of the attacks as a national 'trauma', DeLillo's theorisation of the abject troubles its main tenets. Exploring abject aesthetics, DeLillo writes a counter-narrative

to framings of American exceptionalism and the victory culture that accompanied the (political) imperatives to triumph over grief and perform resilience on the global stage.

Several cultural theorists have since refined Kristeva's understanding of the abject.[49] Elizabeth Grosz and Mary Douglas theorise bodily waste as borderline materials that are 'disruptive of the solidity of things' and 'polluting fluids' (Grosz 195; Douglas 125). Affect theorist Teresa Brennan contends that the abject must be expunged because it triggers 'bad' affects and makes the subject 'miserable' (25). *Falling Man*'s abject artist does not make Lianne 'miserable', however, but enlightened. Butler, in contrast to Grosz and Douglas, focuses not on the leaky abject body, but on the social abject, while Georges Bataille focuses more specifically on the socio-political dimensions of the abject than the psychoanalytical and aesthetic. Although the police arrest the "Falling Man" for his disturbance of social order, DeLillo is more preoccupied with the affective impact of the abject body than social abjection. Butler argues that the materiality of the abject body is 'understood not to matter', but in *Falling Man* the materiality of the abject body is a source of power and resistance (Butler, "How Bodies Come to Matter" 281). Whilst Butler contends that the abject is 'not yet made real', the "Falling Man" brings the 'not yet made real' *into* the sphere of the Real (Butler, "How Bodies Come to Matter" 281). Concurring with popular conceptualisations of '9/11' as 'movie-like: so unreal or surreal', Lianne claims that post-9/11 reality is '*a movie*' (Bolton 173; DeLillo, *Falling* 104; emphasis in original). However, the "Falling Man's" abject art, which is accompanied by the eruption of the Real, heightens Lianne's awareness of the reality of death and man's fall into abjection. DeLillo, like Kristeva, focuses on the subject's pre-lingual responses to the abject, but departs from her theory to reposition the abject as an empowering force for perceptual, political, and potentially ethical change. Kristeva

[49] Critical scholarship on the abject and abject aesthetics proliferated in the 1990s, following the exhibition of several important artworks: *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art,* which debuted at the Whitney Museum in 1993; *Rites of Passage: Art for the End of a Century* (the Tate, London, 1995); and *L'informe: Mode d'emploi* (*Formless: A User's Guide*) at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, 1996. These exhibitions emphasised the porousness and uncontrollability of the body through presentations of its dislocation, dismemberment and evisceration. Rachel Herz's *That's Disgusting: Unravelling the Mysteries of Repulsion* (2012) provides an in-depth analysis of embodied responses to the abject. In a similar vein, Bettina Papenburg and Marta Zarzycka's *Carnal Aesthetics: Transgressive Imagery and Feminist Politics* (2012) explores bodily transgression in contemporary art and offers nuanced interpretations of 'taboo' art and its sensorial affect. Lauren DeLand's "Live Fast, Die Young, Leave a Useful Corpse" (2014) and Karen Gonzalez Rice's "'No Pictures': Blind Date and Abject Masculinity" (2014) investigate mortality and abject body art. These studies focus on abject visual art from the twentieth century, neglecting notable twenty-first-century contributions from a broad spectrum of disciplines. Limiting discussion to abject art and the body, these critics overlook the larger socio-political, ethical, and ontological implications of the aesthetics of abjection. These overlooked areas, however, are the focus of *Falling Man*, which intimates that an encounter with the (counter-cultural) abject body is a complex sensory experience that offers enlightenment. Georges Bataille discusses social disenfranchisement in terms of the dynamics of abjection and exclusion. See: Georges Bataille, "Abjection and Miserable Forms" in *More and Less*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, trans. Yvonne Shafir (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1993). 8-13.

emphasises the abject qualities of bodily fluids, particularly those of the maternal body, which ooze from bodily borders. In *Falling Man*, however, the abject body is not a leaky one; rather, its affective power seeps into the pores of 'fascinated victims' (Kristeva 9). While Kristeva theorises processes of abjection as rituals that repair broken borders to restore cohesion and wholeness, DeLillo ruptures boundaries to facilitate communion between 'self' and 'other', 'us and them', and the living and the dead. For Kristeva, religious rituals are processes of abjection that protect the sacred and pure sphere of the symbolic from the defilement, sin, and impurity of the abject: 'As abjection—So the Sacred [...] the function of these religious rituals is to ward off the subject's fear of his very own identity sinking irretrievably into the mother [...] risking the loss not of a part (castration) but of the totality of his living being' (64). Yet, in *Falling Man* an encounter with the abject is an encounter with the dead and the divine. In his analysis of *White Noise*, *Mao II*, and *Underworld*, Mark Eaton argues that DeLillo imbues his fictional worlds with radiance and transcendence to reveal the 'uncanny interpenetration of the sacred and profane in contemporary culture', which also speaks to *Falling Man*, where the marginal is mysterious and the abject is sacred (32). By virtue of the affective power and physical presence of the "Falling Man's" abject body, Lianne 'contacts' her father and enters into an elevated plane of existence (35). Contrary to Kristeva's belief that the abject opposes the sacred, DeLillo indicates that the "Falling Man's" abject performances are, for Lianne, sacred rituals, while abject human ruins are relics. *Falling Man* nuances Kristeva's theory, therefore, to create a counter-narrative to dominant '9/11' discourse.

Although there have been several critical studies of *Falling Man*, there has not yet been a detailed study of the novel's exploration of the abject. Kate Mason has identified Keith as an abject body, but her argument lacks critical close readings and overlooks the abject body of the "Falling Man". There has, however, been a renewed interest in DeLillo's representation of bodies in his more recent work. *Falling Man* is not the first of DeLillo's forays into performance art: in his 2001 novel, *The Body Artist*, the eponymous artist, Lauren Hartke, expresses grief through performance art. As her name suggests, art is at the centre of her embodied being. Jacqueline Zubeck, in her perceptive comparative analysis of *The Body Artist* and *Falling Man*, persuasively argues that Lauren and the "Falling Man" alter 'their own flesh in order to communicate to small, live audiences the nature of grief and the cellular impact of trauma—by transforming *themselves* into art' (109; emphasis in original).[50] Rebecca Harding reads *The Body*

[50] For Laura DiPrete, DeLillo, in *The Body Artist*, 'confers on corporeality a central role in his tale of loss and recovery' (501). In *Falling Man*, corporeality is more central to loss than recovery, as the abject artist primarily

Artist alongside *Mao II*, drawing on Kristeva's theory of abjection to explore DeLillo's representation of 'unstable bodies' (65). In the latter, Bill Gray incorporates his abject body into his textual corpus, concluding that his 'true biography' will be a 'chronicle of gas pains and skipped heartbeats' moaning 'solemnly, the same grave sound that welled in his gut' (136). In *Mao II*, as in *Falling Man*, abject waste, what is ostensibly 'opposed to I', is not only art, but a reflection of the human subject (Kristeva 1).

Falling Man marks the convergence of DeLillo's explorations of art and terror in *White Noise*, *Libra, Mao II*, *Underworld*, and *The Body Artist.* In *White Noise* (1985), DeLillo associates the 'Law of Ruins' with the Nazi architect Albert Speer, who wanted to 'build structures that would decay gloriously, impressively, like Roman ruins' (257). Aaron DeRosa contends that *White Noise* 'ties architectural production to waste, and specifically a waste product that is deeply nationalistic in its decay' ("Law of Ruins" 46). In *Falling Man*, ruins are also national symbols that signal the ruin of American exceptionalism and the ruin of a future bathed in the utopian glow of cyber capital. Twelve years after *White Noise*, DeLillo published *Underworld*, his most extensive exploration of waste and art. Several critics, including Ruth Heyler, Allan-Lloyd Smith, and Calvin Thomas, have discussed the abject in relation to the novel's theorisation of the regenerative potential of waste.[51] Nick Shay, the novel's protagonist, is a waste-manager who, like *Falling Man*'s Keith, flees from New York to a desert (Phoenix) to bury the contents of his own underworld, his subconscious mind. Nick is haunted by 'the Fall of 1951', which marked the end of America's post-war confidence in its exclusive possession of nuclear arms. Having already fallen in 1951, the fall of 2001 was not the first time America lost its fabled innocence, contrary to what critics such as Gray have claimed. As Jesse Kavadlo notes in his analysis of *Underworld*, 'the world after the fall, after the exile from paradise' is in 'a permanent state of sin awaiting redemption' (124). During his time in the desert, Nick is joined by Klara, who unearths waste (discarded war planes) to create art. *Falling Man* shares *Underworld*'s belief in the art of abject waste and ruin: falling bodies inspire the "Falling Man's" performance art; and the rubble, where the narrative of the terrorists ended, is where DeLillo's counter-narrative

probes, rather than heals, open wounds. See: Laura DiPrete, "Don DeLillo's *The Body Artist:* Performing the Body, Narrating Trauma," *Contemporary Literature* 47.3 (2005): 483-510.

[51] See: Ruth Heyler, "'Refuse heaped many stories high': DeLillo, Dirt, and Disorder," *Modern Fiction Studies* 45.4 (Winter 1999): 987-1006; Allan Lloyd-Smith, "Abjection/abjectivism," *European Journal of American Culture* 24.3 (2005): 191-203; Calvin Thomas, "Art is on the Way: From the Abject Opening of *Underworld* to the Shitty Ending of *Oblivion*" in *Abject Visions: Powers of Horror in Art and Visual Culture*, eds. Rina Arya and Nicholas Chare (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016) 160-88.

begins. DeLillo would later continue to pursue themes of grief, abjection, and terror in *Point Omega* and *Zero K* (2016). *Point Omega* follows film-maker Jim Finley's journey into the desert, where he attempts to produce a documentary about Richard Elster, a former US government advisor with a persistent phlegmy cough, while *Zero K* explores the creation of deathless still lives in the 'Convergence', a cryonic suspension facility burrowed beneath the sands of a desert. Together, these themes form connective tissue across DeLillo's literary corpus, despite stylistic differences. Re-using and re-creating abject motifs in his novels, DeLillo therefore engages in artistic recycling of his own. For him, and his fictional artists, waste and rubble are creative fodder from which new creations emerge.

3. Abject Artists and Terrorists

DeLillo has explored the relationship between art and terror throughout his oeuvre. It has been widely noted that DeLillo kept two files on his writing table: one labelled 'Art', and another labelled 'Terror' ("Not Trying to Manipulate Reality" n.pag.). Commenting on the relationship between terror and art, Bill Gray states: 'Years ago I used to think it was possible for a novelist to alter the inner life of the culture. Now bomb-makers and gunmen have taken that territory. They make raids on human consciousness' (41). Gray's assertion speaks to the events of September 11th, which left Arthur Bradley and Andrew Tate wondering 'to what extent might the terrorist be a kind of novelist?' (44). The '9/11' plotters seized the world narrative when they exhibited a work of visually artistic terrorism on the global stage. If terrorists have hijacked the profession, then how can artists respond? *Falling Man* theorises a style of abject art that functions as a form of terrorism: art with the capacity to 'alter' and resist the *modus operandi* that regulates the symbolic order. DeLillo's abject artist, the "Falling Man", embodies this abject art form. In one of the novel's many ekphrastic passages, DeLillo describes how 'the jolting end of the fall left [the "Falling Man"] upside-down' with his 'arms at his sides, one leg bent at the knee' (168). The performance artist builds a three-dimensional model of Drew's visually striking "Falling Man", which features a man appearing to slice through both towers, the North Tower to the left and the South Tower to the right (see fig. 1).

Fig. 1. The "Falling Man" photograph taken by Associated Press photographer Richard Drew at 9:41:15 a.m., on September 11th, 2001.

This photograph and other images of falling bodies were, according to Thomas Junod, '"taboo"— the only images from which Americans were proud to avert their eyes' ("Part II" n.pag.). The censorship of the image crept into the Coroner's Office, where Junod was told that '*nobody* jumped' (Junod, "Falling Man" n.pag.; emphasis in original). The publication of the image was considered a morally questionable act and a voyeuristic intrusion of one man's personal, private decision to choose death by suicide rather than by asphyxiation. The alleged immorality of its publication, however, is somewhat ironic as the desire to negate Drew's image implies a desire to negate the deaths of the 9/11 'jumpers'. DeLillo's "Falling Man" exploits Drew's image for positive and, arguably, ethical ends by rescuing — rather than repressing — the memory of the 'fallen' from oblivion. As his headfirst falls are neither 'announced in advance' nor 'designed to be recorded by a photographer', they are especially shocking (DeLillo, *Falling* 220). It is not a question of whether this 'notorious figure' will attack, so to speak, but when (219). When he does, he figuratively holds his unwitting audience captive in a living diorama where they must witness 'those stark moments in the burning towers when people fell or were forced to jump' (33). Arrested in mid-air, he is positioned on 'the border of life and death' where 'death infect[s] life', as he awaits his impending demise (Kristeva 4). Forcing his audience to endure the unmitigated shock of a raw confrontation with the falling body, 'without makeup or masks', he commits an act of 'primal terror' (Kristeva 3; DeLillo, "Ruins" n.pag.). There is, however, one

major difference between him and the '9/11' terrorists: whilst the latter were driven by the teleological forward momentum of a deathward plot, the "Falling Man" suspends time and refuses to use reductive rationale to justify death. The affective impact of his tabooed 'fall' assaults the senses to alter consciousness, without ending in rubble.

The jolt of the "Falling Man's" sudden jump quickly turns into a moment of stillness, during which he is suspended between life and death. Lianne recalls the 'blankness' of his face, a 'kind of lost gaze' (167). Gazing aimlessly into the abyss, he is, in Kristevean terms, 'at the border of [his] condition as a living being' (3). His abject body, in turn, pushes Lianne's embodied subjectivity to its limits. During his performance, she undergoes a figurative blood transfusion with him: 'He remained motionless, with the train still running in a blur in her mind and the echoing deluge of sound falling about him, blood rushing to his head, away from hers' (168). This exchange conveys the extent to which the "Falling Man's" art pierces Lianne and transgresses the boundaries that safeguard her from the horror he presents. The abject blood motif recurs later in the novel when the fictional mastermind of the 9/11 attacks instructs his jihadist followers to '[b]ecome each other's running blood' (83). Whilst the '9/11' hijackers are represented as blood brothers, Lianne and the "Falling Man" temporarily 'become each other's running blood' (83). The abject artist is thus positioned as a figure of terror that draws blood from his audience. Through the affective power of his artistic assault, he and his 'victims' figuratively become one.

Lianne later refers to the man in Drew's "Falling Man" photograph as 'a falling angel', a transcendent being, descended from an elevated plane of existence (222). The phrase 'falling angel' invokes another infamous 'fallen angel': Satan. According to the Judaeo-Christian story of the fall of man, Satan was cast down from Heaven into the fires of Hell because he successfully tempted God's human creation to taste the forbidden fruit. Expelled from Heaven, Satan is possibly one of the oldest and most infamous figures of abjection. For Lianne, the "Falling Man" is not yet a 'fallen angel' who has descended into the underworld, but free 'fall*ing*' toward Earth. The implied connection between Satan and the "Falling Man" is apt, as the satanic artist/terrorist tempts his audience to feel the illicit exhilaration of witnessing the forbidden "Falling Man" image come to life. Moreover, he flouts social propriety and standards of 'acceptable' behaviour: Lianne learns he has been arrested for 'obstructing vehicular traffic and creating a hazardous or physically offensive condition' (223). During his college years he assaulted another actor, 'seemingly trying to rip the man's tongue out of his mouth during what was supposed to be a structured improvisation' (223). Following his performances in New York,

he is demonised by the mainstream media which labels him a 'Heartless Exhibitionist' (220). As such, DeLillo paints a portrait of an artist possessed by an anarchist or Satanic spirit. Lianne, however, does not exorcise this spirit, but secretly revels in the horrific beauty of his living recreation of a 'forbidden image' (Duvall 167). Although his hellish 'fall' 'burns a hole in her heart and mind', she partakes somewhat in his project of terror. She senses the 'awful openness' of his performance but does 'not think of turning and leaving', feeling 'compelled' and 'helpless' (164; 167). Clearly keen to emphasise her unreadiness to turn away, DeLillo writes: 'She did not think of walking away. He was right above her but she wasn't watching and wasn't walking away [...] She watched him [...] She did not think of turning and leaving' (163; 164). She is not traumatised but captivated by the "Falling Man" and the *jouissance* his performance elicits, noting that his 'beauty was horrific' (222). Immanuel Kant conceptualises beauty in terms of pleasure, stating that the 'only reason why an object is called beautiful is that its representation immediately produces a peculiar pleasure in the subject' (6). The abject performance art of DeLillo's "Falling Man" seduces and stimulates a similar feeling of uncanny, if not guilty, pleasure. As the abject theoretically precedes the development of language and conceptual meaning, it moves beyond representation, producing an unmediated feeling of horrific beauty that conflicts with the moralising censure and aversion to images of falling bodies. The "Falling Man's" 'fall' from grace is thus, paradoxically, a moment of grace and beauty.

Theorising the aestheticism of terror, DeLillo's counter-narrative engages with one of the most controversial areas of '9/11' discourse: the hypothesis that the attacks were an artistic spectacle. Damien Hirst was heavily criticised for his assertion that the 'thing about 9/11 is that it's kind of an artwork in its own right. It was wicked, but it was devised in this way for this kind of impact. It was devised visually' (n.pag.). His provocative and morally questionable view was shared by Karlheinz Stockhausen, who described the attacks as 'the greatest work of art ever', in the sense that artists 'try to go beyond the limits of what is feasible and conceivable' (qtd. in Schechner 73). For Hirst and Stockhausen, the visual artistry of the attack lies in its leap from security and the mundane. Similarly, Jonathan Franzen suspects that viewers might have felt an 'admiration for an attack so brilliantly conceived and so flawlessly executed or, worst of all, an awed appreciation of the visual spectacle it produced' (n.pag.). Franzen refers to the '9/11' terrorists as 'death artists', who were 'rejoicing over the terrible beauty of the towers' collapse' (n.pag.). Indeed, on the blue and bright September morning, a set of compositional elements came together in concert, with fireballs falling from the sky and smoke rising in the wind, while form shattered into formlessness. The phrase 'terrible beauty' refers both to the cataclysmic

violence and gripping spectacle of the attack, which is 'beautiful', according to Franzen, in spite of its vicious intent.[52] The 'wickedness' of the assault is inherent to its 'terrible beauty', as well as its abject aesthetic. For Kristeva, 'suicidal crime flaunts its disrespect for the law', and, as such, part of the abject nature of the 9/11 attacks pertains to the flagrant violation of the laws of both the state and the symbolic order (4). The collapse of the phallocentric Twin Towers triggered the collapse of the Law of the Father, the rule of the symbolic order and signification, which tore apart the chain of cause and effect. Beyond the 'scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable', the abject attacks leave Keith wondering 'what has happened to the meanings of things [...] simple words lost in the falling ash' (Kristeva 1; DeLillo 103). The artistic assaults perpetrated by the "Falling Man" and the plotters of the 9/11 attacks are horrific yet terribly beautiful therefore because they are abject: they are sheer unmediated experiences of terror.

The "Falling Man" shatters symbolic 'reality' as he publicly performs in the flesh the 'fall' captured in Drew's censored photograph, without frame or contextualisation. In *Falling Man,* the eruption of the Real is not traumatic but libidinally alluring and beautiful. Several cultural theorists have made similar observations in relation to the spectacular fall of the Twin Towers. Slavoj Žižek claimed that America 'got what it fantasised about on 9/11' as the Real erupted and 'shattered our reality' (16). Although such a large-scale visual spectacle of terrorism had never before been witnessed, it had been imagined.[53] In Žižek's view, the 9/11 attackers fulfilled

[52] Jonathan Franzen borrows these words from William Butler Yeats' poem "Easter 1916", a tribute to the rebels of the Easter Rising of 1916, which contains the refrain: 'a terrible beauty is born'. Yeats is troubled by the violence and subsequent execution of the rebels (some of whom were poets and writers he knew personally), while admiring their unwavering determination. Some tenuous connections can be made between the rebels in Yeats' poem and DeLillo's titular Falling Man, despite the differences in time, space, and political context. The Irish rebels exhibited an anarchist spirit and desire to overthrow the ruling order, while DeLillo's "Falling Man" exercises his anarchist spirit through his rebellion against censorship laws and violation of the socio-symbolic order. Although the Irish rebels were 'rising' and the "Falling Man" falling, both partake in a cycle of life and death: the "Falling Man" stages a rising of sorts as he unearths an image buried in history and, for Lianne, stages an uncanny resurrection of her father. The rebels, though 'rising', were also 'falling' as they were eventually executed. The destructive aftermath, however, inspired in the Irish a conviction to end British rule. Both creative destructions, the respective 'rising' and 'falling' of the Irish revolutionaries/martyrs and the revolutionary artist (who later dies by his own hand), radiate a 'terrible beauty' that arrests and alarms the public while disupting the quotidian order, if not the hegemonic order. See: William Butler Yeats, "*Easter 1916*" *and Other Poems* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1997).

[53] In the prescient novel *Here is New York* (1949), E.B. White writes: 'The city, for the first time in its long history, is destructible. A single flight of planes no bigger than a wedge of geese can quickly end this island fantasy, burn the towers, crumble the bridges [...] cremate the millions' (54). White rightly notes the vulnerability that the increasing colonisation of the sky brought about from 1930s onwards, but his observation, however, is not the same as Žižek's observation that America had *fantasised* this destruction, had *willed* it, even. See: E.B. White, *Here is New York* (1949; New York: The Little Bookroom, 2011).

America's desire to witness a cinematic catastrophe without the protection of the screen. In the same vein as Žižek, Jean Baudrillard writes:

> The fact that we have dreamt of this event, that everyone without exception has dreamt of it — because no one can avoid dreaming of the destruction of any power that has become hegemonic to this degree — is unacceptable to the Western moral conscience [...] At a pinch, we can say that they *did* it, but we *wished for* it. (5; emphasis in original)

Baudrillard's assertion is echoed by *Falling Man*'s Martin, who provocatively states, 'that's why you built the towers, isn't it? Weren't the towers built as fantasies of wealth and power that would one day become fantasies of destruction?' (116). The ephemerality of the Towers looms over DeLillo's earlier work. In his 1977 novel, *Players*, Pammy expresses an eerily prescient thought: 'the towers didn't seem permanent. They remained concepts, no less transient for all their bulk than some routine distortion of light' (19). For Baudrillard and *Falling Man*'s Martin, the impermanence and the destruction of the towers (inevitable or otherwise) are willed. Both argue that America silently rejoiced on September 11th, 2001 as the terrorists fulfilled the nation's secret libidinal wish for the fall of the World Trade Center. Claire Kahane claims that 'falling evokes not just memory but fantasy, contaminating both memory and desire with perverse wishes that push us past our limits, urge us toward risk, even toward death itself' (110-11). The fall of the Twin Towers and the 'fall' of the "Falling Man" ultimately push 'fascinated victims' 'toward death itself', fulfilling 'perverse wishes' and revealing the false logic of binary distinctions between victim and terrorist (Kristeva 2; Kahane 110-11). Experiencing exhilaration — rather than trauma — in response to America's humiliation is, by Western moral standards, questionable. However, the immediate repression of American vulnerability through military mobilisation, which followed the swift moral condemnation of terrorism, was not necessarily ethical. Differentiating between morality and ethics, Emmanouil Aretoulakis contends that analyses of '9/11' that explore 'artistic preoccupations with the humanely impossible as well as the morally inconceivable', offer 'a morally free and thus more *ethical* explication' as they 'permit the symbiotic operation of many different faculties — politics, aesthetics, ethics, realism, — without any of them ruling over any other' (n.pag.; emphasis in original). Although he is arrested, the "Falling Man" facilitates such an analysis through his arresting aesthetics and temporary suspension of time.

In "Ruins", DeLillo writes: 'We seem pressed for time, all of us. Time is scarcer now. There is a sense of compression, plans made hurriedly' (n.pag.). The most hurried plan was declared on 20th September 2001, when Bush stated that grief had turned to anger and, in turn, resolution in the form of 'our war on terror' ("Congress" n.pag.). The 'compression' of time privileges reflex and reaction, leaving little time for a sustained reflection on the ethico-politics of

vulnerability and precarious life, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter. The "Falling Man" triggers a variation of shock and suspension, which compels his audience to gaze at the fragile body dangling precariously in front of them. In so doing, he becomes a 'physical *memento mori*', a living reminder that neither nations nor people are immortal (Zuber 210). The *memento mori* is linked to the still life genre of art, a genre concerned with 'looking at the overlooked': what goes unnoticed when the world is viewed through cursory, inattentive glances (Bryson [1990] 2013). The "Falling Man" is what *The Body Artist*'s Lauren Hartke calls a 'living still life', as his 'stationary fall', like her performance, appears to 'stop time, stretch it out, or open it up', bringing the world beneath him to a temporary standstill (*Body* 107; *Falling* 34). Hanging in a state of still-suspension, he throws his 'audience in motion' upside down, compelling them to pause and look at the overlooked: the mortality of man as well as the disembodied deaths of the 9/11 'jumpers' and ungrievable victims of the War on Terror (164). Contrary to the exclusion of these (politically inconvenient) bodiless deaths from public memory, the "Falling Man" re-members them, flouting the rules that regulate who can appear in the public sphere. Slowing down the sped-up time of 'plans made hurriedly', his still life stretches out the temporal (and spatial) compression of grief, inviting sustained engagement and identification with the dying body and the interminable falling of man.

4. Marginal Stories and Awful Openness

Peter Boxall, Aimee Pozorski, T. Nikki Cesare Schotzko, and Sibylle Baumbach have read DeLillo's "Falling Man" in relation to Drew's photograph, but not in relation to the 'marginal story' of Jack Glenn.[54] Graley Herren notes that the performance artist 'provides Lianne with access, albeit limited, speculative, and triangulated, to an embodied perception of her father's suicide', but does not consider the significance of his death in terms of DeLillo's counter-narrative (167). Lianne experiences the fall of the Twin Towers, not as a life-changing trauma, but as an event that reinstitutes her unresolved grief for a pre-9/11 fall that *has* changed her life: the fall of her father. Kristeva asserts that the abject is accompanied by a 'massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness': a 'weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me' (2). Although the experience of uncanniness has been

[54] See: Sibylle Baumbach, *Literature and Fascination* (New York: Springer, 2015); Peter Boxall, *Since Beckett: Contemporary Writing in the Wake of Modernism* (London: A and C Black, 2009); Aimee Pozorski, *Falling After 9/11: Crisis in American Art and Literature* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014); T. Nikki Cesare Schotzko, *Learning How to Fall: Art and Culture After September 11* (London; New York: Routledge, 2014).

theorised as a symptom of trauma, Lianne's uncanny experience of the "Falling Man's" abject art is inextricable from her experience of grief. In her eyes, his suspended body reveals 'something we'd not seen, the single falling figure that trails a collective dread, body come down among us all' (33). The artist reveals something more than the 'horrific beauty' of Drew's censored image: he reveals the terrifying decision to jump or fall made by those trapped in the Twin Towers, and by her father, Jack. Contrary to what Versluys argues, the "Falling Man" does not represent 'the people who had no choice but to submit to their fate'; rather, he recreates the moment the 9/11 'jumpers' and Jack took fate into their own hands (23).

When Lianne was younger, her father was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Preferring not to slide into advanced memory loss, he took his own life. Although Lianne watches the "Falling Man's" performance with spellbound fascination, she eventually flees the scene. As she does so, her bag, containing a binder of narratives written by Alzheimer's patients, '[keeps] time, knocking against her hip, giving her a tempo, a rhythm to maintain' (169). The textual fragment, 'died by his own hand', resurfaces while she runs (169). This sequential memory ties together Jack's decision to kill himself and Lianne's fixation with the "Falling Man's" agency, whether he 'jumps or falls' (168). The experiential connection she intuits between the "Falling Man" and Jack stems from her father's decision to ruin the rampant stride of the future and to halt his slow submission to death at the hands of Alzheimer's disease. DeLillo characterises the slow decline of those suffering from Alzheimer's as a slow 'fall' into abjection. The disease leaves cerebral faculties in ruins, as they 'slide away from the adhesive friction' like metaphorical debris (30). The sunshine that lit up the blue sky disguised the metaphorical darkness of September 11th, a day that DeLillo describes as 'near night' (3). Much like the night that nearly falls and the darkness that swallows the daylight, the diseased brain metaphorically 'closes down' (30). Jack, however, chose not to endure a slow wait for death through a prolonged fall of cerebral decline. Shooting himself, he chose an instantaneous death, much like the 9/11 'jumpers', who chose not to endure the fire and fumes that would slowly smother them. In Lianne's eyes, then, the "Falling Man" is an uncanny embodied cipher for Jack, as well as the 9/11 'jumpers'. When he 'looks into it (into his death by fire)', she sees her father look into his death by gunfire (167). The figurative blood transfusion she and the "Falling Man" undergo gains another layer of significance, therefore, as it symbolises the blood tie she shares with her father.

The "Falling Man's" jump/fall does not reach its inevitable conclusion as it is deliberately suspended, leaving the artist's abject body hanging on for life (and death) in mid-air. The hustle and bustle of city life and the routinised tempo of the quotidian come to a momentary standstill.

For Walter Benjamin, a 'standstill' is a strange 'moment of awakening', when 'what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation' (*Arcades* 463). It heralds the 'now of recognisability': an 'incalculable moment or flash of new and intensified awareness, which might take the form of a crack, even a revolutionary occasion into the order of chronological time' (Athanasiou 181). When Lianne sees the "Falling Man" in still suspension, she enters the 'now of recognisability'. In a moment of uncanny revelation, she recognises her father and the moment he brought his time on earth to a standstill. This partly explains why she considers the 'worst' element of his performance to be 'the stillness itself and her nearness to the man, her position here, with no one closer to him than she was' (168). For Lianne, his presence is too close for comfort, 'too near and deep, too personal' like the memory of her father's suicide, which is never too far from her mind (163). The affective power of his performance transcends the physical and spatial distance between their bodies, as it touches her within the depths of her being. Physically and emotionally close, she feels she 'could have spoken to him but that was another plane of being beyond reach' (168). Her mouth is not sealed shut by unspeakable trauma; she can speak to him, but not in the language of the symbolic order. As the abject precedes the symbolic, it is beyond the reach of linguistic communication. The "Falling Man" operates instead in the realm of affect, the imaginative, and the spiritual. Entering into this realm through her activated imagination, Lianne communicates with her father on a level that transcends words and grammatical systems.

In the years since his death, Lianne has been grieving and 'grasping after her father' to understand his suicide and reconcile herself to his death (155). Her search led her to Søren Kierkegaard, with whom she hung on the 'spiritual brink' during her college years (118). In a letter to Daniel Greenspan, DeLillo writes that he too read Kierkegaard's work 'decades back' and still owns 'an old Anchor paperback and a Kierkegaard anthology, second hand, falling apart, and, as described in the novel' (qtd. in Greenspan 81). He was drawn less to the philosophical and theological content of Kierkegaard's writings than the 'titles of his work [...] the immensity of vision, the will to be equal to eternal themes — fear, trembling, sickness, death' (qtd. in Greenspan 81). Significantly, Kierkegaard is both an artist and a philosopher who explores aesthetics, ethics, and religion in his work, which includes a book, *Prefaces* (1844), consisting only of prefaces because its 'author' had been banned from writing novels.[55] While Kierkegaard's fictional author

[55] See further: Brian Conniff, "DeLillo's Ignatian Moment: Religious Longing and Theological Encounter in *Falling Man*," *Christianity and Literature* 63.1 (2013): 47-73; Jon Stewart and Katalin Nun, eds. *Kierkegaard's Pseudonyms* (Surrey and Burlington: Ashgate, 2015); Eric Ziolkowski, ed. *Kierkegaard, Literature, and the Arts* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2018).

shares similarities with DeLillo's banned artist, the themes of his work also speak to Lianne, who feels a sense of 'danger [...] beyond the limits of a safe understanding' while reading the 'brittle pages' of her Kierkegaard anthology (118). The thrill of feeling 'dangerously alive' is a feeling she 'associate[s] with [her] father' and the man she married, whose name shares with Kierkegaard's the 'hard Scandian *k*' that she loves (11; 118; emphasis in original). Her marriage to Keith, a man who is 'sheer hell on women', was ablaze with 'cut and burn': heated arguments and infidelity, which left unsatisfied her (conflicting) need to feel safe yet dangerously alive (59; 35). Following the dismemberment of another figure of masculine authority, the phallocentric Twin Towers, her passion for physical and emotional 'contact' drives her back into Keith's arms (35). Since the attacks, however, her estranged husband has 'not quite returned to his body yet' (59). Searching for fulfilment in a figure of male impotence, Lianne finds herself abandoned once again. The "Falling Man's" abject body, however, pushes her to the edge of death, causing her to feel 'dangerously alive'. During his performance, she (momentarily) experiences the death of herself, as his blood figuratively flows through her veins. Thus, each time she witnesses the devilish 'fallen angel' hanging in mid-air, she feels that she too is hanging, by association, on the 'spiritual brink' with her father.

Lianne inherits her interest in religion and spirituality from her father, a Catholic who 'believed that God infused time and space with pure being, made stars give light' (232). He believed in a 'force behind [human existence], a principal being who was and is and ever shall be' (231). These words recall those of the Catholic doxology, 'Glory be to the Father', that states: 'as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end' (qtd. in Storey 12). Jack put his faith in an eternally present Father. Lianne's relationship with fathers is more complex, however, as she has been abandoned by several: her biological father, Jack; Keith, the father of her son; and God, the Father Almighty, who she describes as 'the voice that says, "I am not here"' (236). She teeters on the edge of belief: inclined not to, but still prepared to, and wanting to, believe. In one of her many reveries on God, she reveals she has been 'dreaming toward' a 'plane of being, out beyond logic and intuition' (232). Through the "Falling Man", whose performances surpass the limitations of logic and 'safe understanding', she realises this dream (63). When the "Falling Man's" suspended body hovers in the air, he is, for Lianne, a channel to both of her fathers: the dead and the divine. For the duration of his abject performance, she is unable to 'think her own thoughts', signalling her entrance into 'another plane of being', a 'plane of pure being' that she shares with the "Falling Man" and her celestial fathers (165; 168; 232). The "Falling Man's" abject performance is thus, for Lianne, a ritual that makes present her father as

well as the 'hovering possible presence of God': the 'thing, the entity existing outside space and time' (236). Drawing on John Keats' concept of Negative Capability, Cornel Bonca notes that man, in silence, is 'capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason' (134). In the silence, Lianne enters a state of 'pure being'. Her engagement with abject art is imbued with sacredness and constitutes a form of silent prayer: a transcendent form of communication with the father she has been 'grasping after', and the Almighty Father she has spent her life 'dreaming toward' (155; 232). Through her prolonged engagement with the "Falling Man's" still body, she finally finds a sense of communion.

For Lianne, the "Falling Man" is a source of divine inspiration as he (unwittingly) answers her prayer for reconciliation and connection. As with the power of prayer, the affective power of his abject performance derives not from dialogue, but from the excitation of sensation, active engagement, subjective experience, and belief. The performance artist makes no attempt to explain his rationale, if there is any, and has 'no comments to make to the media on any subject' (222). Contrary to the white noise of media discourse and the urgency to define the events of '9/11' in simplistic terms, the "Falling Man's" silence lets 'latent meanings turn and bend in the wind, free from authoritative comment' (12). Stimulating the imagination, with all its limitless potential, his abject art inspires the creation of (counter)narratives. Leafing through the pages of a newspaper, Lianne stumbles upon what is likely Drew's photograph and sketchy details about David Janiak, the man the public call "Falling Man":

> She tried to connect this man to the moment when she'd stood beneath the elevated tracks, nearly three years ago, watching someone prepare to fall from a maintenance platform as the train went past. There were no photographs of that at all. She was the photograph, the photosensitive surface. That nameless body coming down, this was hers to record and absorb. (223)

Lianne records and absorbs several 'falls': the 'falls' of the 9/11 'jumpers', her father, and her own inevitable fall into abjection. As a 'photograph', she is a living embodiment of the falling body. For Butler, the bereaved are 'fallen', but for DeLillo, Lianne is still fall*ing* (*Precarious* 21; emphasis added). Arrested in mid-air, the "Falling Man" occupies the interstitial subject position of someone in a state of unresolved grief, someone who is unable to 'move on' from a loss that has turned their inner world upside-down. Jack's suicide has not only left his own future in ruins, but also Lianne's. Suicide, as Zubeck notes, reworks time, for 'what was once true or applicable to daily existence is now blasted into fragments and radically rewritten in terms of its blunt and irrevocable ending' (116). Identifying as a 'photograph' of the "Falling Man's" 'fall', Lianne identifies as a falling body that is simultaneously frozen in the liminal space of unresolved grief.

Her 'fall' is incomplete; she cannot completely grieve her father's death because she has not yet fully come to terms with his decision to end his life prematurely. Contrary to the medico-psychiatric classification of 'complicated' grief, Lianne's chronic, suspended grief is neither pathological nor self-destructive. From an upturned state of still suspension, she sees the reality of falling and jumping, 'slow and certain decline', from a higher vantage point (125). When she learns of the "Falling Man's" final fall, her own fall reaches completion and her grief a resolution. His cause of death is mysterious: although some news outlets claim that he died of a chronic heart ailment, others claim that his 'plans for a final fall [...] did not include a safety harness', effectively making it a 'suicide mission' (*Falling* 221; Kauffman, "Wake" 371). Reading the newspapers for clues and meaning, Lianne attempts to read the mind of the "Falling Man" and, by extension, the mind of her father. Using her imagination, she pieces together fragments of information and her experiential encounter with the "Falling Man" to arrive at a logical explanation for her father's suicide: this tightens the knot entwining abject artists and terrorists, as it draws together the 9/11 hi*jack*ers, Jack, and Janiak. Jack was an architect — a profession he shared with the lead hijacker, Mohammad Atta — who designed a cluster of 'white stucco dwellings' (130). Jack's architectural creations, which were designed for an 'artists' retreat', recall the 'stucco house' where Hammad and his fellow hijackers plot their artistic assault (130; 171). The most prominent thread of connection, however, is that Janiak, Jack, and the hi*jack*ers are creators of self-destruction.

Lianne's explanation also incorporates the ambiguity that clouded the 'jumps or falls' of the bodies that crashed to the ground on September 11th (168). Speaking on behalf of the New York Medical Examiner's Office, Ellen Borakove claimed that 'a "jumper" is somebody who goes to the office in the morning knowing that they will commit suicide [...] These people were forced out by the smoke and flames or blown out' (qtd. in Keniston and Quinn 188). Their falls/jumps were preceded by the dreadful calculation that suicide would be preferable to a slow surrender to death. Similarly, the "Falling Man" and Jack abruptly arrest time and motion to preclude a prolonged experience of gradual decline or 'falling' into abjection due to degenerative illnesses. The hijackers, in contrast, die in order to fulfil the purpose of life which, they believe, is death. With all of this in mind, Lianne comes to the following conclusion: 'my father shot himself so I would never have to face the day when he failed to know who I was' (130). This was, Lianne reasons, a 'brave thing' (41). According to this (imagined) logic, the purpose of her father's suicide mission was not to terrorise those around him, especially not her, but to face death with bravery, dignity and grace. Comforted and consoled by this (imagined) explanation,

Lianne can finally live with the reality of her father's suicide and the undeniable mortality of man. Thus, the combination of grief, abject art, and an activated imagination facilitates the emergence of an elevated comprehension of human existence. The "Falling Man's" art assaults consciousness in order to inspire new modes of sensation and thought that, in a paradoxical way, provide comfort, peace, and the feeling of being more fully alive.

John McClure argues that DeLillo's novels, 'including *Players*, *The Names*, *White Noise*, *Mao II*, and *Underworld*, climax in dramatic episodes of worshipful communion that recall the religious "mysteries"' (166). The climactic moment of communion and religious mystery at the end of *Falling Man* is not a 'dramatic episode' but a moment of stillness and silence. Towards the novel's end, Lianne sits in church, where she is gathered in holy communion with the living and the dead. Lianne looks on as 'the priest celebrate[s] the mass, bread and wine, body and blood' (233). The communion ritual is a commemoration that obeys the command Christ gave his followers on the night of his death: 'do this in memory of me'. This is the moment of transubstantiation, when the sacrificial offerings of bread and wine are transformed into the physical body and blood of Christ through prayer and divine intervention, without changing their physical appearance.[56] The physical presence of Christ takes the form of bread and wine during mass but, for Lianne, it also takes place when she watches the "Falling Man" perform. Through him, with him, and in him, she feels the presence of her fathers (the dead and the divine) and the moment Jack willingly gave himself to death. Although the artist physically 'falls' (rather than rises) — and transubstantiation is associated with the resurrection of Christ — the "Falling Man's" 'fall' is simultaneously a rise. The abject artist resurrects the memory of the 9/11 'jumpers' and, for Lianne, conjures the living presence of the dead and God. Seen through her eyes, the performance is a ritual that commemorates the sacrifice, death, and 'resurrection' of her fathers, and offers a sense of communion with them.

At the same time, however, Lianne reserves doubts about God's very existence. What she experiences as the living presence of God is the sense of communion she feels when she is at one with others on a 'plane of pure being' (232). She appreciates the communal power of the

[56] The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines transubstantiation as follows: 'By the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change [*conversio*] of the whole substance of the bread into the substance [*substantia*] of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood' (qtd. in Grumett 162). Lianne's desire for communion with her father is a prayer for a transubstantiation of sorts: for a request to be transmuted into a physical reality. Arguably, the "Falling Man" answers this prayer, as she experiences his performance as a physical form of communion. He is not an image, a symbol, or a representation; but a living presence that makes present her absent fathers in a moment of communion, without changing his appearance. See: David Grumett, *Material Eucharist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

church, a space all the more sacred because it is shared by the masses. While there, she experiences an epiphanic revelation: 'it was not something godlike she felt but only a sense of others. Others bring us closer. Church brings us closer. What did she feel here? She felt the dead, hers and unknown others' (233). Rather than relegating the dead to the past or rendering them abject (in the style of the medico-psychiatric model), she experiences grief and the lingering presence of the dead in the living body as a blessing. Sitting in prayer, she is at one with the 'dead in the walls, over decades and centuries' (233):

> It was a comfort, feeling their presence, the dead she'd loved and all the faceless others who'd filled a thousand churches. They brought intimacy and ease, the human ruins that lie in crypts and vaults or buried in churchyard plots. (233)

Contrary to the forward momentum of terrorist plots, physical plots of the dead are sacred spaces where time stands still and resting bodies lie. Commemorating the dead in a way that resembles the cultural veneration of architectural ruins, Lianne elevates abject 'human ruins' to the status of culturally rich, if not sacred, relics. Rather than fearing mortality, she now 'breath[es] the dead in candlewax and incense', all of whom have shaped the present (234). Suspended between the past and the present, and the living and the dead, she appreciates the porousness of embodied subjectivity, as it enables her to breathe in the dead and communicate with them on the level of 'pure being'. Far from the clinical and political imperative to get over grief and to get on with the future, she demonstrates that suspension in the experiential realm of grief — suspension in the ruins of the future — reveals the sanctity of the quotidian.

Lianne's reflections recall DeLillo's own in his 2001 essay, "Ruins". Writing about 'the *hadj*, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca', he notes that the faithful all recall 'in prayer their fellowship with the dead. Allahu akbar. God is great' ("Ruins" n.pag.). For DeLillo, the dead are 'their own nation and race, one identity, young or old, devout or unbelieving' ("Ruins" n.pag.). Before the attacks, the greatness of God had an equivalent: the 'daily sweeping taken-for-granted greatness of New York. The city will accommodate every language, ritual, belief and opinion' ("Ruins" n.pag.). Both the greatness of God and New York shine through the 'union of souls' ("Ruins" n.pag.). Writing in 2001, DeLillo contends that the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment and divisive rhetoric threatens to overshadow the greatness of New York, but, by 2007, the year of *Falling Man*'s publication, his faith in New York appears to have been restored. The ashen air is now a union of souls, an open grave for pulverised bodies from 'every language, ritual, belief, and opinion' ("Ruins" n.pag.). The greatness of New York resides not in its status as the centre of global trade, but in the abject ruins of the World Trade Center and the ruins, or relics, of the dead scattered through the city air. The 'openness' of the abject is thus 'awful' indeed: it is a

source of horror that makes palpable the wonder and awe of the 'daily taken-for-granted greatness of New York'.

Following her new-found appreciation of abject ruins and her (imagined) communion with the "Falling Man", Lianne finally completes her metaphorical fall in grief. Contrary to the recovery method espoused by the medico-psychiatric model, Lianne does not detach herself from the dead to return to an illusory state of autonomy. Rather, she becomes at one with herself only by becoming one with others, especially the dead. By the end of the novel, she feels comfortable in her own skin. Following a daily run, she catches a whiff of her grieving body, from which abject materials ooze, and fulfils DeLillo's own search to 'find mystery in commonplace moments' ("Outsider" 59):

> It was the body and everything it carried, inside and out, identity and memory and human heat [...] She was ready to be alone, in reliable calm, she and the kid, the way they were before the planes appeared that day, silver crossing blue. (*Falling* 236)

Reminiscent of *The Body Artist*'s Lauren, who 'wanted to feel [...] the flow of time in her body, to tell her who she was', Lianne, in a final moment of transcendence, embraces the permeability of her grieving body (124). She realises that all she has recorded and absorbed has turned into living tissue; her body is bound to who she is and how she perceives the world. Although she is left alone again with Justin following Keith's departure, she is not lonely. By virtue of the 'awful openness' of her embodied self and its interconnection with the world of the living and dead, she knows that she is never truly alone.

5. Writing the Ruin

Although the (self-)destructive creations of Jack and the hijackers end in smoky rubble, the rubble inspires the conception and creation of DeLillo's counter-narrative. The rubble of the Twin Towers is abject, 'in-between' and 'composite', and an amalgam of obliterated buildings and bodies (Kristeva 4). The mass of ruins is a metaphorical union of souls, a gathering of various bodies from different nations, races, religions, where distinctions between perpetrators and victims no longer apply. DeLillo incorporates the concept of abject ruin and the abject aesthetic of the "Falling Man's" body art into the textual body of *Falling Man.* Focusing on the themes and aesthetics of abjection, DeLillo embodies Kristeva's description of the writer as someone who is 'fascinated by the abject, imagines its logic, projects himself into it, introjects it, and as a consequence perverts language – style and content' (16). Inspired by his abject architects of

terror, DeLillo stylistically (un)builds stories, creatively destroying narrative conventions to assault (and elevate) the reader's consciousness.

One of the most abject ruins in *Falling Man* is called 'organic shrapnel' that forms when:

> The bomber is blown to bits, literally bits and pieces, and fragments of flesh and bone come flying outward with such force and velocity that they get wedged, they get trapped in the body of anyone who's in striking range. (16)

Organic shrapnel is a material manifestation of the affective power of the "Falling Man's" organic, abject art: it literally violates subjective and corporeal borders to reveal the 'awful openness' of the human body. As Mason notes, this shrapnel is a stark reminder of the extent to which 'one human's life can affect another's' (147). It is a physical *memento mori*, an embodied and embedded memory of the moment the bomber's body was blown to smithereens. This moment is frozen in time, preserved within the flesh of anyone within 'striking range'. To be struck by shrapnel or the "Falling Man" is to be struck by the physical impact of grief, which blows to pieces the perpetrator/victim dichotomy of the state-sanctioned '9/11' narrative. Furthermore, if fellowship with the dead is a mark of 'greatness', then grief and the presence of shrapnel within the skin are not afflictions, but sources of enlightenment and transcendence.

The concept of organic shrapnel operates on a linguistic as well as thematic level. The narrative point of view is fluid as the heterodiegetic narrator weaves in and out of the streams of consciousness of its main focalisers (Keith, Lianne, and Hammad). While the shrapnel pierces the corporeal border between self and other, and the "Falling Man" performs a figurative blood transfusion, *Falling Man*'s sentences pass surreptitiously from one consciousness to another. The most masterful example is the following description of the moment the self comes into physical contact with the other:

> [Hammad] fastened his seatbelt. A bottle fell off the counter in the galley [...] and he watched it roll this way and that, a water bottle, empty [...] and he watched it spin more quickly and then skitter across the floor an instant before the aircraft struck the tower, heat, then fuel, then fire, and a blast wave passed through the structure that sent Keith Neudecker out of his chair and into a wall. (239)

An intersubjective consciousness emerges as Hammad's narrative perspective is flung into Keith's. Hammad's pre-9/11 narrative, previously consigned to separate chapters, is textually incorporated into the larger post-9/11 narrative, which, as a counterpoint to the teleological plot of terrorism, lacks a chronological plot. The collision of both narratives represents on a linguistic level the moment the marginalised voice of the abject Muslim Other hijacked cultural metanarratives and the larger Western consciousness.

Shattering the foundations of identity, the combined power of grief and the abject leaves the possibility of coherence and autonomy in ruins. As Kristeva notes, the abject is located on 'the fragile border (borderline cases) where identities (subject/object) do not exist or only barely so' (207). DeLillo incorporates this aspect of the abject into his characterisation. The "Falling Man" is both an uncanny cipher and a plurality of body parts: an 'upper body' with 'legs spread slightly, arms out from his body and bent at the elbows' (159; 164). For Lianne, he is neither coherent nor an individual, but a collection of corporeal fragments. Thus, he is not only an embodied cipher for Jack, whose body was blown to bits by his gun, but also for the mangled bodies lingering in the air. DeLillo collates the shards of fragmented subjects and buries them within the novel's narrative structure. Personal pronouns are splattered across the opening pages of the text, and Keith and Lianne are not referred to by name until page nine. Throughout the novel, narrative perspectives blend into each other, unsettling the referents of pronouns. Chapter three, for instance, opens with 'he', referring not to Martin, with whom the previous paragraph ended, but to Keith (14; 15). The novel's pronominal uncertainties work in tandem with the titles of its parts to destabilise referential denotations. These titles pay homage to artists/terrorists: 'Bill Lawton' (a mishearing of Bin Laden), 'Ernst Hechinger' (Martin's real name), and 'David Janiak' (the real name of the "Falling Man"). DeLillo's dual nominations are a form of linguistic shrapnel, as they emphasise the traces of otherness contained within the self.

The need to celebrate the wonder of difference in a time of homogeneity influences DeLillo's use of repetition. Contrary to psychoanalytical conceptualisations of trauma as a belated return of a repressed experience, DeLillo theorises repetition not as a return of the same, but as a return of the unfamiliar. Although the "Falling Man" recreates the posture of the man pictured in Drew's "Falling Man" photograph, his performance is neither a belated repetition of the moment the anonymous man jumped from the burning tower nor a replication of Drew's image. Instead, the "Falling Man" re-uses Drew's image to create something familiar yet unfamiliar, something uncanny and abject. The coexistence of similarity and difference paralyses the circuitous loop of traumatic repetition. Stirring the senses and the imagination, the "Falling Man's" uncanny repetition facilitates the creation of a meaningful narrative. Due to the haphazard repetition of his 'falls' and her repeated exposure to the feeling of apparent sudden death, Lianne absorbs the shock of death, and comes to terms with the fact of its inescapability. Repetition draws on the aesthetics of still life paintings which, like *Falling Man*, portray the everyday world of routine and repetition. Through his use of uncanny repetition, DeLillo portrays the strangeness (and wonder) of the familiar and follows what Gander, following Bryson,

calls the 'directive of the still life': to look at the overlooked, which, in the case of *Falling Man*, is to look attentively at the falling body and the metaphorically falling body of grief (Gander, "Art of Being" 131). DeLillo stylistically stills life by suspending plot development. The novel is bookended by the image of a shirt falling from the sky on September 11th. Critics have read DeLillo's return to the beginning as a form of traumatic repetition that evinces his failure to resolve trauma. The ending of *Falling Man* is not an analeptic flashback, however, but a symptom of temporal suspension that resonates with the words, '[a]s it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be', from the 'Glory be to the Father' prayer. The novel opens with the words: 'It was not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night' and '[a] shirt came down out of the high smoke, a shirt lifted and drifting [...] falling again' (3; 4). The last page of the novel portrays 'the residue of smashed matter, in the ash ruins of what was various and human', and finally, the image of 'a shirt com[ing] down out of the sky' (246). Beginning and ending in the rubble, DeLillo aestheticises the blessed ruins of the future and the suspended time of grief to rescue the reader from the finality of teleological plots.

DeLillo uses ekphrasis to describe the "Falling Man's" abject art. WTM Mitchell defines ekphrasis as a 'verbal representation of visual representation', which leaves a 'black hole' in the verbal structure, entirely absent from it, but shaping and affecting it' (152; 178). The 'black hole' or absence at the core of DeLillo's ekphrasis compels the reader to pause, to see beyond the words on the page in order to visualise the "Falling Man's" performance. Seeing the performance primarily through Lianne's eyes, readers momentarily share her vision, which, in turn, influences subsequent visualisations and interpretations of the performance. DeLillo's ekphrastic passages implicitly reveal, then, that the reader's way of seeing is impacted both by the characters with whom they are in 'contact', and all that has been recorded and absorbed throughout the reading process. Ekphrasis suspends readers between the verbal and the visual, drawing them into the realm of the imagination to grasp an image that is 'beyond reach' (168). The "Falling Man's" abject art works on a comparable level, as it compels viewers to grasp something beyond the limits of the symbolic and to fill the 'black hole' with an imaginative response.

Due to *Falling Man*'s lack of chronological plot, there are several 'black holes' or narrative gaps in its structure. The novel's disjointed passages read as a series of still lifes painted with words, which, in turn, portray lives lived in still suspension. To read the novel superficially, considering only its surface details, is to risk overlooking the subtleties and deeper significances of DeLillo's word paintings. Lianne overlooks the radiance of everyday grief until she encounters the "Falling Man", who stimulates her senses and compels her to reach beyond the limits of

conventional modes of comprehension. DeLillo invites his readers to do the same. Whilst the "Falling Man" suspends time, DeLillo's skilful use of stylistic techniques, such as ekphrasis, slows down the reading pace as the reader, at times, must pause and flip back several passages in search of clarity. Through his use of understated prose, ambiguity, absences, uncanny repetitions, and gaps, DeLillo almost invites the reader to ask: 'is there something I have missed?' The answer would appear to be 'yes', as it is not until Lianne searches for clarity that she finds the otherwise unnoticed mysteries and profundity of the ordinary, as well as the logic of her father's suicide. DeLillo, however, is unwilling to resolve or explain the novel's ambiguities, or mysteries, choosing instead to let meaning twirl in the wind, much to the frustration of critics such as Gray. Seeking to restore 'taken-for-granted greatness', DeLillo offers no guaranteed certainties ("Ruins" n.pag.). In so doing, he invites his readers to become absorbed in *Falling Man*, to lose themselves in the reading process just as Lianne (momentarily) loses herself in abject art and grief.

Although critics have read the novel's gaps, fragmentary episodes and shifts as representative of trauma, I argue that they are characteristic of the abject and the brain that falls slowly into abjection. Dissociation, memory loss, and ephemerality are symptoms of trauma, but they are also symptomatic of Alzheimer's disease. Fleeing from the "Falling Man", Lianne recalls the fateful day when Rosellen, who suffers from late stage Alzheimer's, could not remember where she lived. Although the disease has left Rosellen's memory and cerebral faculties in ruins, Lianne marvels at her use of language, 'how she developed extended versions of a single word, all the inflections and connectives' (156). Lianne recalls the most memorable line from Rosellen's final script that epitomises her unique writing style: '*Do we say goodbye, yes, going, am going, will be going, the last time go, will go*' (156; emphasis in original). Cognitive meaning slips away from Rosellen's grasp, until all that remains is a goodbye. Formed from the basic rules of conjugation, her farewell is simple yet poetic as the present and future tenses combine to metaphorically ruin the future. Rosellen's touching farewell communicates the 'last bare state', the 'body's last fleet breath', and the 'final fall' of man, not through a logical use of language but through currents of feeling and suspension (156; 33; 221). It is not the theoretical voice of reason that speaks to the divine, but the falling body on the cusp of death. Omar refers to the room where he and his fellow Alzheimer's patients share with Lianne their counter-narratives, their fragmented stories and reflections on life and death, as 'our prayer room' (63). For Lianne, who listens to those who are slowly falling from Alzheimer's, listening is a saving grace. Her silent encounter with the "Falling Man" is a form of silent prayer and, in turn, she lets Keith 'know she was listening, mind and body because listening is what would save them this time' (104). Eaton

claims that DeLillo's earlier novels intimate that listening closely might make audible 'the still small voice of hope' (49). *Falling Man* develops this line of thought, suggesting that attentive looking and listening with the grieving body are necessary for redemption and salvation, not 'plans made hurriedly' or the deafening white noise of the media.

The reading process is a silent encounter between the reader and the writer, while the absences, gaps, and ekphrasis within *Falling Man* channel a higher power, 'the voice that says, "I am not here"', which invites the reader to listen and to meditate on the mysteries of death, grief, and the novel itself (236). Language is thus the locus of absence and suspended meaning — rather than a mode of representation — in the novel, which, in turn, activates the reader's imagination to expand perceptions of post-9/11 reality. DeLillo's counter-narrative transcends simplistic interpretive frameworks of the symbolic order, operating instead in the realm of the abject: the space of unresolved grief, the imaginative, and the awful, where the future lies in ruins. Turning narrative conventions upside-down, DeLillo invites the reader to share this liminal realm; to experience the still suspension of time and to become absorbed in the novel. Lianne's experience demonstrates that seeing (still) life, death, and life-in-death from the perspective of the grieving, falling body facilitates a sacred fellowship with others. If the 'extraordinary wonder of things is somehow related to the extraordinary dread, to the death fear we try to keep beneath the surface of our perceptions' as DeLillo portends, then *Falling Man* and its revelation of the 'awful openness' of the abject is truly a wonderful work ("Outsider" 63).

Chapter Three

'Tarrying with Grief' in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*[57]

DeLillo had reason to write in "Ruins" that '[w]e seem pressed for time, all of us. Time is scarcer now. There is a sense of compression, plans made hurriedly' (n.pag.). One of the most hurried of these plans was announced on September 20th, 2001 when President George W. Bush declared 'our grief has turned to anger, and anger to resolution' ("Congress" n.pag.). With the transmutation of grief complete, America became a nation arming and mobilising itself for the 'War on Terror'. Chapter Two explored how DeLillo's titular "Falling Man" stretches and slows the spatio-temporal compression of grief to invite sustained reflections on the fragility of the falling body. Mohsin Hamid's 2007 novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* accepts this invitation, delving further than *Falling Man* into the ethico-political implications of dwelling on, and dwelling in, grief, while pointing out the dangers of 'plans made hurriedly'. This chapter reads the novel in response to the question Judith Butler poses in *Precarious Life*: 'is there something to be gained from grieving, from tarrying with grief?' (xii). Contrary to the political and medico-psychiatric tendency to 'psychologize' loss and 'depoliticize the discussion and analysis of socio-historical phenomena and their representation', Hamid politicises the discussion, responding to Butler's question with a tentative affirmative (Traverso and Broderick 9).

The novel depicts the marginal and marginalised stories of Erica and Changez, both of whom suffered losses before the events of September 11th, 2001. Their stories are not of 'trauma' and resilience but of abjection and suicide, themes they share with the 'marginal story' of *Falling Man*. Erica's story revolves around the death of Chris, her childhood sweetheart, while Changez laments the chronic neo-colonialist exploitation of his native Pakistan, which is intimately related to another major source of his grief: the disappearance of Erica. Following the death of Chris, Erica is trapped by a nostalgic longing for an old world of innocence and purity, a mythical time she believes she shared with him. She is exposed again to the stark reality of mortality in the wake of the terrorist attacks, which reinstitute her unresolved grief for Chris and increase the fervour

[57] Earlier versions of parts of this chapter appear in Donnelly, "'Tarrying with Grief' in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*," *C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-Century Writings* 7.1 (2019): n.pag. 11 June 2019 <https://c21.openlibhums.org/article/id/679/>.

of her pursuit to restore a lost (imagined) purity. Attempting to make whole her pierced emotional and corporeal borders, she builds a metaphorical wall around herself. (Am)Erica's pursuit of moral (and racial) purity, however, proves to be a death wish.

This chapter will go on to consider the ways in which Changez tarries with chronic grief. Although Changez is nostalgic for Erica and his family's former privilege, he does not deny precariousness and mortality. Instead, he imagines the possibility of generating empathy and compassion. His experiential response to loss reveals the extent to which the self is neither pure nor independent, but plural and interdependent. This epiphany extends the purview of his gaze and prompts him to undertake a duty of care for those with whom he is invariably bound. Critical of the US government's unwillingness to tarry with grief and respond to the vulnerability of other nations in an ethically responsible way, Changez theorises an ethico-political model of grief that does not stoke nationalist fervour or reiterate the exceptional circumstances of 'trauma' used to justify the War on Terror. His model also contradicts and reveals the limitations of the dominant medico-psychiatric model, which aims to resolve grief and return the subject to an assumed state of autonomy as soon as possible. For Changez, grief is not simply a process that involves rebuilding oneself following a breakdown (a recovery narrative of resilience implicitly fostering self-reliance and conformity with normative structures), but an embodied experience that reveals the fluid and ephemeral nature of the self. While DeLillo's *Falling Man* invites the reader into the liminal space of unresolved grief, where time is suspended and the limits of linguistic meaning tested, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* invites the reader to join with Changez in tarrying with his tale of unresolved grief. Changez advocates a continuous, open-ended engagement with loss, reflecting on the permeability of the self and the pain it shares with others, including adversaries. As he tarries with grief for an extended period of time, and still maintains affective attachments to Erica, his response to loss theoretically meets the diagnostic criteria for 'complicated grief'. Whilst 'complicated grief' has been classified as a psychiatric disorder, the novel, like *Falling Man*, suggests that a prolonged grieving experience is not pathological. Although melancholia proves self-destructive, Changez's grief facilitates empathetic identification with Erica, as well as his (re)birth and formation of a community that cares for precarious lives, regardless of political affiliations. Developing Butler's assertion that 'the possibility of making different kinds of ties emerges' from loss, this reading argues that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* suggests that grief has the potential to create alliances that bridge regional, gender, cultural, and political distances in the post-9/11 period (*Precarious* 40).

At the point of its publication in 2007, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* spoke directly to post-9/11 America, articulating a critical voice that had then been excluded from mainstream US discourse. As an advocate of cultural pluralism and hybridity, the novel paints a more diverse set of grief portraits than those depicted in the *New York's Times*' "Portraits of Grief", *TIME*'s "Portraits of Resilience", and DeLillo's *Falling Man*. Although *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* has been read as a canonical '9/11 novel', the arc of its vision extends beyond the spatial and temporal co-ordinates of New York City on September 11th, 2001. The novel observes the chronic precarity and grief produced by the ongoing neo-colonial style mission of US-led global capitalism and the War on Terror, and shares similarities with Hamid's pre-9/11 and post-post-9/11 novels. As discussed in Chapter Two, DeLillo did not attempt to write a novel of exception that would either register or reflect the exceptional traumatised state into which the nation had allegedly been forced on September 11th, 2001. Instead, he sought to write a counter-narrative, and, as Chapter Two argued, the points of connection between *Falling Man* and DeLillo's earlier and later works suggest continuity rather than exception. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* makes a similar suggestion, as it is neither a novel of exception nor an outlier in Hamid's oeuvre, and shares significant parallels with his 2017 novel, *Exit West*. Where *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* searches for ways to transcend emotional, physical, geographical, and ideological borders, *Exit West* imagines a world where geographic borders have dissolved into fluidity with the advent of magical doors. Although porous borders leave selves and nations vulnerable to violence, both novels insist on the potential for (pro)creation and cross-pollination. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* focuses on the inevitability of change and dislocation along the journey of life, a theme developed further in *Exit West*, which claims that 'we are all migrants through time' (209). Although it is set in a post-9/11 context, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and its prescient exploration of precarity and grief, moves beyond the events of a singled-out September day and speaks to the present.

Set in a café in Lahore, Changez relates a tale of his time in America to a (silent) American with ease and theatrical flourishes. As the story is told from his perspective, everything the reader learns about the silent American, the United States, and Erica is offered via Changez's filtered perception and deliberate word choice. Describing his childhood and Pakistani heritage, he states: 'I grew up with a poor boy's sense of *longing*, in my case for what we had and lost' (81; emphasis in original). This is partly because he and his family are 'part of a broader malaise afflicting not only the formerly rich but much of the formerly middle-class as well: a growing inability to purchase what we previously could' (12). In situations such as these, Changez claims,

'one has two choices: pretend all is well or work hard to restore things to what they were. I chose both' (12). Taking this approach, he imagines his life unfolding in a way that conforms with the conventions of the American Dream, which Lauren Berlant calls a 'genre' for living. James Truslow Adams describes this dream narrative as the 'dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone' if the dreamer is willing to work hard (404). As soon as he arrives in America, Changez sets out to make this dream a reality and live the life he feels destined to live. His nostalgic quest to restore fallen wealth and privilege is marked by a number of early successes: he receives a scholarship to study at Princeton University; and he successfully competes for a job at Underwood Samson, a prestigious business valuation company. During his time in New York he meets and falls in love with a white and wealthy Manhattanite named Erica, whose transformation is inextricably tied to the deceptive dynamics of both the mighty and the morose. Changez's attraction to her is intertwined with his melancholic longing for the former privilege of his family and homeland. His life takes an unexpected plot twist, however, which compels him to imagine otherwise and (co-)create an alternate life story. While Erica becomes increasingly gripped by her own melancholic longing for Chris, Changez becomes increasingly disillusioned with the United States. His evolving resistance to its capitalist empire, military exploits in the Middle East, and racialised determinations of insider/outsider culminates in his departure from Underwood Samson. Following Erica's mysterious disappearance and suspected suicide, he returns to Pakistan. After he has related his narrative of love and loss to the American, Changez asks him: 'Why are you reaching into your jacket, sir? I detect a glint of metal. Given that you and I are now bound by a shared intimacy, I trust it is from the holder of your business cards' (209). On this note, the novel draws to an abrupt end.

1. Critical Reception

In *Falling Man*, the reader is invited to fill in the narrative gaps left by the novel's lack of chronological plot. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* makes a similar request, but with less subtlety. Sarah Llot argues that Changez's 'monologue' develops the idea of the cathartic function of authorship as a response to trauma, asserting that the narrative invites active and empowered readership (571). In a similar vein, Peter Morey argues that the novel combines the dramatic monologue form with the 'hoax confessional' to parody the 'cultural certainties encouraged by those "true confessions" of former radicals' (136). The novel plays with different generic conventions and 'cultural certainties' to test their limits and frustrate expectations. Through his use of the second-person pronoun 'you', Hamid attempts to plunge readers into what Changez

calls a 'deep bout of introspection', during which presumptions, racial stereotypes, and the life genres conditioning perceptions of geo-political reality are subject to critical scrutiny (173). While DeLillo warns against reductive deathward plots, Hamid twists them, with the intention of breaking 'frames of practised response' and the conventions of morality tales (DeLillo, "Ruins" n.pag.). In her comparative analysis of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Falling Man*, Julia Szołtysek attempts to 'establish patterns through which the seeming "perpetrators" and "victims" are forced into a melancholic and parasitic relationship with one another' (108). Szołtysek is right to point out the ways in which 'perpetrators' and 'victims' are entangled in these novels, but she misses an opportunity to illuminate how DeLillo's and Hamid's portrayals of *grief*, rather than a pathologized 'parasitic' melancholia, explore this entanglement and the implications of such 'closeness'.

More so than *Falling Man*, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* critiques pre-conceptions about the shadowy figure of the Muslim 'terrorist' Other. The novel stages a meeting between East and West, 'us' and 'them', and 'terrorist' and 'victim' to set up, but ultimately disappoint, expectations of a battle between these (alleged) diametrical opposites. The meeting reveals the constructed nature of the official 9/11 narrative, testing its limits and subverting the roles assigned to Americans and Arabs and/or Muslims. In an interview with Deborah Solomon, Hamid notes that 'in the American media, it's almost always the other way around; representatives of the Islamic world mostly seem to be speaking in grainy videos from caves' (1). In the novel, Changez attempts to convince his American interlocutor that he and his Pakistani kinsmen are 'not the crazed and destitute radicals you see on your television channels but rather saints and poets and—yes—conquering kings' (116). Although *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* does not offer a rich theological discussion, it does consider the tribal politics of religious identification, the resurgence of Christianity and Islam, and the religious rhetoric of the national security strategy known as the 'Bush Doctrine' (56).[58] The novel explores religious phenomena, such as Erica's unhealthy infatuation with Chris, which Changez describes as 'a religion' (129). Erica believes in Chris or, more precisely, she believes he is still alive, while Changez is a faithful follower of Underwood Samson (the embodiment of US power, privilege, and capitalism). To different

[58] In a pithy summary, Melvin Gurtov explains that 'the Bush Doctrine represented an elaboration of traditional doctrine; but in a one-superpower world, such an elaboration amounted to an unprecedented assertion of a US right to global domination' (48). See: Melvin Gurtov, *Superpower on Crusade: The Bush Doctrine in US Foreign Policy* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2006); and David Weiss and Jason A. Edwards, eds. *The Rhetoric of American Exceptionalism* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2009). Weiss and Edwards note that the 'Bush Doctrine' is tethered to the notion of exceptionalism, that 'because of its national credo, historical evolution, and unique origins, America is a special nation with a special role – possibly ordained by God – to play in human history' (1).

extents, Erica and Changez are faithful, if not fundamentalist, worshippers of their respective idols. The faithful devote their lives to God, but Erica's devotion to Chris is extreme to the point of death. She becomes a martyr of sorts, willing to sacrifice herself in her quest to keep him (and the purity he represents) alive. The novel therefore extends the parameters of the term 'fundamentalism' beyond post-9/11 associations with the Muslim 'terrorist' Other, using it to describe extreme affective attachments to desired objects, people, and ideals, including the dogmatic principles of US capitalism and empire. As time progresses, however, Changez becomes disillusioned with his idol and critical of fundamentalism in its various forms.

Geoffrey Nash argues that the 'ambiguity' of the novel is 'purposive' and 'in keeping with its site of enunciation: entirely within a Western discourse it mounts a guarded resistance on behalf of the precariously placed stranger while still making overtures of reason to an audience he wishes to placate' (111). Nash's construal of the 'placatory' intention of the novel depends on the position and generic expectations of the reader. If, for instance, the novel is read as a psychological thriller, then Changez's fluctuations and chameleon-like self could be interpreted as symptoms of psychopathology, or even trauma. If the reader picks up the book on the basis of its title, then Changez could well be mistaken for the titular 'reluctant fundamentalist', and his critiques of US foreign policy and the War on Terror as motivations for extremist violence. Bruce King, for instance, derides the novel as a 'study in resentment' (684). If Changez is resentful, he is resentful that the US has suffered 'so few apparent consequences' for the devastation and precarity it has wreaked in other nations, such as Pakistan, during its global expansion of power (131). He feels 'resentful' when comparisons are made between America and Pakistan: 'Four thousand years ago, we, the people of the Indus River basin, had cities that were laid out on grids and boasted underground sewers' whilst the 'ancestors of those who would invade and colonize America were illiterate barbarians. Now our cities were largely unplanned, unsanitary affairs, and America had universities with individual endowments greater than our national budget for education' (38). Elena Ortells Montón interprets Changez's acknowledgement of his resentment as 'the beginning of the end: this is when Changez changes, this is when the "American" fundamentalist believer in the western capitalist system turns into the Pakistani fundamentalist defender of the basic rights of oppressed nations' (28). Contrary to what critics have argued, there is no convincing evidence to suggest that Changez's 'resentment' has turned into fundamentalism and a desire for revenge. His public admission that he was 'remarkably pleased' (rather than traumatised) by the sight of the fallen Twin Towers has been read as proof of his suspected turn to terrorism (82-83). Changez explains, however, that he is not pleased with the deaths of almost

three thousand victims, but with the aesthetic power of America's fall from grace, stating: 'I was caught up in the *symbolism* of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees' (83; emphasis in original). Changez was not the only one to feel *jouissance* at the sight of the superpower on its knees. As noted in Chapter Two, Baudrillard claimed that the nation — and 'everyone without exception' — silently rejoiced when the dream of the destruction of such a powerful Hegemon became a reality (5). Unlike those in the US who similarly rejoiced, Changez is neither white nor American and he makes no secret of his pleasure.

Renee Lee Gardner argues that the novel's structure 'subverts the empowered West-versus-subaltern East binary by lending voice to the othered (Pakistani) character while silencing the traditionally empowered (American) ones' (109). The American interlocutor, however, is not forcibly silenced by Changez, who, in turn, is not a silent sufferer of post-colonial 'trauma'. Changez uses familiar predation tropes in his narrative (such as his comparison of the American to an animal 'uncertain whether it is predator or prey') to set up, but ultimately disappoint, expectations of a climactic battle between the two men (35). Contrary to what such generic tropes suggest, the men are not necessarily adversaries. Writing about the pervasive fear of death in contemporary living, Hamid states: 'we are not adversaries, we are in it together, the great mass murderer, Death, has us all in his sights' ("Permawar" n.pag.). It would be advisable, he suggests, to 'recognise one another with compassion, not as predatory cannibals, but as meals for the same shark' (Hamid, "Permawar" n.pag.). Changez and the American are 'bound' together by an intimate story of loss, which reminds both men that they are mutually susceptible to Death, the greatest predator of all. Sharing his narrative of grief, Changez ultimately becomes bound to 'you', the reader, who, in Hamid's view, is a 'being with the thoughts of two beings inside it' experiencing 'a pooling of consciousness that blurs the painstakingly constructed boundaries of the unitary self' ("In the Land of the Pure" n.pag.). When his counter-narrative of grief is read, therefore, worlds collide in the shared space of the text world, where minds meet and merge, and spatial and temporal distances collapse.

Adnan Mahmutovic argues that the 'intimacy' Changez and the American share 'is meant to say that political and business exchanges need to be grounded in a certain sharing of civic rights and just economic interest' (12). In her examination of Changez's relationship with the American, Ayşem Seval proposes that 'as the silent addressee of Changez's dramatic monologue, the American is constantly under Changez's gaze' (108). Seval adds that the novel is 'about [Changez's] interpretation—through constant deductions—of the silent American' and 'Americanness' (108). Changez's relationship with the anonymous American is not simply a

'political' or 'business' exchange, but an emotional investment that offers release. Written in the style of Sufi poetry, which, according to Hamid, is a literary form of 'self-help', Changez's narrative is helpful for several parties: himself; the nation he wishes to save from self-destruction; the American, and, in turn, 'you', the reader ("The Book" n.pag.). This is one of the ways the novel departs from the paradigmatic trauma aesthetic and its 'politically debilitating' recourse to discourses of unspeakability and marginalisation of non-western literary forms (Craps and Buelens 5). Critics have yet to acknowledge the structural similarity between the novel and a Sufi poem: a form of 'Islamic mysticism' that 'expresses itself in the form of love poems, which are second-person addresses, very often, and quite often nameless second-person addresses' (Hamid, "Home to Roost" n.pag.). Although Sufi literature emerges from an Islamic tradition, Hamid notes that it 'transcends religious groupings and can even transcend religious faith' ("Interview" n.pag.). His secular Sufi poem reveals the mystical union between lovers and intimates. Changez, a self-proclaimed 'lover of America', does not express love for his nameless American interlocutor, but for Erica (1). Contrary to what Ann Marlowe argues, the novel is not 'anti-American agitprop', therefore, but the narrative of a frustrated 'lover' expressing disappointment about his beloved's insular gaze, self-defensive borders, and disregard for precarious lives elsewhere (n.pag.). His critique is not issued as a terrorist threat, but as the counsel of a 'lover', wishing to save the nation he loves from itself. Although the reclusive Erica disappears into a subconscious world of fantasies and phantoms, Changez does not wish to remain alone in a world of (imagined) memories and pain. Instead, he shares and examines his (repressed) past, fantasies and fears with his interlocutor, who listens attentively and, unwittingly, performs the role of a therapist. Reflecting on the 'critical personal and political issues that affect [his] emotional present', Changez communicates to the American thoughts and feelings he could not — and cannot — express to Erica (165). In so doing, he shares with the American an 'intimacy' he failed to share with Erica during her lifetime (209). This therapeutic encounter does not share the main objective of psychotherapy: to reach 'closure'. Whilst *Falling Man*'s Lianne reconciles herself with her father's suicide and eventually enters a state of contentment and calmness, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*'s lack of narrative resolution suggests that Changez is not yet ready or willing to close what cannot be 'closed': the ongoing suffering produced by the neo-colonialist exploits of US capitalism and war. This suffering is chronic, and so too is Changez's grief, such that he — and the reader — cannot close the book on his-story. Instead, the reader is invited to imagine otherwise, engaging in an act of co-creation with Hamid that further solidifies the bond between the responsive reader and the storyteller in the shared space of the text world.

The novel's aesthetic features and its thematic content support Pei-Chen Liao's view that it is 'oversimplifying to read [*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*] simply as a novel that promotes anti-Americanism' (153). Building on Liao's argument, this chapter asserts that the novel does not endorse a narrow nationalistic view. To only recognise those who are most familiar — whether American or Pakistani — as human beings is to restrict the category of grievable life to solely nationalist frames. Instead, the novel critiques the systemic violence linked to colonialism, imperialism and war-waging whether present or past, American or otherwise. As Paul Jay notes, Hamid 'deals with the relationship between globalization and the histories of colonialism, decolonization, and postcolonialism' (92). This reading concurs with Jay, as well as Joseph Darda's assertion that Hamid challenges the logic of the War on Terror in the 'interest not of anti-American hostility but of international solidarity' (108). Drawing on Butler's theory of precarious life, Darda argues that the novel exemplifies the characteristics of 'critical global fiction', which he defines as fiction that 'sees the struggle against militarism and brutality itself as a site for a global coming-together' (109). The novel not only 'sees' the struggle against precarity as a site for 'coming-together', but also envisages the repercussions of doing so through its depiction of Changez's political assembly of the precarious. Darda, following Butler, argues that 'tarrying in our own grief might broaden our understanding of the conditions that sustain or endanger life beyond the boundaries of American recognisability' (115). Whilst Hamid undoubtedly stresses the transformative potential of grief, Darda fails to offer close readings of both the novel's representation of loss and its theorisation of the ways grief can 'broaden our understanding' of precarious life. Developing Darda's argument, this chapter examines Hamid's portrayal of grief and its illumination of the inherent relationality of the self. It also interacts with Mahmutovic, who asserts that the 'care' arising from the 'porousness of national identity in Hamid's novel constitutes the basis of global civic engagement' (13). However, while Mahmutovic notes Changez's 'care' for Erica, he overlooks his formation of a plural care community.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist satisfies Richard Gray's demand for post-9/11 fiction that responds to the syncretic character of American culture, avoiding binaries (such as them and us, West and East, Christian and Muslim) in favour of a deterritorialised and 'mixed, plural' America (*After* 90). Contrary to his scathing critique of *Falling Man*, Gray praises *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* for its location of crisis in an 'interstitial place', a 'site where a discourse founded on either/or distinctions is interrogated and even subverted' (*After* 65). Changez is a site of hybridity, embodying both the Middle Eastern Other and America. Blurring constructed borders

between 'us' and 'them', 'East' and 'West', and 'here' and 'there', the novel exemplifies what Michael Rothberg calls a 'centrifugal literature of extraterritoriality' ("Failure of the Imagination" 158). Rothberg, like Gray, stresses the need to 'imagine how US citizenship looks and feels beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, both for Americans and for others' ("Failure of the Imagination" 158). Changez articulates a double narrative as both an ardent 'lover of America' and a vociferous critic, articulating its Orientalist fears while sharing his own specific knowledge of local, American, and international relations. He feels a sense of home in both Pakistan and America, and envisions ways in which citizens can co-exist together, beyond the confines of nationalist ideologies and geographical borders. Hybridity works on an aesthetic as well as a thematic level in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Following Berlant's claim that 'chronologically heterogeneous grief' makes possible 'new genres of reciprocity', Hamid indicates that grief inspires the creation of hybrid literary genres, as well as life genres (*Cruel* 86). Selecting and juxtaposing stylistic and thematic features from different literary genres, he creates a hybrid form that does not conform to the conventions of one particular genre.

2. Precarious Lives

In *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004), *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (2009), *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015), and *The Force of Nonviolence: The Ethical in the Political* (2020), Butler uses a philosophically ambitious approach to analyse the interweaving racial, economic, and gendered powers rendering some lives more precarious than others. In *Precarious Life*, Butler critiques the Bush administration for its failure to utilise the exposure of national vulnerability productively, 'to use a temporary dislocation from First World privilege to acknowledge a mutual corporeal vulnerability as a basis for a new interdependent global political community' (xiii). In *Frames of War* Butler nuances this view by differentiating between 'precariousness', a socio-ontological condition shared by all forms of life, and 'precarity', a 'politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death' (25-26). *Falling Man* explores the ontological precariousness of embodied subjectivity, but *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is more expansive in scope, offering a global glimpse at the US neo-colonialist power structures that force non-western citizens to live in chronic conditions of precarity and war. Writing on war and violence, Butler asserts that lost lives 'would *be registered as a loss* only because those lives were affirmed as having a living value, and that, in turn, means we regard those lives as worthy of grief', or grievable (*The Force of*

Nonviolence 28; emphasis in original). On the opposite side of the spectrum, there are lives whose 'claim against being injured or killed is not always registered. And one reason for this is that their lives are not considered worthy of grief, or grievable', due in part to racism, xenophobia, and a systemic disregard for the dispossessed and impoverished (Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence* 28).

Butler contends that framing is the 'presupposition for a life that matters', and an intentional and 'non-intentional operation of power that works to delimit the domain of representability itself' and represent what is 'provisionally called "reality"' (*Frames* 14; 74). The selectivity of the framing process was instrumental in representing a palatable post-9/11 'reality' that did not veer far from the state's script. As discussed in previous chapters, scenes of the terrorist spectacle unfolding on September 11th were broadcast on live television and played repeatedly, whilst scenes and images of falling bodies plummeting to the pavements and the mangled bodies of the dead were excluded from public view. Instead, images of resilient firefighters and the Twin Towers ablaze were splashed across newspapers and television screens to convey American victimhood and resilience. The disembodied deaths of '9/11' victims were grievable and politically valuable, whilst the bodiless deaths of those killed by US military exploits in Iraq and Afghanistan were ungrievable and potentially politically damning. Shielding US audiences from scenes of battle and bloodshed repressed the reality that the US was occupying (and killing) the very people it had pledged to free from 'evil'. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* suggests that frames of recognition, though undoubtedly powerful, cannot condition perception in its entirety. Frames represent material entities on an exclusively superficial level: they cannot convey or completely control the complexity and contingency of human feeling. Concurring with *Falling Man*, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* indicates that the constitution of 'reality' is always perceived from a unique and subjective point in time and affected by embodied experience.

This reading will also draw on Butler's theory of abjection to examine *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*'s portraits of abject grievers. In *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1995), she expands Kristeva's definition of the abject as 'the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite', asserting that the marginalisation of the abject body protects the stability of the ruling culture and hardens the borders of the national subject, temporarily allaying fears of its dissolution (Kristeva 4). Butler asserts that 'the exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed requires the simultaneous production of abject beings, those who are not yet "subjects", but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject' (*Bodies* 3). Though she concurs with Kristeva's assertion that the abject poses a threat to the autonomy and coherency of subjects and

societies, Butler is more interested in social abjection than Kristeva and focuses primarily on 'lives [that] are not considered to be "lives" and whose materiality is understood not to matter' (Butler, "How Bodies Come to Matter" 281). In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, these are the immaterial lives of the worthless waste products of global capitalism and the 'collateral damage' of the War on Terror (203). The novel's protagonists embody traits of both Kristeva's and Butler's theories of the abject. As a perceived 'terrorist' threat to the (moral and racial) purity of America, Changez experiences social abjection through police inspection, verbal abuse, and increased surveillance and suspicion. Repeatedly rejected by Erica, it becomes clear to him that he is Erica's cast-off. In addition, he is a site of hybridity and fluidity, and comes to identify with the bleeding maternal body, which is, according to Kristeva, abject. While the "Falling Man" is the abject body of *Falling Man*, Erica is the falling woman of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. If Erica is analogous with America, then Hamid indicates that America's attempt to secure borders and shore up sovereignty is a resolute failure that causes boundaries to collapse. Andrew Pepper notes that 'traditional accounts of sovereignty' are 'founded on a sacrosanct boundary between an ordered domestic realm and an anarchic international realm' (410).[59] Hamid unsettles these boundaries, depicting Erica's mission to protect herself from Changez and the impurities of the world — or the 'anarchic international realm' — as a protracted process of abjection that aggravates a self already in a state of crisis. As the deletion of 'Am' suggests, Erica lacks a self in various ways. She withers and wastes akin to a living corpse, an entity that Kristeva defines as the 'utmost of abjection' (4). When she finally vanishes into thin air, her corporeal boundaries completely disappear, and she comes to exist as a fluid entity living within Changez. The novel suggests that the abject is not solely an external threat or source of terror, contrary to Kristeva's claim. The subject is always already impure as it is stained by the abject blots and blemishes of others from its conception, which Changez comes to realise while tarrying with grief.

This chapter also draws on Butler's and Isabell Lorey's recent writings on precarity to examine *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*'s theorisation of abject bodies as potential political agents. In *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015) Butler asserts that 'those who find themselves in positions of radical exposure to violence, without basic political protections by forms of law, are not for that reason outside the political or deprived of all forms of agency' (79). Following Butler, Lorey, in *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious* (2015), explores the possibility of using precarity as an instrument of political change. As precarity

[59] For a more detailed discussion of traditional theorisations of sovereignty and the ways post-9/11 crime fiction undermines and reinforces them, see: Andrew Pepper, "Policing the Globe: State Sovereignty and the International in the Post-9/11 Crime Novel," *Modern Fiction Studies* 57.3 (2011): 401-24.

'always exists in relation to others', it is, Lorey writes, 'constantly linked to social and political possibilities of action' (100). One of the possibilities is the establishment of a 'community of care': a community that foregrounds 'our vulnerability' and 'our situated, partial and unfinished constitution within the weave of relationships in which we live' (Lorey, "Care Crisis" n.pag.). Whereas Cathy Caruth's trauma theory reduces the traumatised subject to a state of passivity — and situates 'memory entirely under the sign of post-traumatic melancholia' — Butler and Lorey consider the potential to turn socio-economic and political injuries into revolutionary possibilities (Luckhurst 210). Hamid shares Butler's and Lorey's interest in the possibility of forming new political assemblies from grief, maintaining hope that a recognition of human precariousness can engender a collective struggle against precarity and the exploitation of precarious life.

3. Erica: From American Dream to American Nightmare

Berlant asserts that the 'fantasy of the American Dream' is 'an important one to learn from', writing:

> A popular form of political optimism, it fuses private fortune with that of the nation: it promises that if you invest your energies in work and family-making, the nation will secure the broader social and economic conditions in which your labour can gain value and your life can be lived with dignity. (*Queen of America* 4)

Changez's dream of living the 'good life' and attachments to 'conventional good-life fantasies' — characterised by upward mobility, meritocracy, family-making, financial stability, and socio-economic opportunity — is partly why he forms such intense affective attachments to Erica (Berlant, *Cruel* 2). When he arrives in America, he adheres to the conventions of the American Dream narrative, with the (optimistic) view to fulfilling its promise of the good life. Changez admires Erica for the qualities Lahore once had: privilege, majesty, and splendour. Seeing her for the first time while holidaying in Athens, the seat of a fallen empire, he compares her, and the regality she radiates, to the female Queen of the animals: the 'lioness: strong, sleek, and invariably surrounded by her pride' (24). Changez is instantly attracted to her alluring 'presence, an uncommon *magnetism*', and soon she becomes the embodiment of his American Dream (24; emphasis in original). When she invites him to taste the temptations of the Dream and enjoy the pleasures of the good life, he eagerly accepts. Dining with Erica and her family in their luxury apartment, he remarks that he is entering 'the very same social class that [his] family [is] falling out of in Lahore' (97). Although he had agonised over his sartorial choice — due in part to his fallen familial privilege — he notes that Erica had not been as 'preoccupied with issues of dress

selection as I had been', as her social status carries with it a degree of self-assuredness (50). His belief that Erica 'vouches for [his] worthiness', by parading him around the stylish social sphere of Manhattan, temporarily (and quite paradoxically) allays his insecurities about his inferiority (85). He boasts: 'this was how my life was *meant* to be, that it had in some way been inevitable that I should end up rubbing shoulders with the truly wealthy in such exalted settings' (97; emphasis in original). In his eyes, Erica unlocks the key to his own version of Manifest Destiny: his destiny to live the life of wealth and abundance his family once had.

Beneath the surface, Erica is torn apart by a loss that predates the attacks:

> The destruction of the World Trade Center had, as she had said, churned up old thoughts that had settled in the manner of sediment to the bottom of a pond; now the waters of her mind were murky with what previously had been ignored. (94)

Erica is neither resilient nor traumatised. Although she is 'haunted' after the 9/11 attacks, melancholia is the precondition of this fragile entity of America (92). In the wake of '9/11', her consciousness becomes flooded by 'old thoughts' that had been buried deep within, especially the death of Chris, which, Changez believes, 'made her aware of impermanence and mortality' for the first time (129). Anna Hartnell argues that 'Erica fixates on the evidence of her own mortality — Chris — by investing in a melancholic stance that refuses the act of mourning' ("Moving through America" 344). Indeed, in the weeks, months, and years after Chris' death, Erica exhibits classic signs of melancholia. In his 1917 essay "Mourning and Melancholia", Freud defines melancholia as a form of pathological, incomplete mourning for lost objects, places, or ideals. Incapable of acknowledging the reality of loss and relinquishing affective attachments to the lost other, the melancholic subject 'knows whom he has lost but not what he has lost in [the lost object]' (Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" 245). A subsequent 'turning away from reality takes place and a clinging to the object through the medium of a hallucinatory wishful psychosis' (243). Erica's melancholic state reveals the powerful extent to which strong affective attachments to others result in the loss of subjective boundaries. As Changez notes, Erica and Chris' relationship involved 'such a degree of commingling of identities that when Chris died, Erica felt she had lost herself', while Erica herself states, 'I kind of miss home, too. Except my home was a guy with long, skinny fingers' (104; 32). Chris provided Erica with the comforts of a home, such as a sense of security and belonging, and so when he died, she became 'broken', emphasising the dislocation and disunity at the heart of America (59).

The novel nuances Freud's characterisation of the melancholic subject. Whilst Freud contends that the melancholic 'hide[s] the weakness of their own nature', Erica reveals (and

exacerbates) her own weakness ("Mourning and Melancholia" 245). Building on Freud's theory of melancholia, Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok postulate that the melancholic subject 'fantasise[s] swallowing (or having swallowed) that which has been lost', adding that, 'failing to feed itself on words to be exchanged with others, the mouth absorbs in fantasy all or part of a person' (126; 128). As Erica has 'stopped talking to people' and 'stopped eating' since Chris' death, she has failed to 'feed' her mouth, so to speak (68). She does, however, divulge details about her disordered psychological and physical state to Changez:

> My mind starts to go in circles, thinking and thinking, and then I can't sleep. And once a couple of days go by, if you haven't slept, you start to get sick. You can't eat. You start to cry. It just feeds on itself. (117)

These symptoms signal her desire to 'swallow' and preserve the lost other in a psychic 'crypt' within the self (Abraham and Torok 130). By incorporating Chris, or rather his lifeless shadow, into the structure of her embodied psyche, Erica subconsciously 'feeds' on the latter and herself. His death becomes ungrievable not in the Butlerian sense, but in the sense that it cannot be grieved because he is still 'alive enough' to Erica, buried within what Abraham and Torok call a 'secret tomb inside the subject' (Hamid, *Reluctant* 151; Abraham and Torok 130). Experiencing 'things that were stronger and more meaningful than the things she could experience with the rest' of those around her, she retreats from the lived present, dwelling instead in an imagined past (151). She is no longer an American Dream but an American Nightmare: less a strong and alluring empress than an isolated shell of her former self.

Several critics have read Chris as an allegory of a post-9/11 resurgence of US neo-colonial power. Hartnell asserts that Chris embodies a Christopher Columbus-styled America as his name recalls 'not only Europe's Christian roots but also Christopher Columbus' encounter with the Americas', while Margaret Scanlan asserts that Erica's fixation with Chris symbolises America's post-9/11 determination to 'look back' to myths of American dominance (Hartnell, "Moving through America" 343; Scanlan 266). Hartnell and Scanlan are right to point out the pervasive presence of colonial and Christian rhetoric in the state's narrative of the attacks and their aftermath. Speaking from the pulpit of the National Cathedral on September 13th, 2001, Bush asserted that the US now had a responsibility 'to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil' ("Prayer and Remembrance" n.pag.). In a revealing interview with Bob Woodward in 2002, he claimed that American values of freedom and liberty — which had apparently incensed the terrorists to the point of attack — are 'God-given values. These aren't United States-created values' (131). Following this logic, to spread American values is to spread the word of God. Accordingly, state officials and US soldiers were recast as 'civil' Christian missionaries who would save souls

from what Attorney General John Ashcroft called the barbaric 'savage' forces threatening the civilized world (n.pag.). Declaring that 'the United States will use this moment of opportunity to extend the benefits of freedom across the globe', Bush framed the neo-imperialist impulse of the War on Terror as a Christian civilizing mission, granting state officials a license to flout international laws and human rights (Bush, "National Security Strategy" n.pag.). As Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton note, Bush's War had an 'imperialist agenda inextricably entwined with the history of neoliberal globalisation and America's place within it' (14). The intersection of neo-colonialism with state-sponsored violence was clearly demonstrated in the now infamous *New York Times* article in which Ron Suskind reports a conversation he had with a 'senior adviser to Bush' during the summer of 2002. In the interview, Suskind's interviewee scoffs at concerns about the moral justification and accountability of US foreign policy, declaring: 'we're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality' (n.pag.). Adopting the historical-revisionist and cultural-imperialist strategies of colonial conquest, the Bush administration created a 'reality' where the US is an empire moulding the world in God's image, setting moral standards, spreading God-given American values to all, and bringing justice to enemies.

Whilst the resurgence of US colonial power is notable, Scanlan's argument that Erica is nostalgic for a former era of colonial dominance is less persuasive. Erica presents Chris as a figure of childish innocence rather than a laudable figure of power and dominance. Their relationship was one of collaboration and shared (his)stories:

> [they] had grown up together—in facing apartments, children the same age with no siblings—and were best friends well before their first kiss [...] they used to spend hours at home reading [European comic books] and making their own: Chris drawing, Erica writing. (31-32)

There is a sense of symmetry between Erica and Chris: from the 'facing apartments' they live in to their shared lack of siblings to their co-creation of comics. In contrast to the gendered power relations of colonialism, Erica is not forcibly bound to Chris. If Chris is to be read as an allegory of Christian-colonial power, then it is partly because Changez projects his own repressed anxieties onto him. When Erica tells Changez that she 'feel[s] haunted, y'know?', she does not realise the extent to which Changez knows how it feels to be 'haunted' by (colonial) phantoms of the past and present (92). Changez's scathing description of the 'illiterate barbarians' who invade[d] and colonise[d] America' paradoxically betrays his insecurities about his own inferiority to his 'rival', Chris (38; 93). Chris is Changez's Other: he is a white, wealthy, Christian American and (requited) lover of Erica, whilst Changez is a post-colonial, (secular) Muslim from a formerly

privileged family. Whilst Erica believes she found a home within Chris, Changez considers Chris a cancerous growth, which spreads, mutates, and annihilates like the colonial power he represents.

Changez's bitter resentment toward Chris can be mapped onto Frantz Fanon's theorisation of the native-settler relationship. Fanon explains that 'when their glances meet he [the settler] ascertains bitterly, always on the defensive, "They want to take our place." It is true, for there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler's place' ("Concerning Violence" 81). Changez wishes to occupy the place of supremacy Chris occupies in Erica's life, the extent to which is painfully evident in Changez's awkward sexual encounter with Erica. As her 'body had rejected' his on previous occasions, Changez finally asks Erica to 'pretend I am [Chris]' (103; 120). In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) Fanon speaks of the White man's inscription on the black body, explaining that there is not a neat division between 'black skin' and 'white masks' but a doubling and a dissembling image of being in at least two places at once. Whilst Fanon theorises the 'black man who wants to turn his race white', Changez is a brown man who wishes to turn white (*Black Skin* 110-11). Changez's wish to become what Erica imagines Chris to be is, effectively, a wish to be the product of Erica's (white) imagination and purist fantasies. Granting his request, she imagines his brown body clothed in a white mask and finally opens herself to him. In that moment Changez feels neither privileged nor prized but '*possessed*', most likely by Chris the colonial phantom, whose presence looms over him (120; emphasis in original). Although Changez sought to invert the roles in the native-settler, occupied-coloniser relationship, he realises that it can only take place if he is willing to be the product of a white fantasy. Begging to be seen as a white man who is neither fully alive nor dead, Changez is willing to sacrifice his subjectivity to become one with Erica. Thus, his affective investment in America can be read as an example of Berlant's notion of cruel optimism: Changez's affective attachment to the Dream he ardently desires is 'actually an obstacle to [his] own flourishing' as it facilitates self-degradation and erasure (*Cruel* 1).

Erica also participates in a process of self-erasure, transforming from a 'vivid confident woman' into a 'pale, nervous creature who could almost have been a stranger' (117). Embracing 'the paradox at the heart of Sigmund Freud's *Unheimlichkeit*', Erica becomes uncanny in the Freudian sense, 'the form of something familiar unexpectedly arising in a strange and unfamiliar context' (Jeanniard du Dot n.pag.; Royle 1). Following this definition, to experience something or someone as *unheimlich* or uncanny is to recognise something strangely familiar that had previously been suppressed. Uncanniness is also experienced when the wholesomeness of the

domestic sphere, the paragon of familiarity and homeliness, is lost or torn apart. Changez recognises in the fragile, frail and uncanny Erica the suppressed reality of precarity that ravages his homeland and family. Spreading 'God-given' Christian American values through democratization by force, the US reduced the occupied people of Iraq, Afghanistan, and those in neighbouring countries — such as Pakistan — to objects of colonial conquest and possession. While Erica is haunted by Chris, the spectre of colonialism, Pakistan is 'layered like a sedimentary plain with the accreted history of invaders from the Aryans to the Mongols to the British' (8). With the onset of the War on Terror, the threat of another invasion looms large. Changez notes that his family 'resides within commuting distance of a million or so hostile troops who could, at any moment, attempt a full-scale invasion' (144-45). Erica, meanwhile, is 'going through a bad patch', reflecting that 'it hasn't been like this since the first time, after Chris died' (117). Both Changez's native homeland and Erica, with whom he feels 'at home', experience a simultaneous resurgence of repressed ghosts (81).

Assessing, rather than admiring, Erica, Changez notes:

> She was gaunt, her flesh seeming almost bruised where it passed over the bones of her face, and she glowed with something not unlike the fervour of the *devout* [...] She looked like someone who was about to complete the month of fasting and had been too consumed by prayer and reading of the holy book to give sufficient thought to the nightly meal. (152; emphasis in original)

Although Erica is intimately bound to Chris, she is not perceived as Chris-tian. Whilst her failure to eat is symptomatic of melancholic incorporation, Changez interprets it instead as a preparatory ritual for the 'holy month' of Ramadan. Notably, the Arabic word 'Islam has two meanings [in English]: "submission" and "peace"' (Nigosian xv). Erica's faithful, if not fundamentalist, adherence to Islamic rituals is interpreted as an act of submission to a higher power. Subconsciously merging his Islamic heritage with Erica's psychic cannibalism, Changez presents the 'diminished' Erica as the personification of the diminishing state of his homeland (116). Changez's boss describes Pakistan as a nation that is 'wasting away', just as Erica gradually withers and wastes until she becomes 'emaciated' (110; 159). Erica is not only 'otherworldly' in the sense that she is evocative of repressed ghosts, but also because her disembodiment and eventual fall into abjection are uncanny reminders of Changez's 'otherworld': his precarious home and family in Pakistan (101). Although her disappearance into a 'dangerous nostalgia' coincides with post-9/11 America's longing to retrieve a mythical past, it also triggers the return of repressed memories of his family's toxic nostalgia (130). Precarity leaves his family with nothing but a tattered social repute, wasted opportunities, and nostalgia for a lost precious purity. As Changez

states, '*Nostalgia* was their crack cocaine [...] and my childhood was littered with the consequences of their addiction: unserviceable debts, squabbles over inheritances, the odd alcoholic or suicide' (81; emphasis in original). These suicides and squabbles are not exceptional traumas, but marginalised stories of abjection that 'littered' Changez's youth and sullied his childhood innocence. Although Erica does not share the financially precarious position of Changez's family, she is addicted to Chris and the purity of the imagined past they shared together, the very opposite of Changez's past. Purity is an ideal Erica shares with Pakistan, 'the land of the pure' where purity 'is to be valued and impurity to be avoided, resisted, expelled' (Hamid, "In the Land of the Pure" n.pag.). Erica is not just an allegory of America, therefore, but also the uncanny double of two ostensibly diametrically opposed nations: America and Pakistan.

Mahmutovic argues that 'Changez's desire to help Erica is a desire to help America heal after 9/11' (9). His desire to help, however, extends beyond America to those who, like his family, are haunted by colonial phantoms. Noting that Erica has become 'emaciated, detached, and so lacking in *life*', Changez becomes 'pained' and 'wonders what [he] can do to help her' (159; emphasis in original). He attempts to help her, tentatively, through the growth of intimacy, explaining to his American interlocutor that 'the best way of doing this was to come close to touching her' and 'then to wait for her to become aware of my physical presence' (99). Emphasising his corporeal presence, he attempts to detach Erica from a disembodied ghost and make her present to the living. Changez's antidote to nostalgic longing depends on mutual affection, mutual recognition, and dialogue between both parties. This is where his relationship with her falters. In her quest to restore a lost (imagined) purity, Erica is neither open nor responsive to others. Instead, she locks herself away in a figurative ivory tower, where she is emotionally and physically unavailable to Changez, unless, of course, he is wearing a white mask. Whilst he encourages Erica to share her (life)story with him, she cannot engage with the world beyond the comic-book world she co-wrote with Chris. Changez tells his American interlocutor that 'she did not answer when I rang and she did not respond to my messages', and, in the end, finally concedes that 'she had chosen not to be part of my story; her own had proven too compelling' (116; 189). Neelam Srivastava reads Changez's omission from Erica's narrative as an allegory of American exceptionalism, arguing that 'Erica has chosen to write a story without Changez in it, seeing her own trajectory as unique' (182). The insularity of her narrative is symptomatic of a failed imagination, a failure she shares with the creators of the dominant '9/11'

narrative. Stuck in the past, Erica cannot imagine a desirable present or future with Changez, the perceived Muslim Other.

Lindsay Anne Balfour contends that the novel uses the metaphor of an America in decline to suggest that America is effectively dying by its own hand: 'like Erica, America has been too buried in its own nostalgia to see a new world emerging' (214-15). Commenting on this nostalgia, Changez, with incredulity, remarks: 'America, too, was increasingly giving itself over to a dangerous nostalgia at that time. There was something undeniably retro about the flags and uniforms, about generals addressing cameras in war rooms and newspaper headlines', adding 'I was struck by its determination to look *back* [...] scrambling to don the costumes of another era was apparent' (130-31; emphasis in original). The nostalgic and 'old-fashioned quality' of this discourse served many purposes: it reasserted 'the virtues of nation and community' with 'unashamed flag-waving patriotism', rousing feelings that 'Americans, under attack, were one again' while boosting 'pride in the American way of life, its values, its culture, and its democracy' (Smelser 270). *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* frames Erica's nostalgic quest for a lost era of innocence and purity as a suicide mission. She confines her existence to the walls of a mental institution, removing Changez and the rest of the world from the arc of her vision. During her time there, she refuses medication and the advice of her doctor, who tells her not to 'think about [Chris] so much' (68). Erica's refusals suggest that she does not wish to relinquish Chris but, rather, to maintain (if not strengthen) her affective attachment to him. She identifies increasingly with him, wasting away in hospital just as he did in his dying days. When Changez visits her there, he is greeted by a nurse who informs him that Erica feels 'better in a place like this, separated from the rest of us, where people [can] live in their minds without feeling bad about it' (151). Erica does not aspire to conform to social norms or the conventions of medico-psychiatric measurements of 'recovery', but to inhabit the realm of the imaginary. This, she believes, is the only way of recovering a lost (imaginary) purity. Although she is suffering from a deep bout of melancholia, she is not a passive victim or agentless being. Ankhi Mukherjee asserts that 'Erica, who has developed a melancholic attachment to her dead lover, cannot withstand the powerful nostalgia that 9/11 invokes' (n.pag.). Mukherjee disregards Changez's indication that Erica *can* withstand the nostalgia Chris's (pre-9/11) death invokes. According to Changez, Erica's dangerous nostalgia is 'one from which only she could choose whether or not to return' (129). Erica chooses the latter and seeks solace in imagined memories to escape the reality of human mortality and impurity. Her wish to reclaim the purity she found in Chris is ultimately a death wish as she becomes 'sickly white' and 'lacking in *life*' (127; 159; emphasis in original). Her wish

is finally fulfilled when she sinks under the surface of the death-filled 'waters of her mind', plunging herself into the murky depths of the Hudson River, a space of abjection and waste. When she vanishes without trace, leaving nothing but her clothes 'on a rocky bluff overlooking the Hudson', her melancholic incorporation of Chris is complete (163; 185). Erica, like Chris, now exists as a disembodied ghost.

4. Grief and Change(z)

Changez travels from Pakistan to America to study at Princeton University, a place that 'made everything possible for [him]' (16). After graduation he finds employment at Underwood Samson shortly before September 2001. His time at the company — especially in the context of the US-led War on Terror that develops during his short tenure at the firm — exposes the unapologetically dangerous side of the United States. America and the US are two different entities in the novel: the US (as embodied by Underwood Samson) is a dominant force that exploits and precaritises others through capitalism; America (as embodied by Erica) is insular, fragile, and self-destructive. While Erica practices a fundamentalist devotion to Chris, Underwood Samson practices a form of fundamentalism that operates under the auspices of global capitalism, the 'primary means by which the American empire exercise[s] its power' (177). The firm's winning formula is to '[f]ocus on the fundamentals', a practical yet potent principle indoctrinated into each employee from workday one (112). Signing the employment contract is thus synonymous with selling oneself to the company's motto of 'meritocracy' (39). Compared to an 'army of clean-shaven youngsters' dressed in 'battle fatigues', Changez and his colleagues are exhausted soldiers of Underwood Samson and its capitalist empire (148; 43). The military motif is not only mirrored in the staff's army-like exterior but also in their rhetorical inflection. Jim, Changez's boss, reproaches Changez like a sergeant reprimanding his marine: 'In wartime soldiers don't really fight for their flags, Changez. They fight for their friends, their buddies. Their team' (174). Underwood Samson countervails Erica's nostalgia as it remains focused on productivity, fundamentals, and 'the task of shaping the future with little regard for the past' (132). The firm's business policy foregrounds the neo-colonial practices of US capitalism and US foreign policy. Through Underwood Samson and Chris, the novel indicates that neo-colonialism — in its many disguises as cultural, economic, and psychological oppression — still lives on even though direct colonial rule may have disappeared.

In an interview for *Paris Review*, DeLillo states that 'military leaders, totalitarian leaders, terrorists, men dazed by power' have seized authorial control of the world narrative ("Art of Fiction" 101). *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* adds multi-national corporate capitalists to DeLillo's list of power-dazed men, theorising US corporate capitalism as a global enterprise and form of neo-imperialism. In DeLillo's view, terrorists, such as the jihadists of *Falling Man*, 'reduce the world to a plot', and, in Hamid's eyes, financial fundamentalism reduces the world to a 'micro-universe' (DeLillo, "Ruins" n.pag.; Hamid, *Reluctant* 165). The firm reduces the world to a plot by excluding the 'lives the [American] empire thought nothing of overturning for its own gain' from US frames of recognition and concealing the broader geopolitical and social implications of its capitalist conquests (173). Such reductive frames render Underwood Samson employees oblivious to the vices of US-led capitalism and the existence of its ungrievable victims. Underwood Samson demands '*single-minded* attention to financial detail, teasing out the true nature of those drivers that determine an asset's value', and so its employees are expected to focus on the minutiae of financial value rather than its devaluation of human life (112; emphasis added). Changez admits that 'our job required a degree of commitment that left one with rather limited time for such distractions' as 'the compassionate pangs I felt for soon-to-be-redundant workers' (112). Here he points out the dialectical conflict between counting and accountability, between finance and precarious life. Although Underwood Samson counts and calculates the risks and rewards of business management through capitalist frameworks, it does not account for its devaluation and precarisation of human life.

During the early stages of his financial career, Changez admires the prestige and dominance of his idol and executes its fundamentalist practices with aplomb. Initially, his longing to reclaim his lost wealth and privilege is stronger than his concern for those living in a state of precarity. Like Erica, who only has eyes for Chris, he turns a blind eye to the reality of precarity produced by global capitalism, believing that selling himself to Underwood Samson will banish festering feelings of inferiority. He is easily seduced by Jim's sales pitch: 'We believe in being the best. You were the best candidates at the best schools in the country. That's what got you here' (39). With his bruised ego now massaged, Changez gloats that he is 'something special' (5). Unaware that he has become a slave to the Dream, he considers himself especially chosen to serve his master. Berlant notes that 'a citizen of the Dream can feel firmly placed in a zone of protected value while on the move in an arc of social mobility' if the 'vulnerability of personal existence to the instability of capitalism and the concretely unequal forms and norms of national life', and global life, are 'suppressed, minimised, or made to seem exceptional' (*Queen of*

America 4). Berlant's assertion is applicable to Changez, who feels that the mantle of Underwood Samson will protect him from 'rare cases of abuse' against Muslims (107). Wrapped in a white mask of exceptionalism, he tries to convince himself that such cases 'were unlikely ever to affect me because such things invariably happened, in America as in all countries, to the hapless poor, not to Princeton graduates earning eighty thousand dollars a year' (107-08). Although Underwood Samson offers Changez (temporary) financial security, it lures him into a false sense of emotional security that only exacerbates pre-existing insecurities and his devaluation of self.

Changez temporarily leaves America behind while on business in Valparaíso, Chile. Reconnecting with his literary heritage, he comes to evaluate his own value system more than the failing publishing house he is there to evaluate. Chile suffered its own '9/11' on September 11th, 1973: the coup d'état against the then Chilean President, Salvador Allende. In one of the defining events of the Cold War, the Chilean military and the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) worked together to overthrow the first and only democratically elected socialist government. Although the event was arguably 'more profound' than the 2001 terrorist attacks on America, 'very few of the eight billion people alive today could remember or would be able to identify what happened in Chile' (Dorfman 39). The construction of '9/11' as a singular American 'trauma' devalues the historical significance of Chile's '9/11', as well as its victims.[60] It is apt, therefore, that Changez returns from Chile with a more critical perspective of the disproportionate valuation of human life and the privilege afforded to grievable victims of America's '9/11'. He tells his American interlocutor that he did not know that 'dying was confined to the limited geography of what would come to be called Ground Zero', such that he and his family in Pakistan 'waited as our September ticked by — little noticed by the media in your country, which was focused at that time on the first anniversary of the attacks on New York and Washington' (84; 202). Although there are more victims of US terror — whether in Chile, Iraq, or Afghanistan — they are not as widely recognised as US victims of terror. Enraged by this realisation, Changez offers a vociferous critique of the 'War on Terror', which, he contends, was a war 'defined to refer only to the organised and politically motivated killing of civilians by killers *not* wearing the uniforms of killers' (202; emphasis in original). Changez, ashamedly, realises that he too has been complicit with the occupation of these civilians as a soldier of Underwood Samson (US).

[60] For a more detailed discussion of the significance of the Chile setting in the novel, see: Albert Braz, "9/11, 9/11: Chile and Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 42.3 (2015): 241-56.

When the invasion of Afghanistan was underway, Senator John McCain published an article in the *Wall Street Journal* entitled "No Substitute for Victory: War is Hell. Let's Get on with It", in which he urged the American public to '[s]hed a tear, and then get on with the business of killing our enemies as quickly as we can, and as ruthlessly as we must' (n.pag.). There was no time for deliberation or doubt; the nation had to accept that war, though costly, was the only option. Although Changez is not a US military soldier, he is a soldier of US capitalism, the 'primary means by which the American empire exercise[s] its power' (177). While invested in the business of war, the Bush administration stressed the need for the nation to invest in another venture: to return to their usual spending habits and resume the usual order of business (and the US market) as quickly as possible.[61] On his return to the White House, Bush stated that national resilience would be displayed on the global stage as soon as Americans returned to work: 'No question about it, this incident affected our economy, but the markets open tomorrow, people go back to work and we'll show the world' ("Remarks by the President upon Arrival" n.pag.). Reactivating the economy was framed as a patriotic duty that contributed to the fight against terrorism. Changez fulfils this duty as one of Underwood Samson's 'wartime soldiers', battling from the Homefront at the behest of his imperial master, much to the detriment of his kinsmen in Pakistan and neighbouring nations (174).

While in Chile, the head of the publishing house, Juan-Bautista (John the Baptist), asks Changez whether or not it troubles him 'to make [a] living by disrupting the lives of others' and proceeds with a warning from history (171). The janissaries, Juan-Bautista explains, were Christian boys 'captured by the Ottomans and trained to be soldiers in a Muslim army, at that time the greatest army in the world' (172). Changez identifies with a version of the janissary tale tailor made to fit his own life story:

> Juan-Bautista's words plunged me into a deep bout of introspection. I spent that night considering what I had become. There really could be no doubt: I was a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with a kinship to mine and was perhaps even colluding to ensure that my own country faced the threat of war [...] I had thrown in my lot with the men of Underwood Samson, with the officers of the empire, when all along I was predisposed to feel compassion for those, like Juan-Bautista, whose lives the empire thought nothing of overturning for its own gain. (173)

[61] For example, on September 12th, 2001 the then mayor of New York City, Rudy Giuliani, gave the following advice to Americans: 'go about a normal day, take the day as an opportunity to go shopping, be with your children, do things, get out, don't feel locked in' (n.pag.). See: "Giuliani, Go Shopping," *ABC News*; YouTube, 12 Sept. 2001, 27 Nov. 2018 <https://youtu.be/6jx1QZskGFg>.

Juan-Bautista performs a secular baptism that helps [Changez] to '*push back the veil behind which all this had been concealed*' (178; emphasis in original). When he realises that 'in this constant striving to realise a financial future, no thought was given to the critical personal and political issues that affect one's emotional present', his 'blinders' come off, leaving him 'dazzled and rendered immobile by the sudden broadening of [his] arc of vision' (165). While *Falling Man* reveals the power of embodied perception, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* theorises sustained reflection on the depth of embodied feeling as an alternative to US frames of recognition. Plunged into a 'deep bout of introspection', which renders him 'immobile' in a suspended present, he goes in search of his soul — a search distinct from his pursuit of soulless fantasies of the good life (173; 165). While (pre)occupied by Underwood Samson, Changez willingly sold his soul to serve as a soldier in its neo-colonialist mission. Drawing on Fanon, Arnold Itwaru notes that colonisers create inferiority complexes to 'place people in positions of degradation', with the aim of convincing them that '[d]elieverance comes through admiring whiteness and "all things good that come with being white"' (Itwaru qtd. in Alatas 31). Suffering from such an inferiority complex, Changez wore a white mask to play the part of Chris the coloniser, while attempting to 'act and speak, as much as [his] dignity would permit, more like an *American*' during his time as a servant of the empire (74; emphasis in original). With the benefit of hindsight, he realises he had become a stranger to himself, admitting that he looked at the world through 'the eyes of a foreigner, and not just any foreigner, but that particular type of entitled and unsympathetic American' (141). As 'acting "more like the white man" is the desire for whiteness at the EXPENSE of blackness', Changez's pretentious performances of white American men are processes of abjection or 'lactification', which attempt to expunge racial impurity (Itwaru qtd. in Alatas 31). This desire is cruelly optimistic, as it ultimately requires self-erasure.

Michael S. Koppisch asserts that Changez's 'success' with Underwood Samson and Erica fails to instil in him 'any lasting gratification at the attainment of the object of his desire. On the contrary, success produces rather a deep sense of loss, emptiness' (129). Changez, however, never fully succeeded in attaining the objects of his desire, as he can only live the good life of material wealth and socio-economic privilege if he is both a willing slave to US capitalism and veiled in a white mask that shields Erica's eyes from the perceived impurity of his brown body. The good-life fantasy is therefore as empty at the core as the emaciated and disembodied Erica, as its realisation depends on ruthless competition and (self-)abasement. In a period of sustained introspection, Changez finally realises the cruelty of his optimistic attachment to Underwood

Samson and the cruelty the firm — and US capitalism — has inflicted on ungrievable lives living in chronic conditions of precarity. His (self-)reflection on grief and secular baptism mark the birth of a new vision and value system with a refined sense of the value of the 'good life' and 'ungrievable' lives. Ronnie Janoff-Bulman and Andrea Berger assert that 'when the meaninglessness of the world becomes all too apparent, another type of meaning-making takes hold, that is associated with the creation of value in survivors' lives' (33). These grief scholars add that bereaved subjects create value through the process of reciprocal valuing: 'we value others who value us' (Janoff-Bulman and Berger 37). Changez, a financial valuator, re-evaluates life but not through a process of reciprocal valuing. During his occupation at Underwood Samson, he adhered to the value system of his master, which depends on exploiting resources and commodifying others for financial profit. Tarrying with grief after the death of his 'personal American Dream', he begins to appreciate the intrinsic value of the ungrievable waste products of global capitalism and the War on Terror, as well as America's abject cast off: the Muslim 'terrorist' Other (106).

The Reluctant Fundamentalist indicates that the racialised stereotype of the Muslim 'terrorist' Other existed before the 9/11 terrorist attacks.[62] Changez recalls his response to a Princeton peer's question about future aspirations: 'I said I hoped one day to be the dictator of an Islamic republic with nuclear capability; the others appeared shocked, and I was forced to explain that I had been joking' (33). Although uttered in jest, his reply indicates that Americans had already considered the Muslim Other a source of terror. Existing suspicion grew at an exponential rate after the terrorist attacks. A 2002 Human Rights Watch report stated that the ferocious backlash against peoples and institutions presumed to be South Asian, Middle Eastern, Arab and/or Muslim sparked a nationwide wave of hate crimes.[63] The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) reported 1,717 incidents of backlash discrimination against Muslims

[62] For more expansive discussions of Muslims in America and the West before and after the terrorist attacks, see: Evelyn Alsultany, *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation After 9/11* (London and New York: New York University Press, 2012); Erik Bleic, ed. *Muslims and the State in the Post-9/11 West* (London and New York, Routledge, 2010); Jocelyne Cesari, ed. *Muslims in the West After 9/11: Religion, Politics and Law* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009); Katherine Pratt Ewing, *Being and Belonging: Muslims in the United States Since 9/11* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2011); Svenja Frank, ed. *9/11 in European Literature: Negotiating Identities against the Attacks and What Followed* (Göttingen: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Amaney Jamal and Nadine Naber, eds. *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2008); Lori Peek, *Behind the Backlash: Muslim Americans After 9/11* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011).

[63]The 2002 Human Rights Watch Report reported a global backlash against refugees and migrants from the Middle East and South Asia. See further: "United States 'We Are Not The Enemy': Hate Crimes Against Arabs, Muslims, and Those Perceived to be Arab or Muslim After September 11," *Human Rights Watch* 14.6 (2002): 1-41.

— ranging from verbal taunts to airport profiling — from September 11th, 2001 to February 2002.[64] There are several examples of incidents such as these in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Changez becomes the 'subject of whispers and stares' due to the negative connotations associated with a beard 'worn on a man of [his] complexion' (148). He suffers 'verbal abuse by complete strangers' in the streets of New York, and, on one occasion, is confronted by a man who makes a 'series of unintelligible noises — *"akhala-malakhala*"' (148; 133). On this occasion, the man presses his face 'alarmingly close' to Changez's, shouting: '"Fucking Arab"' (134). Meanwhile, rumours swirl regarding 'Pakistani cabdrivers being beaten within an inch of their lives', as well as 'tales of the discrimination Muslims were beginning to experience in the business world—stories of rescinded job offers and groundless dismissals' (107; 134). With the implementation of the 2001 USA PATRIOT Act came the curtailment of certain civil liberties, especially those of Muslim Americans.[65] While the 'FBI was raiding mosques, shops, and even people's houses' and 'Muslim men were disappearing, perhaps into shadowy detention centers for questioning or worse', state officials, Changez asserts, were using bully tactics to intimidate the government of Pakistan (107). He notes that 'the situation in Pakistan continued to be precarious; it was rumored that India was acting with America's connivance, both countries seeking through the threat of force to coerce our government into changing its policies' (169). Changez is a 'lover of America' but his love is unrequited, while his homeland is embroiled in an abusive power relationship with the land he admires and to which he longs to belong.

Feeling rejected by both Erica and America, Changez states contemptuously:

> As a society, you were unwilling to reflect upon the shared pain that united you with those who attacked you. You retreated into myths of your own difference, assumptions of your own superiority. And you acted out these beliefs on the stage

[64] The FBI reported that the number of anti-Muslim hate crimes rose from twenty-eight in 2000 to 481 in 2001, a seventeen-fold increase. According to the same report, in 2001-2002 CAIR received 525 complaints, a 43% rise over the previous year and an increase of almost seven times since 1995-1996, when CAIR first began to monitor discrimination experienced by members of the Muslim community. Similarly, complaints that charged local and federal government agencies with violations of civil liberties doubled, from 10% in 2000-2001 to 19% the following year. The largest number of complaints (42%) involved profiling incidents at airports or those at the hands of government agencies, especially the FBI and local law enforcement authorities. These incidents included security-centred scrutiny, public humiliation, raids by government agents on Muslim homes and businesses, detention and interrogation of Muslims, as well as the closure of several Muslim charities. The report states that there is close to an eight-fold increase in incidents reported against the Muslim community, compared to the number of incidents following the Oklahoma City bombing in April 19, 1995 with those after September 11th, 2001. See further: "The September 11 Backlash," *Human Rights Watch* 2002, 1 Jan 2015 <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/usahate/usa1102-04.htm>.

[65] The 2001 USA PATRIOT Act is an acronym for Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism.

> of the world, so that the entire planet was rocked by the repercussions of your tantrums, not least my family, now facing war thousands of miles away. (190)

Critical of humanity's brief respite from US-led violence, Changez argues that America, having been attacked, should have been more open to the prospect of spending time contemplating the grief of others, especially the grief of the Muslim 'terrorist' Other. Instead, grief was co-opted and commodified by patriotic displays and 'trauma kitsch', which erased the 'socio-economic contexts of oppression, victimization, and violence' that led to the attacks (Rothe, *Popular* 45). Changez is unnerved by the apparent omnipresence of the American flag, which 'invaded New York after the attacks; it was everywhere. Small flags stuck on toothpicks featured in the shrines; stickers of flags adorned windshields and windows; large flags fluttered from buildings' (90). He interprets this unabashed flag-waving as a declaration of war, asserting that it 'seemed to proclaim: *We are America* [...] *the mightiest civilization the world has ever known; you have slighted us; beware our wrath*' (90; emphasis in original). Changez's interpretation has merit, as the national news channel CNN aired a special news bulletin on the evening of September 11th, 2001 with the headline 'America Under Attack' scrawled on the screen and an image of the American flag. Three days later, the channel aired a similar news segment entitled 'America's New War' (qtd. in Cavedon 161). The initial description of the events as an 'attack' and later as an act of 'war' reflected a linguistic shift in the state's narrative. In his address to the nation on September 11th, Bush referred to the events as 'terrorist acts' and 'terrorist attacks', but, by September 12th, they were 'more than acts of terror. They were acts of war' ("Photo Opportunity" n.pag.). This overnight transformation is just one of many quick turns the state's version of events would take. In "Ruins", DeLillo observes the accelerated time of the post-9/11 moment, when pre-emptive military action was taken in a matter of months and grief banished within days. This observation is not lost on Changez, who states that 'humanity's respite was brief: six months later the invasion of Iraq would be under way' and 'the likelihood of a catastrophe that could have claimed tens of millions of lives receded' (202). He argues that a wounded America should empathise with those who suffer from the 'repercussions' of its violent outbursts and myths of exceptionalism. Significantly, this is prompted by sustained engagement with grief and its revelatory insight into the relationality and precariousness of the embodied self.

Changez grieves Erica's complete submission to Chris and the simultaneous submission of Pakistan to occupying forces. He recalls Jim's speculation that '[s]omething's eating at you. If I had to guess, I'd say it's your Pakistani side' and later confesses, 'I could not bring myself to converse or to eat' (136; 146). Both are symptoms of the psychic cannibalism suffered by the melancholic subject who swallows the loss and fails to digest the reality of death. Although

somewhat in denial — due in part to Erica's disembodied death — Changez accepts that she is no longer a physical presence in his lived present. He is capable of articulating his experience to the American and tells him that 'waves of mourning washed over me' (195). His metaphorical submersion under water recalls his almost telepathic reading of 'the waters of [Erica's] mind [that] were murky' with melancholia (94). Changez's body is metaphorically plunged under 'waves of mourning', while Erica's body appears to have plunged literally into the depths of the Hudson River. The physicality of the experiential connections between Erica and Changez demonstrates that the body is the locus of 'shared pain', contrary to the medico-psychiatric (and Cartesian) theorisation of grief as an exclusively psychological process. Changez's experience of grief reveals that consciousness is inextricably tied to embodiment (the ontological state of being and having a body), both his own and Erica's.

Sharing *Falling Man*'s interest in open bodies, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* theorises the potential ethical implications of openness to each other. Where *Falling Man* demonstrates that currents of affect traverse the permeable surface of bodies, sometimes involuntarily, to reveal an 'awful openness' that cannot be willed away, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* explores how the chiasmic structure of affect exposes the contingency of the experiential realm of being. Lacking a 'stable *core*', Changez's subjectivity becomes fluid and fluctuates in accordance with the internal rhythms of his body (168; emphasis in original). Changez explains that his embodied response to Erica's death 'pull[s] and tug[s] at [his] moods', controlled 'by an internal cycle that was almost *tidal* [...] I responded to the gravity of an invisible moon at my core' (195; emphasis in original). He experiences grief as a forceful movement, controlled not by an autonomous will, but by an 'internal cycle' over which he has no control. The forceful flushes and pulses of grief that move Changez invoke the myth that the phases of the moon cycle correspond to those of the female menstrual cycle, a cycle of abjection, death, and (re)birth. John Robbins explains that 'not only do the phases of women's menstrual cycles frequently correspond to the phases of the moon and the tides, they also correspond to different states of mind, different emotional states, and different ways of being' (109). Changez's menstrual cycle analogy suggests that the embodied experience of grief provides fertile ground for personal (and political) growth. In the resilience and recovery phase after the 9/11 attacks, expressions of '"wrong" emotions were linked to female bodies and "feminine emotions" (such as grief)', as they could be interpreted as signs that a 'soft America couldn't rise to the occasion of defending our nation' (Pason 103). The metaphorical castration of the Twin Towers disrupted dominant masculinist fictions of American impregnability. Susan Faludi contends that the state and media's obsession with masculinity after the attacks involved

an 'odd mix of national insecurity and domestic containment' and a 'fixation on restoring an invincible manhood by saving little girls' (13). Changez's female imagery also invokes the former myth of the female virgin land reconstituted in the masculine environments of the US. Together, these associations imply that Changez identifies with the permeable body of a bleeding woman, or more specifically: the body of Erica. Developing Butler's contention that one becomes 'beside oneself', the novel suggests that the affective experience of grief enables one to become *more* than oneself, as Changez shares America's pain even though he is its abject cast-off (*Precarious* 32).

In *Falling Man*, Lianne contacts her father through a channel of affect, and, in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez reaches Erica through the affective power of grief. His empathetic identification with her facilitates a 'process of osmosis', an indirect approach to penetrating 'the membrane with which she guarded her psyche' during her lifetime (160). The process of 'penetration' and 'osmosis' is a figurative form of impregnation, a process that emphasises the impure origin of embodied existence: the abject space of the womb, where the physical boundaries between self and (m)other do not yet exist. While self and (m)other are intricately tied together in the womb, Changez remains 'emotionally entwined' with Erica (195). Although her body is never found, she is entombed within Changez, where she comes to exist as a boundless presence through his preservation of affective ties. As with *Falling Man*'s Lianne, who realises that the porousness of embodied subjectivity facilitates a (re)union with the dead, Changez realises that his porous body leaves him contiguous with the world of the living and the dead. Whilst the 'commingling' of Chris and Erica is destructive, the commingling of Changez and Erica is an antidote to the lifelessness of purity, as it has the potential to conceive and develop new forms of being (104). Mahmutovic argues that the 'commingling of identities' is a 'willingness to change together' (12). It is not a conscious decision, however, but a consequence of the self's uncontrollable emotional entanglements with others. Changez can neither help himself from falling in love with Erica nor losing part of himself after her death. Developing Berlant's assertion that 'love always means non-sovereignty', Changez's persistent emotional attachment to Erica indicates that there is also no sovereign in grief ("On the Risk of a New Relationality" 9).

Despite his return to Pakistan, Changez is emotionally dislocated in the wake of Erica's death:

> I remained emotionally entwined with Erica, and I brought something of her with me to Lahore—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that I lost something of myself to her that I was unable to relocate in the city of my birth. (195)

While *Falling Man* demonstrates that affect transcends physical and spatial distances, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* creates new affective cartographies from grief. For Changez, and indeed Erica, feeling at home transcends the geographical confines of the nation in which one is born: home is found with/in others. The entanglement of America and Pakistan eschews the 'patterns of inclusion and exclusion' that define traditional theories of sovereignty, revealing the non-sovereignty and interdependency of the embodied subject (Walker 179). In her discussion of non-sovereignty, Berlant asserts that traditional conceptions of the individual as a sovereign self 'afford a militaristic and melodramatic view of individual agency by casting the human as most fully itself when assuming the spectacular posture of performative action' (*Cruel* 96). Sovereignty can therefore be understood as the performance of autonomous thought and action. Berlant asserts that 'chang[ing] something from within' and 'training in one's own incoherence' are characteristics of 'non-sovereignty' ("On the Risk of a New Relationality" 15-16). Changez's procreative commingling with Erica gives birth to a non-sovereign mode of being, based on both the incoherence of the self and other. Changez states:

> It is not always possible to restore one's boundaries after they have been blurred and made permeable by a relationship: try, as we might, we cannot reconstitute ourselves as the autonomous beings we previously imagined ourselves to be. Something of us is now outside, and something of the outside is now within us. (197)

The non-sovereign self does not conform to circumscribed boundaries between inside and outside, here and there, and self and other, and exceeds the confines of autonomous subjectivity. The situated relationality of the self implies that connectivity and separation are two inseparable aspects of selfhood, which are foregrounded in interpersonal relationships (and their loss). Therefore, the embodied subject can never exist as a separate or 'pure' entity as it is constantly changing, forever intermeshed in material, socio-political, and emotional relationships with others.

Significantly, Changez's name is a plural, a multiple, and an imperative in French. As his name suggests, he is changeable and, unlike Erica, he is willing to accept that impermanence and injury are unavoidable, realising that he cannot clad himself in 'armor of denial' (95). Although he grieves the death of Erica and his 'personal American dream', he realises that change is not only inevitable but necessary to imagine alternate existences and shared futures (106). Berlant and Lee Edelman contend that possibilities for change emerge from 'discovering and inhabiting disturbances in the relation between one's affects and one's imaginaries for action. That discovery is the site of potentially recontextualizing creativity' (89). For these theorists, no substantial change can occur without either a serious disruption to the conditions and 'genres for life' or a politics

of collective action. Accordingly, it is more productive to consider infrastructures and imaginaries that might make solidarity and thriving possible in the lived present, rather than investing in fantasies of a future that cannot materialise. Tarrying with grief, Changez adopts this strategy. Finding alternate affective genres, he stays attached to others (both dead and alive) to envision a more ethically engaged 'good life'. Using the modalities of non-sovereignty and relationality as the building blocks of his new version of the good life, he enacts the ethico-political change he wishes to see. Although Athena Athanasiou notes that a political subject is 'a figure typically understood through the apparatus of [a] self-contained sovereign subject [...] with masculinist undertones', Changez's feminised non-sovereign subjectivity is neither apolitical nor agentless (20). His calls for compassion and allusions to reproduction culminate in his creation of a community of care. While human life depends on the care of (m)others for survival, from its conception in the abject cocoon of the womb, Changez provides parental nourishment and a protective space for those living in spaces of abjection. Working as a University lecturer in Pakistan and acting as a 'mentor' to students, he offers a listening ear and practical advice 'not only on their papers and their rallies, but also on matters of the heart and a vast range of other topics—from drug rehabilitation and family planning to prisoners' rights and shelters for battered spouses' (204). He considers these individuals 'comrades', a term usually associated with Marxism, but one that Fanon and Paul Gilroy also use to refer to 'colonial and postcolonial folks' (*Reluctant* 205; Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* 311; Gilroy 56). Moved by the stories of these 'like-minded' '*well-wishers*', Changez is moved to act against neo-colonialist oppression and precarisation (205; emphasis in original).

Changez's provision of counsel and care is not confined to the walls of his office, as it extends into the public sphere, where it operates as a form of political activism. In *Notes*, Butler asks: 'are we to say that those who are excluded are simply unreal, disappeared, or that they have no being at all—shall they be cast off, theoretically, as the socially dead and the merely spectral?' (78). For Hamid and DeLillo, the answer is no. *Falling Man*'s abject artist stages a silent political protest as his physical presence in the public sphere makes visible the censored falling body. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the physical presence of Changez and his abject comrades in the public sphere challenges the frames determining who and what can rightfully appear. Changez organises 'demonstrations that the foreign press would later, when our gatherings grew to newsworthy size, come to label anti-American' (203). If the protests are perceived as anti-American, then it is because 'no country inflicts death so readily upon the inhabitants of other countries, frightens so many people so far away, as America', as Changez

informs television networks (207). Acutely aware of the oppressive phantoms of colonialism looming over his precarious homeland, he and his comrades stand in opposition to asymmetrical power relations and the logic of precarisation and oppression. Thus, their protests are not anti-American, but — like the novel itself — 'anti-precarity', as Darda notes (115).

Recalling a protest against the American Ambassador's visit, Changez states: 'we were charged at by large numbers of uniformed and plain-clothed police. Scuffles broke out, I intervened in one, and as a result I spent the night in prison, nursing a bloody lip and bruised knuckles' (204). Whilst DeLillo's abject artist is arrested for his violation of censorship laws and public apparitions, the collective presence of Changez and his comrades in the public sphere constitutes an embodied resistance to the smooth functioning of disciplinary systems threatening their existence. For Fanon, expressions of anger and violence reject the social order and structures of precarity, enabling precarious subjects of colonialism to emerge as human beings from a zone of 'nonbeing' or abjection (*Black Skin* 10). In a theatrical and incredulous tone not dissimilar to Changez's, Fanon writes, 'I don't believe it! Whereas I had every reason to vent my hatred and loathing, they were rejecting me?', adding: 'I made up my mind, since it was impossible to rid myself of an *innate complex*, to assert myself as a BLACK MAN. Since the Other was reluctant to recognize me, there was only one answer: to make myself known' (*Black Skin* 95; emphasis in original). Changez shares this rationale and, as his others (Erica and Underwood Samson) are 'reluctant' to recognise him, he asserts himself (and his humanity) to the American interlocutor and the American Ambassador. The collective expression of anger and grief and the violent scuffles that ensue are signs that Changez and his comrades have reached their affective limits; they are not 'acting out' trauma, but rather, unwilling to exist in a zone of 'nonbeing'. Together, the assembly of abject bodies struggles for the right to self-definition and recognition as human beings, while demanding 'greater independence in Pakistan's domestic and international affairs' (203). They do not perform sovereignty; rather, they exercise a collective form of non-sovereign agency that is both potent and vulnerable, powerful yet destitute of sovereign status as it depends on the presence of others for recognition and response.[66] Although Changez has been arrested and exposed to police force, he and his 'comrades' are persistent. He

[66] In this way, Hamid departs from Giorgio Agamben's theorisation of 'bare life' and the *homo sacer*, a figure stripped of political status and isolated from the wider citizenry yet still subject to state power. To elucidate the logic of inclusive exclusion and his theory of 'bare life' as a 'life exposed to death', Agamben uses the roman figure of the *homo sacer*, a figure who 'can be killed but not sacrificed', abandoned but yet still subject to divine and profane law (*Homo Sacer* 88). Bare life, Agamben notes, is the 'threshold in which law constantly passes over into fact and fact into law' (*Homo Sacer* 171). The living body is therefore 'the rule and criterion of its own application', and, as such, neither above nor autonomous from the law (*Homo Sacer* 173). See: Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

takes pride in telling his American interlocutor that 'my office hours were soon overrun by meetings with politically minded youths', for advice on rights, shelter, and welfare in the struggle against precarisation (204). Demonstrations that oppose precarity are, as Butler notes, 'documenting the failures of justice, and they are part of our political freedom and even our political hope' ("Worldless" n.pag.). The persistence of Changez's 'politically minded youths' — rather than politically paralysed traumatised victims — offers a flicker of hope for a changed future in which the vulnerable can live, if not flourish.

Pluralism and hybridity are the main ingredients of Hamid's 'Petri dish in which organisms [...] can flourish' ("Slaying Dragons" 235). Accordingly, Changez's mentorship facilitates the formation of surprising alliances among 'groups of people who do not otherwise find much in common and between whom there is sometimes even suspicion and antagonism' (Butler, *Notes* 27). During the American ambassador's visit, 'thousands' from 'all possible affiliations—communists, capitalists, feminists, religious literalists' take to the streets in protest (204). Their collective struggle is anti-precarity and pro-pluralism, as it engenders solidarity and alliances across various nationalist, economic, gender, and religious ideologies, creating a 'union of souls' that is, according to DeLillo, a testimony to the 'taken-for-granted greatness' of daily life ("Ruins" n.pag.). Resisting the purity of Erica and Pakistan, Changez proudly states: 'I had, in my own manner, issued a firefly's glow bright enough to transcend the boundaries of continents and civilizations' (207). Identifying with and as Erica, Changez transgresses the boundaries delineating 'civilizations' and 'notions of Muslim-ness, Western-ness, European-ness, American-ness', which are, according to Hamid, 'illusions: arbitrarily drawn constructs with porous, brittle, and overlapping borders' (*Discontent* 6). In turn, Changez and his comrades' assembly embodies a plural and relational community of care that departs from the 'insufficiency of identitarian ontologies' (Butler, *Notes* 68). In this case, grief and precarity unite a broad spectrum of people, establishing alliances that move beyond the exclusivity of identity politics.

Returning to the question posed at the outset, 'is there something to be gained from grieving, from tarrying with grief?', this chapter concludes that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* portrays grief as a moving affective experience with the potential to mobilise new ethico-political movements (Butler, *Precarious* xii). This potential can only come to fruition if the bereaved subject is willing to accept and reflect on the relationality of embodied subjectivity and its ephemeral nature. Erica responds to loss with a melancholic hunger for a lost mythical era of purity and innocence, which can only be satisfied through death. In contrast, Changez tarries with the reality that embodied subjects are fluctuant and fragile, as they depend on the material, socio-

political, and affective networks in which they are invariably entangled. He comes to the conclusion that 'we cannot reconstitute ourselves as autonomous beings', a conclusion that proponents of the dominant medico-psychiatric model of grief have yet to reach (*Reluctant* 197). Instead of clinging to an imagined past of purity and impermeability, Changez wishes to change the present in the hope of changing the future. He offers a listening ear and counsel to students who share with him intimate stories of pain and precarity, while assembling his 'comrades' together in the struggle against precarity and erasure. Though they are abject and ungrievable in the eyes of the US, they are neither agentless nor politically passive. Despite opposing socio-political views, strangers become familiars in Changez's pluralist assembly of the precarious. The alliances between them are formed, not from the presumption of an ontological shared humanity, but from the post-colonial struggle against 'the alienated sociality that absorbs the cries of those who suffer by making them sound less human' (Gilroy 57). In turn, the novel espouses tarrying with personal and shared grief to inspire a 'different way of *observing*' (*Reluctant* 140; emphasis in original). *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* therefore offers a cautiously optimistic response to Butler's question. For Hamid, it is 'politically imperative for [writers] to find optimism' since its antithesis, pessimism, is a 'deeply conservative and reactionary position' that attracts people to 'charlatans, bigots, chauvinists, xenophobes, regressive forces that try to take us into the past' ("Optimistic Visions" n.pag.). If optimism is found, then it is 'entirely possible that if we engage, we can make things better', according to Hamid ("Optimistic Visions" n.pag.). This logic underpins *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which presents a compelling case for the ethico-political gains of tarrying with (shared) grief and an optimistic vision of a present, and future, changed for the better. Whether this optimism is misplaced, or even cruel, remains to be seen.

Chapter Four

The Poethics of Loss: Claudia Rankine's *Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric*

Developing *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*'s critique of (racial) purity, US capitalism, and exploration of the ethico-political potential of grief, this chapter argues that Claudia Rankine's *Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric* (2004) prescribes an ethico-politics of responsibility as an antidote to the pain of experiencing life as a form of living death. Rankine blends the lyric, the essay, and the visual to collate and connect (counter)narratives of loss that span across time and space. Juxtaposing the 9/11 attacks with stories of loss plucked from both the present and the past, Rankine's *American Lyric* historicises the present and undermines the widespread view that the American nation suffered an extraordinary 'trauma' on September 11th, 2001. The scope of the text is broader than that of *Falling Man* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and moves beyond the events of a singled-out September day to cover a wide-range of private and public ailments, including: terrorist attacks (the 9/11 attacks and the bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993); the rapacious media-driven assault on selfhood; the perils of anti-depressants in the pursuit of happiness; the disposability of the body in a capitalist culture; the systemic racism that denigrates black bodies; and the loneliness of a life spent on the fringes of society.[67] For Rankine's titular American lyricist, the possibility of soothing these social pains

[67] Developing Zygmunt Bauman's theory of 'waste' and 'wasted lives' in a neoliberal wasteland, Brad Evans and Henry A. Giroux use the discourse of disposability to move 'beyond the unavoidable production of excess waste' to consider the 'activity', the 'experience', and the 'state relations' that produce and perpetuate particular types of wastefulness (48). Giroux engages with but ultimately 'rethink[s]' biopolitics, theorised by scholars such as Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben as the operations of power used to 'regulate matters of life and death, and, in turn, how such issues are intimately related to both the articulation of community and the social, and the regulation, care and development of human life' (*Stormy* 12). Writing after Hurricane Katrina, Giroux identifies a 'new form of biopolitics at work under the Bush administration', which 'not only includes state-sanctioned violence but also relegates entire populations to spaces of invisibility and disposability' (*Stormy* 21). This chapter explores Rankine's portrayal of black and/or terminally ill bodies as abject bodies that are easily disposed of, expended, and exploited. Rather than focusing solely on the production of disposability, the analysis considers the mechanisms of abjection, the ethical implications of the breakdown of the first-person subject, and the poethics of poetry to examine how disposable bodies might become bodies that matter. See: Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives* (London: Polity Press, 2004); Henry A. Giroux, *Stormy Weather: Katrina and the Politics of Disposability* (Boulder, Colorado: Paradigm, 2006); and Brad Evans and Henry A. Giroux, *Disposable Futures: The Seduction of Violence in the Age of Spectacle* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2015).

begins with an ethical recognition of disposable abject bodies and an embodied response to their suffering. She models a form of ethical lyric subjectivity that is both fragmented and self-reflexive, emerging from discursive contexts and the grieving body. *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* is, in turn, a work that weeps for disposable lives, reformulating notions of 'death' to propose more ethically engaged ways of living.

This reading begins with a brief description of *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, followed by a consideration of the racialisation of '9/11' before moving onto an explanation of the methodology the analysis applies and, finally, an assessment of extant literary criticism of the book. The focus then turns to Rankine's verbal and visual portraits of those existing in a liminal state between life and death: black people and the terminally ill, who, she suggests, are deemed worthless and disposable in an American society ravaged by racism and capitalism. Responding to the post-9/11 revival of American nationalism and the racialised fallout, Rankine foregrounds the nation's long history of anti-black racism, painting a diverse collection of grief portraits and colouring them black and white. Depicting the racial inflections of police brutality, she reveals the simplicity of post-9/11 narratives that idealise the police and lament the loss of American innocence. While Hamid critiques the neo-colonial exploits of the state and US capitalism, Rankine examines the state's failure to care for black bodies and a healthcare system that either discards or commodifies terminally ill bodies for capitalist gain. These bodies are abject and experience life as a metaphysical death, a form of death-in-life. *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, however, acts as a living counter-history that memorialises and publicly weeps for the living dead.

The next section of the chapter explores how the 'disease' of racism and the malaise of capitalism infect Rankine's lyric speaker, who is encoded as a woman of colour. Despite her loneliness and isolation in a society that aspires to self-reliance at the expense of others, she is drained by the grief and grievances of Others that seep into her pores. Although the permeability of her corporeal and subjective borders becomes a source of exhaustion, it is simultaneously the means through which she is awakened from a comatose society, one that is numb to the suffering of abject bodies. The abject ruins and rubble blanketing the streets after the collapse of the Twin Towers are not confined to New York City on September 11th, 2001, as Rankine — like Hamid, who portrays an abject America — repositions the nation as a landfill site. She adapts a diagram of the human digestive system, replacing intestinal matter with a silhouette of the North American landmass and labels one organ only: the liver. This intervention remaps America as a human wasteland, a nation not of fecundity and abundance, but of barrenness and living death, and invites the question: what does it mean to be a human liver in an American wasteland? The

chapter goes on to consider this question, arguing that the answer lies in the breakdown of the first-person subject in response to the Levinasian 'face' of the Other. Contrary to the dominating medico-psychiatric grief model, the text advances a model of fragmented subjectivity that recognises the subject as porous, that is, as shaped by interactions with exteriority. The stable and sovereign subject traditionally associated with the lyric genre dissolves into a non-sovereign and porous American lyricist shaped by experiential encounters with abject bodies. The breakdown of the self-absorbed 'I', through gut-wrenching grief for these bodies, is necessary, Rankine suggests, to facilitate the emergence of more ethically engaged ways of living in an American wasteland.

The third and final section of the chapter explores *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*'s embodied poetics of recognition and response. The lyricist inhabits the flesh of bruised and beaten black bodies to create a work that weeps: a work that expresses tears of 'sadness', an umbrella term she uses to define the condition of black life in America. The production of such a work is an ethical act of public mourning and remembrance, as it makes disposable lives legible and attempts to make them matter. The reader is brought into close proximity with the lives that populate the pages of the text, while the title — *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* — is a plea for intentional recognition and response on the part of the reader. Towards the conclusion of the text Rankine introduces the ideas of two central thinkers, philosopher Emmanuel Levinas and poet Paul Celan, whose respective thinking on ethics and poetics provides the basis for a model of poetry as an ethical encounter between writer and reader. The chapter closes with an examination of Rankine's prayer to be 'here': to be alive and present to and for others. Though this hope is simple, it is one that has been all but dashed due to the machinations of history, systemic racism, and the socio-political convulsions of the 9/11 attacks. *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* persists in the face of despair, however, and resuscitates an exhausted hope for the future amidst the ruins of the present.

It is necessary to preface this chapter's critical reading with a brief description of the aesthetic and thematic features of Rankine's *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, which work within while wearing away the conventions of the lyric genre. Consisting of fragments of poetry, prose, photographs, snapshots of television stills, crumpled labels from prescription medications, cultural documents, and diagrams of the human body, Rankine's *American Lyric* is comparable to a scrapbook. As such, it is more hybrid in form than *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and more innovative than the alleged experimentalism of the trauma genre, which Alan Gibbs derides as a 'facile bricolage of accepted representational practices disingenuously masquerading as

experimental and avant-garde' (48). Through the porous and rhizomatic structure of her work, which introduces some concepts only to revisit them several pages later, Rankine invites readers to tie together (loose) threads of connection between (geo)politics and affect, the public and private, and the mind and body. In her exploration of Rankine's use of 'investigative techniques', Tana Jean Welch defines the investigative poet as one who 'engages in an active relationship with the political, social, and cultural forces around him or her' to produce an 'alternate narrative history' (125). More so than *Falling Man* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* breaks verbal and visual frames to rebuild an 'alternate narrative history'. In one of Rankine's several re-eventualisations, the titular American lyricist reframes a televised conversation, removing the original on-screen visuals and replacing them with the words of the conversation she has overheard. The process of break down and (re)creation encapsulates *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*'s formal project of breaking frames of mis- or non-recognition to allow the voice of the Other to be listened to or, at least, overheard.

Two to three blank pages separate each section of the book, with one of the pages containing an image of a television set visualising the lyricist's mindset. Leaving the television switched on all the time, she inhabits a televisual space where her mind is flooded with vast quantities of (often meaningless) data that paradoxically obscures the news it purports to tell. Faintly visible in the visual white snow is the outline of a face, which, Rankine later revealed in a 2006 interview, is the face of George Bush ("Claudia" n. pag.). Writing about the politicisation of affect after the 9/11 attacks, Lauren Berlant contends that Bush 'wants to transmit not the *message* but the *noise*' to ensure that public investment in political affairs is limited to '*the affect of feeling political together*, an effect of having communicated true feeling without the distancing mediation of speech' (*Cruel* 224; emphasis in original). The transmission and social circulation of noise is a form of 'affective binding' facilitating the collective feeling of political solidarity without revealing the operations of state power governing social life (Berlant, *Cruel* 224). Published before Berlant's critique, Rankine's depiction of dizzying interference and disguising static is particularly prescient as it reframes Bush as an obscurantist transmitter of white noise. His characteristically *white* noise drowns out dissenting voices and deafens (white) American citizens so that they can enjoy an illusory sense of 'feeling political together' (Berlant, *Cruel* 224). In contrast, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* broadcasts an image of a nation that was united neither before nor after September 11th, 2001, but divided by the colours of the static's stripes and stars: black and white.

1. 9/11: A White American 'Trauma'?

Although a chorus of literary scholars has noted the paucity of non-white characters in '9/11 fiction', they rarely look beyond the 9/11 literary canon to find texts that do include the perspectives of people of colour. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* exposes the unfavourable reality of systemic racism, xenophobia, and rising islamophobia in post-9/11 America, but *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* turns a more critical and attentive eye to the malaise of systemic racism and capitalism. As it focuses less on the 9/11 attacks and more on the ordinary violence perpetrated by white Americans against African Americans, it is rarely included in studies of post-9/11 literature. To move 'beyond' the idea of '9/11', however, it is necessary to examine texts in which the attacks are not the central focus. As discussed in Chapter Three, the radical Muslim was considered the greatest antagonist after the attacks, which unsettled the hierarchy of racial stereotypes in the US. In *Post 9/11: African American Style* (2004), comedian Freddy Cee stated: 'Now, tell me something, when was the last time any of you heard of an African American having problems catching taxis after September 11th? Well to both of those, you probably want to know why?' (77). According to Cee, the reason is that 'America's got herself some new niggas, the Middle Easterners' (77). Although Middle Eastern figures became the target of popular fear and suspicion, crystallised racial stereotypes about African Americans did not suddenly dissolve. Unlike middle-class white Americans, African Americans were not considered to represent the face of America and their voices still went unheard at memorial ceremonies and in media discourse such as *TIME*'s commemorative issue, "Beyond 9/11".[68] There were, however, several high-profile African Americans, such as Cornel West, Amiri Baraka, and Ta-Nehisi Coates, who spoke pointedly about the events in terms of racial politics in ways deemed 'treasonous and coded as divisive' (Melnick 95).

[68] *TIME* does not deny the conspicuous absence of African Americans in the collection, explaining that the lack of representation is due to a dearth of testimonies and stories detailing African Americans' engagement with the events of September 11th, 2001 and the following decade. This is more reflective of a disinterest in African American testimonies on the part of the media and cultural producers. There is a lack of African American portraits in literary responses to the attacks, and, even when African Americans are protagonists, they are often turned into white protagonists. *TIME* presents white people as the 'most affected' and most resilient victims and, in so doing, embraces the 'cult' of heroism that was both gendered and racialised. Of the 343 members of the Fire Department of New York (FDNY) that died, approximately a dozen were black men and another dozen Hispanic (Connor 93). These figures discredited multicultural ideals while presenting the overwhelmingly white New York firefighters as 'quintessential American heroes and models of ideal American citizenship' (Rubin and Verheul 14). See: Michael Andrew Connor, "Real American Heroes: Attacking Multiculturalism through the Discourse of Heroic Sacrifice" in *American Multiculturalism After 9/11: Transatlantic Perspectives*. Eds. Derek Rubin and Jaap Verheul (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009) 93-104.

Responding to critics who lambasted his poem, "Somebody Blew Up America", Baraka published an article entitled "The ADL Smear Campaign against Me. I Will Not Resign, I Will Not Apologize" (2002), in which he wrote:

> Black people feel we have always been victims of terror, governmental and general, so we cannot get as frenzied and hysterical as the people who ask us to dismiss our history and contemporary reality to join them, in the name of a shallow "patriotism," in attacking the majority of people in the world, especially people of color and in the third world. (n.pag.)

Sharing these sentiments, Cornel West, in conversation with Toni Morrison, stated that the 9/11 attacks awakened white America to what was, for black Americans, already a reality: 'Since 9/11 all Americans feel unsafe, unprotected, subject to random violence and hated, and that's been the situation of black folks for 400 years' ("Better Do Something" n.pag.). In a similar vein, US novelist Walter Mosley noted the discrepancy between the responses of white Americans and black Americans to the 9/11 attacks: 'I haven't met one black person who was surprised. Like everyone else, they were shocked by the magnitude of it, and appalled by the deaths, but they weren't surprised by the hate and anger that produced it' (n.pag.). Black Americans, according to Mosley, 'know how hated America is' because they are painfully aware that 'people who are different, people whose beliefs are different, people of a different colour' are treated with 'suspicion or disdain' (n.pag.). Mosley was not the only African American author to point out the racial inflections of cultural narratives of the 9/11 attacks. In an epistle penned for his son, entitled *Between the World and Me* (2015), Ta-Nehisi Coates reflects on the story of race and racism in America. His response to the 9/11 attacks merges with memories of Ground Zero as the locus of terror and commerce during the Transatlantic slave trade: 'I kept thinking about how southern Manhattan had always been Ground Zero for us. They auctioned our bodies down there, in that same devastated, and rightly named, financial district' (Coates, *Between* 86). Offering a word of advice to his son, and readership, Coates suggests that the main source of terror is not the feared Muslim Other: 'I did know that Bin Laden was not the first man to bring terror to that section of the city. I never forgot that. Neither should you' (*Between* 87). The mass death caused by slavery (and US military exploits) is comparatively larger but erased from public memory, enabling the 9/11 attacks to be regarded as an unprecedented atrocity and the victims etched in public memory. Coates confesses that his 'heart was cold' when he cast his eyes on the ruins of the World Trade Center, a socially unacceptable response which directly contradicts the assumption that the nation was traumatised (*Between* 87).[69] He recalls how he 'wanted nothing to do with any

[69] Instead, Coates was dealing with 'disasters all [his] own', one of which was the murder of his twenty-five-year-old friend, Prince Jones, who was 'shot down mere footsteps from his family by agents of the state' in September 2000

kind of patriotism, with the broad national ceremony of mourning' for the victims of the 9/11 attacks, feeling 'no sympathy for the firefighters, and something bordering on hatred for the police officers who had died' (Coates, "Fear of a Black President" n.pag.). Coates disagreed strongly with the celebration and admiration of heroic police after the attacks, admitting that 'they were not human to me. Black, white, or whatever, they were menaces of nature; they were the fire, the comet, the storm, which could — with no justification — shatter my body' (*Between* 87). Rebuttals to these remarks reflected the disproportionate allocation of grief and care for African American victims of (state) violence. *New York Times* columnist Michiko Kakutani accused Coates of using damaging 'Manichean' rhetoric, while Richard Lowry condemned what he considered Coates' 'toxic world-view' (n.pag.). As this chapter will demonstrate, Rankine's *American Lyric* suggests that the 'toxic world-view' is not one that is critical of systemic racism, but one addled with the poison of white supremacy. Portraying the ongoing grief of African Americans (resilient or otherwise) — either demonised by the state and media or rendered disposable and undeserving of public recognition and response — *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* moves beyond the characteristically white American 'trauma' of '9/11' to focus on the chronic pain of systemic and routinised racism.

The titular American lyricist visits the ruins and wreckage at the site of the fallen Twin Towers, where she watches two of the most celebrated figures of white American resilience — rescue workers and police officers — from a distance: 'I see but do not hear them. The language of description competes with the dead in the air. My eyes burn and tear' (82). She may be unable to hear over the white 'noise' of mourners 'feeling political together' at the attack site, who are deaf to the dissenting voices and silenced cries of those — like Coates — who do not, and cannot, share this sense of solidarity (Berlant, *Cruel* 224). Along with the 'dead in the air', this (empty) white noise fills the affective atmosphere, causing the lyricist to feel nothing but emptiness inside. Standing apart from what Coates calls the patriotic 'broad national ceremony of mourning' and those there to 'police our curious grief', she maintains a critical (spatial and emotional) distance and muses:

> It strikes me that what the attack on the World Trade Center stole from us is our willingness to be complex. Or what the attack on the World Trade Center revealed to us is that we were never complex. (83; 91)

(*Between* 86; "Fear of a Black President" n.pag.). See: Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2015); and "Fear of a Black President," *Atlantic* Sept. 2012, 1 June 2016 <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/09/fear-of-a-black-president/309064/>.

From this vantage point, September 11th, 2001 was not the day on which a mythologised American innocence was stolen; rather, it was the day on which a chronic American naiveite or simplicity was revealed. This simplicity would further reveal itself through the construction of '9/11' as a national trauma and the (false) logic of Bush's infamous ultimatum, which the lyricist paraphrases as follows: 'it is the twenty-first century and either you are with us or you are against us. Where is your flag?' (91). Contrary to Bush's policing of 'curious grief', the lyricist engages with her chronic and complicat*ing* grief to create a work that weeps.[70] As Coates notes, the history of terror — contrary to popular thought — did not begin on September 11th, 2001 at Ground Zero, a site that bustled and buzzed with trade and commerce during the Transatlantic slave trade. The lyricist moves the focus away from the 9/11 attacks to magnify contemporary permutations of the terror and trade Coates associates with the former World Trade Center: US capitalism and systemic racism. Rankine, in turn, breaks simplistic 'facile political frameworks' to create a 'realistically messy' heterogeneous poethics of grief, which moves beyond '9/11' (Welch 124; Retallack 5).

The dominant medico-psychiatric model of grief focuses primarily on 'the internal, private worlds of individuals in isolation from their social world' (Valentine 59). In contrast, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* theorises grief as an embodied experience that reveals the situated relationality of the subject. The grieving subject is not isolated from 'their social world' but inextricable from it, spontaneously engaging in affective exchanges and experiential encounters within its shared environment. The lyricist experiences grief as a chronic condition consisting of a complex fusion of sadness, distress, despair, numbness, and gut-punches. Kathleen Stewart defines these feelings as 'ordinary affects': 'public feelings that begin and end in broad circulation, but they're also the stuff that seemingly intimate lives are made of' (2). Personal and public crises permeate every corner of the text as well as the lyricist's body. During one of many sleepless nights, she turns on the television and notes the number of advertisements for anti-depressants. Commending this marketing strategy, she states: 'It seems right that pharmaceutical companies should advertise in the middle of the night, when people are less distracted and capable of tuning in more and more and most precisely to their fearful bodies and their accompanying anxieties' (29). Tuning into the television — rather than the body — temporarily anesthetises witnesses, turning them into

[70] Living a life characterised by an interminable state of mourning and grief, the lyricist theoretically meets the diagnostic criteria for 'complicated grief', defined as a chronic response to loss that lasts longer than a six-month period. See: M. Katherine Shear et al., "Review: Complicated grief and Related Bereavement Issues for *DSM-5*," *Depression and Anxiety* 28.2 (February 2011): 103-17.

enervated spectators, such that critical thinking or 'expressing emotion' is 'not fine, not okay, no' (43). With her senses somewhat dulled, the lyricist wonders whether she is 'already dead', or quite possibly, brain dead (7). Such thoughts are considered suicidal and soon an ambulance attendant arrives to take her away with or without 'restraint' (7). Attempting to explain away her questioning, she tells the attendant that she merely suffered 'a momentary lapse of happily', while telling herself that the 'noun happiness is a static state of some Platonic ideal you know better than to pursue' (7). In the endnotes to the text, Rankine cites a dictionary definition of the term happily: 'by chance or accident; perhaps' (133). Accordingly, 'happiness' connotes a contingent affective state, contrary to the common conceptualisation of happiness as a goal to pursue. The lyricist's lapse of 'happily', however, is mistaken for depression.

The common conceptualisation of depression as a psychiatric disorder shares with post-Freudian grief models a 'mechanistic view of human functioning' (Klass, Silverman, and Nickman 15). Contrary to this view, Ann Cvetkovich contends that depression, though it 'might not immediately reveal its connections to capitalism and colonialism', is a 'sensational story of a different kind, literally sensational because it's about the impact of the world around us on our senses — which include our bodies, our feelings, and our minds' (158). The lyricist once again resists attempts to 'police [her] curious grief' and pursue happiness, as she chooses not to consume the anti-depressants – or happy pills – that she has been prescribed, rejecting their promise of a 'good life' and a quick return to 'efficient' and 'autonomous functioning' (Walter, "New Model" 6). Her decision is partly based on the knowledge that the consumption of drugs can 'induce liver damage', particularly the consumption of fluoxetine – the pill she is prescribed – which is 'slower to break down in people who have cirrhotic livers' (141). Without these pills, she is capable of feeling the 'impact of the world' on her senses and soaks up the pain of abject bodies with whom she is invariably bound (Cvetkovich 158). The main source of her chronic grief is not '9/11' but the ordinary loss of (black) embodiment in America. In *Falling Man*, ordinary life shines with wonder and radiance; in *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, it is shot through with 'crisis ordinariness'.

2. Crisis Ordinariness

As noted throughout this thesis, 'trauma' and 'shock' quickly became keywords to define America's affective response to the terrorist attacks. Following the settling of dust and debris in New York and the assessment of the damage caused, the US responded with shock tactics of its

own. Naomi Klein's *Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (2007) argues that US military tactics of 'Shock & Awe' deployed in Afghanistan and Iraq reveal something essential about the neoliberal world, which thrives on crises. Klein calls this 'shock therapy': '[This] is how the shock doctrine works: the original disaster — the coup, the terrorist attack, the market meltdown, the war, the tsunami, the hurricane — puts an entire population in a state of collective shock,' which enables the state to enact otherwise politically disadvantageous polices (19). The inability to move beyond traumatic shock as a (politically advantageous) explanatory paradigm for the events of September 11th partly explains why national narratives remain stuck in a repetitive circuit that sidesteps the fraught work of historicising. Brad Evans and Henry A. Giroux note that '[h]istorical consciousness has been transformed into narratives of ceaseless, unavoidable catastrophe, devoid of any engagement with wider structures of power and the underlying conditions of our ongoing oppression' (78). Critical thinking subsequently 'becomes a burden' as the capacity to 'question the fundamental ontological and epistemological parameters in all their catastrophic permutations is tantamount to being at odds with the prevailing orthodoxy and the dystopian logics of rule contemporary neoliberalism thrives upon' (Evans and Giroux 78). As an antidote, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* offers 'knowledge as a prescription against despair' and theorises the poethical encounter as the basis of a possible 'utopia' (*Don't* 55).

In *Cruel Optimism* (2011), Berlant diagnoses the 'traumatic' as a genre of explanation for 'the situation of being without genre' or the larger historical narratives on which self-continuity depends (80). The construction of a 'traumatic' event is to an extent dependent on the construction of the 'ordinary' or everyday life of the nation. The 'traumatic' status assigned to '9/11' rested on a specific view of history: history as a traumatic disruption of the ordinary uneventful everyday of sovereign nation-states, which is itself a matter of state regulation. The discourse of the 'everyday' pre-empts the possibility of an eventful disruption, one that could become a focal point for the (re)construction of a united nation. Berlant takes issue with the prevalence of trauma theory in 'critical theory' and 'mass society' as a 'genre for viewing the historical present', arguing that its 'fundamentally ahistoricising' logic frames the present as a scene of exception shattered by 'some ongoing, uneventful ordinary life' (*Cruel* 9; 10). She argues that it is more productive to examine the 'affective impact' of crisis and how it 'takes form [and] becomes mediated' in everyday life (*Cruel* 9-10). The 'ordinary' is defined as a space where multiple histories converge in the present. Across diverse geopolitical and biopolitical locations, the present imposes itself on consciousness as a moment of extended crisis, with one crisis piling

on top of another. As Berlant states, '[c]risis is not exceptional to history or consciousness', but 'a process embedded in the ordinary that unfolds in stories about navigating what's overwhelming' (*Cruel* 10). This concept refines the meanings of 'crisis' and 'ordinariness' through apposition, indicating how the routine and recurrent merge with moments of 'exceptional' disaster. Accordingly, the term 'crisis' not only describes what DeLillo calls a 'massive spectacle' (such as '9/11') and cataclysmic catastrophes, but also the repetitious experience of living a life co-existent with (slow) death ("Ruins" n.pag; Berlant, *Cruel* 95). Berlant defines slow death as the 'physical wearing out of a population and the deterioration of people in that population that is very nearly a defining condition of their experience and historical existence' such that 'life building and the attrition of human life are indistinguishable' ("Slow Death" 754). In *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, slow death, or metaphorical liver cirrhosis, is caused by the passive consumption of poisoning prescription medication and mind-numbing television, as well as systemic racism and capitalism.

Drawing on *Cruel Optimism*, this chapter argues that Rankine's *American Lyric* is a historically reflexive poethics of loss that moves beyond the dehistoricised trauma narrative of '9/11' to a greater extent than *Falling Man* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. With its roaming lyric eye/I, it gazes attentively at the overlooked, whether in the form of abject bodies, police brutality, or 'marginal' stories of the quotidian. In this 'post'-9/11 text, the 9/11 terrorist attacks are not a singular or stand-alone American 'trauma'; rather, they are re-situated within a collage of ordinary stories of terror, abjection, and loss. Rankine, like Berlant, contextualises crisis within the ordinary and refuses the exceptionality of '9/11' 'trauma', prioritising instead the grief and loss that characterise everyday life, especially for African Americans. The *DSM-III*'s exclusivist definition of trauma as a 'psychologically distressing event outside the range of usual human experience' is applicable to 'what is normal and usual in the lives of men of the dominant class: white, young, able-bodied, educated, middle-class, Christian men' (*DSM-III* 236-38; Brown 101). As discussed in Chapter Three, potentially 'traumatic' stressors and intense 'fear, terror, and helplessness' are neither rare nor exceptional but chronic for those living in conditions of colonialism and precarity (*DSM-III* 238). Whilst postcolonial trauma scholars have turned to non-western trauma narratives to 'decolonize' Euro-American centric trauma theory, there is still a need to examine counter-narratives that detail the ongoing ordinary suffering of abject bodies in the West. This chapter responds to this need and reads *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* as one such counter-narrative.

Despite the crisis and catastrophe that characterise everyday experience, the embodied subject still searches for ways of staying 'attached to life', scrambling for modes of survival. Contrary to the claims of traditional trauma theorists, Berlant contends that disruptive events have a potentially progressive impact on the subject, facilitating the formation of new genres for living in a present without guarantees or norms. Both Berlant and Rankine consider this dynamic in ways other than traditional trauma narratives of 'working through', which entails the assimilation of the traumatic experience into established narrative frameworks. Certain measures of adjustment, however, are 'cruel'. As noted previously, the concept of 'cruel optimism' describes the subject's attachment to fantasies of the 'good-life' — of enduring 'reciprocity in couples, families, political systems, institutions, markets, and at work — when the evidence of their instability, fragility, and dear cost abounds' (Berlant, *Cruel* 2). This is the 'double bind' of cruel optimism, as Berlant notes: 'even with an image of a better good life available to sustain your optimism, it is awkward and it is threatening to detach from what is already not working' (*Cruel* 263). In *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, as in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the collapse of life genres proves (re)productive rather than 'traumatic'. The breakdown of the lyric subject — through systemic injury, negation, and embodied grief — is paradoxically the means through which relationality is (re)discovered, and new attachments to life and new genres for living are formed. The American lyricist's interpretation of the 'good-life' dovetails with that of Changez's in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. For these characters, the 'good' life is one where the subject is present for the abject Other, and responsive to its anguish in an ethical relationship of care and responsibility.

To explore the ethical potential of embodied experiences of grief, this chapter turns to Levinas' theory of ethical responsibility. The face-to-face encounter is central to Levinas' theorisation of human responsibility, which, like Rankine's *American Lyric*, 'begins with the everyday and reaches beyond' (Morgan 54). Elucidating Levinas' concept of 'the face', Diane Perpich explains that 'the "I" who encounters the face loses its naïve being at home in the world and discovers itself bound by the other in its ethical responsibility' (58). To encounter the face is to be the 'hostage' of the Other: to obey its demand for a response (Levinas, "Substitution" 94). There are instances of this in the novels examined earlier in this thesis, as well as in *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*: DeLillo's "Falling Man" holds his audience, his fascinated captives, hostage, as he compels them to face the falling body; and, in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez is 'bound' to the American with whom he is engaged in a face-to-face encounter (Hamid, *Reluctant* 209). Invariably bound to others, whether unwittingly or unwillingly, the subject is always

somewhat estranged, or never fully at home with, or at one with, itself. As such, it 'loses its naïve being at home in the world', realising, as the American lyricist does, the naiveite or (American) simplicity of assuming or aspiring to autonomy (Perpich 58). Contrary to the solipsistic navel-gazing Erica in Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Rankine's American lyricist shares Changez's view that 'we cannot reconstitute ourselves as autonomous beings' (197). In each of these texts, grief reveals the openness, affectability, and response-ability of embodied subjectivity, a recognition of which is theorised as a precondition for ethical response.

In her exploration of Levinasian thought, Butler writes:

> If [...] it is the face of the other that demands an ethical response then it would seem that the norms that would allocate who is and who is not human arrive in visual form. These norms work to give face and to efface. (*Frames* 77)

Don't Let Me Be Lonely breaks verbal and visual frames, which, according to Butler, regulate public recognition, to allow the face of the otherwise unintelligible Other to break into public consciousness. Contrary to the omission of black faces from post-9/11 publications such as "Beyond 9/11", Rankine attempts to counter the erasure and dematerialisation of the black body through her inclusion of photographs of black men brutally assaulted and murdered in 'ordinary' acts of racial terror. The depth and spontaneity of the lyricist's response cracks disembodied media frames that either censor or dehumanise black bodies. For Levinas, the Other does not refer exclusively to a marginalised group; for Rankine, the Other refers more specifically to pained abject bodies, especially those that are black and/or terminally ill. In various iterations of Levinas' philosophy, '[t]he face is not reducible to the mouth nor indeed to anything the mouth has to utter' (Butler, *Precarious* 133). For Butler, and indeed Rankine, the Levinasian 'face' extends beyond the visage to 'bodily parts' that 'cry' and 'sob' and 'scream, as if they were a face with a mouth, a throat, or indeed, just a mouth and a throat from which vocalisations [of pain] emerge that do not settle into words' (Butler, *Precarious* 133). Developing the thesis that grief is an affective and embodied – rather than an exclusively psychological – experience, the American lyricist feels gut-wrenching grief in response to the pained 'faces' of Others, which she then translates into poetry. Drawing on the work of Berlant, Butler, and Levinas this chapter reads *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* as a 'post'-9/11 poethics of loss that metaphorically weeps for abject bodies experiencing terror and death not as 'traumatic' but as constitutive of ordinary life.

3. Critical Reception of *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*

Critical discussions of *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* have predominantly focused on Rankine's exploration of media saturation in a post-9/11 America. In "Politics and Poetics of Fear After 9/11: Claudia Rankine's *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*" (2011), Emma Kimberley positions Rankine's lyric alongside a recent millennial wave of ekphrastic poetry preoccupied with the 'mediated representations' of 'perceived reality' that exploit trauma for 'commercial or political ends' (777). Ira Sadoff describes such mediated representations as 'contemporary culture's assaulting sense data', which constructs 'the fiction of identity' while corrupting the imagination of 'the interior of the other' (35). Rankine's hybrid lyric is indeed a radical reformulation of the traditional lyric form and reveals how 'perceived reality' is contingent on the subject's affective experience. Commenting on Rankine's aesthetic strategies, Dorothy Barresi defines the text as 'commonplace performative', describing the lyricist as 'a reporter, a collector and a connector of uneasy moments' (189-90). Rebecca Macmillan similarly argues that *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* 'actively archives' through its constellation of texts, images and detailed endnotes and 'accentuates the limits of their representational strategies' (173). She asserts that Rankine conceptualises the lyric as a mode that enables archival engagement: 'the gathering of affective materials that document an American present beyond the scope of a singular representative experience' (Macmillan 198). Conventional manifestations of the lyric express intimate personal experiences, but Rankine's 'American' lyric is situated within broader contexts of cultural and national identities. Developing Alex Young's description of the American lyricist as a 'strong articulation of a lyric self that speaks despite — and because of — her hyperawareness of her own social and political position', this reading suggests that the lyricist is (pain)fully aware of the position of her body and its relation to abject bodies in the shared time and space of the present (n.pag.). In an interview with Leonard Lopate, Rankine explains that the subtitle, 'an American Lyric', foregrounds the book's 'exploration of the self in a social space', as well as her cruelly optimistic attachment to America, which she summarises as follows: 'I live in America and I felt all of the sudden barraged by it' (n.pag.). *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, in turn, emphasises the situated relationality of the lyric subject and the affective, social, material, and political relationships in which she is entangled, some of which are draining and distressing. Anthony Reed classifies Rankine's American lyric as 'postlyric', which, he explains, refers not to a new genre but to 'the use of received understandings of the lyric as a horizon of hermeneutic expectation, only to disrupt the very basis of that mode: the assumed solidity of the speaking, universal "I"' (98-99). Reed argues that Rankine's 'postlyric' marks the 'unavailability of — and continued desire for —

established modes of personal and racial representation and norms of poetic expression in the post-segregation era, understood as a new stage in the struggle against an increasingly globalized antiblackness' (99). Angela Hume, in response to Reed, asserts that Rankine's adaptation of the conventional lyric genre connotes the 'impossibility of a coherent self for black subjects who continue to be othered by a society that has determined that their lives cannot matter' (Hume 105). She adds that Rankine's poetry, in its 'duration of a vexed lyric mode', constitutes a 'persistence within, as opposed to [an] outright rejection of, lyric' (Hume 80). Building on Hume's reading, this chapter argues that Rankine wears lyric conventions down to create a 'failed lyric' that aestheticises liver failure and the abjection of livers in a wasteland.

In "Toward an Antiracist Ecopoetics: Waste and Wasting in the Poetry of Claudia Rankine" (2018), Hume explores the web of historical connections between wasting, biopower, capital, racism, and the environment. This chapter shares Hume's interest in 'wasting' bodies — or, more specifically, abject bodies — but offers closer readings of the processes of breakdown and (re)creation in *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*. Drawing on Foucauldian theory, Hume classifies the poetics of Rankine's second *American Lyric*, *Citizen*, as a 'social biopoetics', defined as a 'destructive force and a mechanism for survival' located in 'the interstices or ruptures between text and image' (108). There are places in Hume's analysis, however, where clarity is required. It is unclear, for instance, whether she reads the interstices between text and image in *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* as the locus of a 'social biopoetics', while a more detailed exploration (and explanation) is needed to understand exactly how, or why, these interstices constitute 'life-making' forces (Hume 108). Departing from the notion of biopoetics, this reading argues that Rankine engages in (and espouses) a specific type of embodied cognition — 'thinking, as if trying to weep' — to create a lyrical wake ritual that wakes the (living)dead to awaken the living (Rankine, *Don't* 55). Hume asserts that Rankine's poetry constitutes an anti-racist eco-poetics with a 'negative political ontology', but this chapter suggests that *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* is a work with a decidedly ethical impetus — rather than a negative political ontology — which metaphorically weeps for abject bodies to make them matter (Hume 103).

Katherine Leveling, in "Claudia Rankine's *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, Infographic Maps, and Subject-System Identity in Contemporary Political Thought" (2019), reads Rankine's substitution of the intestines for a map of the US as the basis of a 'poetics based on the identity of subject and system': 'the map erases any space between subject and system [...] the two are the same, at all times' (33; 50; 51). Leveling's conflation of the entire human form with an (unspecified) 'system' is too general, however, and leaves a series of questions unanswered, for

example: if the subject and system are one in *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, then why does Rankine only substitute the intestines (rather than the entire body) for a map of the US? If the subject is 'the system', as Leveling argues, and the system is inherently racist, then are all subjects inherently racist, or poisoned by racism? If so, what are the implications and how do they relate to the lack of identity markers on the diagram, except for the labelling of the liver? Several more critics have engaged with Rankine's anatomical diagram, including Lisa Siraganian, who argues that Rankine's theorisation of embodiment fails to 'produce a viable political connection or even a social one', such that 'the true politics associated with this position is a no politics' (n.pag.). Siraganian's misreading of Rankine's lyric as an apolitical text is underpinned by the deeply flawed assumption that embodied subjects and affective experiences are sealed off from surrounding socio-political environments, an assumption that is the very antithesis of Rankine's theory of embodiment. Paula Koneazny argues that the liver in *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* is both 'a metaphor for the world' and a 'metaphor for the writer who transforms personal and social toxins into the truth of art and translates grief into hope' (21). If, however, the liver is a metaphor for the writer *and* the world, then the distinction between both is lost. This chapter suggests that the liver is analogous with the lyric subject living in a characteristically American wasteland and explores the ethico-political role of the liver (both the organ and the lyricist) in the process of translating grief into hope.

In "A Prescription against Despair: On Claudia Rankine's *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*" (2012), Erik Anderson asserts that Rankine's lyric 'enacts the intersection of private and public grief, a ritual to address our wounds' (1). Although he notes that 'the text is not, a priori, poem or essay or prayer', he neither identifies nor elaborates on the significance of the prayer-like qualities of the text, contrary to the reading offered in this chapter (1). Anderson's essay explores social issues and the poetics of lyric address, but it neglects the ethical dimension of poetry and the breakdown of the lyric 'I'. In "Narrative Wreckage: Terror, Illness, and Healing in the Post-9/11 Poethics of Claudia Rankine" (2016), Mark A. Tabone reads fragmentation in relation to trauma, arguing that Rankine aestheticises the psychological 'wreckage' left in the wake of the material wreckage of the Twin Towers (95). Arguing against Tabone's trauma reading, this chapter contends that Rankine neither pathologises *grief* nor advocates the reparation of a fragmented subjectivity; rather, she suggests that the fragmentation or the breakdown of the liver (and the self-absorbed subject of the traditional lyric) is necessary for the health of the body politic. Welch notes the ethical impulse of the text, asserting that it advances a 'trans-corporeal' ethics that emphasises 'material interconnectedness' to 'counteract American exceptionalism' (123; 143). Developing Welch's argument, this chapter argues that Rankine's American lyricist,

and ultimately Rankine, translates embodied responses to loss into a poetics of responsibility: a poetic that exists for the abject black body, recognising and responding to its pain and publicly grieving its (living) death. Responding to Welch, Catherine Gander asserts that '*Don't Let Me Be Lonely* also suggests a (re)cognition of the interconnectedness of geographical and bodily topographies under oppressive regimes of white hegemony' ("Black and White" 14). In her deft reading, Gander asserts that Rankine suggests that an 'acknowledgement both of our shared landscape and of the necessity of interpersonal relations' is needed to 'ethically reorient ourselves toward others,' a suggestion which 'carries with it a sense of hope' ("Black and White" 14). This chapter undertakes close readings of the particulars of these (ethical, aesthetic, and socio-political) 'interpersonal relations' — which are not only a 'necessity' but also life-sustaining — and examines the role of grief in 'reorienting ourselves toward others' (Gander, "Black and White" 14). The lyricist's 'acknowledgement' is specific, and arguably constitutes more than an 'acknowledgement,' as she breaks down in response to and (self-reflexively) questions her responsibility both to and for abject bodies (Gander, "Black and White" 14).

Joanna Penn-Cooper reads *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* through the lens of Ross Gay's concept of the 'anti-affirmative'. Quoting from Gay's "Black Poetics and the Anti-Affirmative" (2007), Penn-Cooper states that the 'affirmative first claims what is truth, then goes about proving how it is true' (Gay qtd. in Penn-Cooper 52). For Gay, the anti-affirmative is a corrective to the concealment of America's history of racial violence and socio-political injustice. He connects his concept of the anti-affirmative to Houston A. Baker, Jr.'s theorisation of the African American artist's 'mastery of the minstrel mask', which keeps alive a 'spirit of play, hope, and redemption' (Baker qtd. in Penn-Cooper 52). Penn-Cooper argues that Rankine's American lyricist does not wear the subversive mask of the minstrel, but lays bare her 'vulnerability' through the 'relative flatness' of her diction (52). *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* is neither anti-affirmative nor resistant to hope, as Gander notes. This chapter contends that the text expresses what W.E.B. Du Bois calls 'a hope not hopeless but unhopeful': 'hope' that affirms life despite its barrage of injuries (Du Bois 131). Whilst the significance of ordinary racist encounters in this *American Lyric* has been lost in critical readings focusing predominantly on Rankine's engagement with the media and the 9/11 attacks, this reading argues that both aspects of the text are not mutually exclusive, and provides a new lens through which to read *Don't Let Me Be Lonely.*

4. The Living Dead

Don't Let Me Be Lonely opens with the lyricist's childhood recollection that 'There was a time I could say no one I knew well had died' (5). This memory and the child's 'pre-mortal' state of consciousness evokes the myth of American innocence that resurfaced in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, a period that Richard Gray describes as a time 'after the fall' (in his book of the same name) (Filreis n.pag.). Along with *Falling Man*, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* demonstrates that the American domestic (in terms of both the familial home and the homeland) is in an interminable state of 'falling'. The text begins with a crisis that strikes the heart of the domestic sphere, a space framed as a cultural site for the nostalgic return to a harmonious past after the fall of the Twin Towers. Rankine depicts the American domestic not as a fantasised space of security and stability, but one of death and falling authoritative figures: namely, the lyricist's parents. The lyricist encountered death when she was eight years old, when her pregnant mother 'went to the hospital to give birth and returned without the baby' (5). The death of her sibling marks the 'fall' of childhood innocence, as she feels the touch of death for the first time. Describing her confusion, she states: 'Where's the baby? we asked. Did she shrug? She was the kind of woman who liked to shrug; deep within her was an everlasting shrug. That didn't seem like a death' (5). The severed intricate material bond between mother and baby creates an emptiness that reverberates throughout the body of the lyricist's mother: her womb, once a space of fecundity, protection, and growth becomes one of hollowness and death. The symbolic empty womb anticipates the motif of a barren American wasteland, which recurs throughout the text in various guises, negating the simplistic myth of America as a promised land abundant in health, wealth, and happiness. The fruitless pregnancy of the lyricist's mother implies that waiting for or expecting new life is a futile endeavour, resulting only in promises undelivered. Still birth describes the delivery of a baby born without any sign of life and exemplifies the simultaneity of life and death. The mother's deep 'everlasting shrug' in response to her loss, and possibly to her daughter's question, is thus an embodied gesture of resignation to enduring a life that coexists with death.[71]

[71] Her shrug is also what Berlant calls a 'rhetorical response to a non-rhetorical question of the body' that allows her to avoid the specifics of her daughter's question and to let go of the promise of life (qtd. in Byler n.pag.). See: Darren Byler, "Walking Around in Lauren Berlant's "Elliptical Life," *Fieldsights, Anthro Happenings, Cultural Anthropology* (2012): n.pag. 1 Feb 2015 <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/walking-around-in-lauren-berlants-elliptical-life>.

Considering the ambiguity of still birth, the lyricist concludes that her sibling's death 'didn't seem like a death', later adding that 'The years went by and people only died on television—if they weren't Black, they were wearing black or were terminally ill' (5). The sequential memory of her sibling's death and her notably racialised visualisation of mortality reveals her recognition of still birth as a condition suffered by sick and/or black bodies. As her encounters with death are largely limited to mediated spectacles, when death arrives on her doorstep the familiar becomes unfamiliar:

> Then I returned home from school one day and saw my father sitting on the steps of our home. He had a look that was unfamiliar; it was flooded, so leaking. I climbed the steps as far away from him as I could get. He was breaking or broken. Or, to be more precise, he looked to me like someone understanding his aloneness. Loneliness. (5)

As the materiality of her father's 'look' contrasts the intangible nature of mass-mediated spectacles of death, it appears 'unfamiliar', and transforms her home into an uncanny space of death and estrangement. She distances herself physically and emotionally in response, and 'steps as far away from him as [she] could get' (5). The use of parataxis in this piece creates the effect of numbness, but also of searching, a circling around death and aloneness, much as the lyricist circles around her father, viewing yet distancing herself from his face. The sensorial experience of flooding, leaking, breaking, and emptiness characterising her father's grief for his mother recalls his partner's fruitless pregnancy. On both occasions of death in this piece, the corporeal connection, the symbolic birth chord, between a mother and child is cut. Maternal separation at birth marks the first time the self is detached from the (m)other in a lifelong process of material separation and loss. From the outset, then, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* foregrounds the interminable 'break*ing*' of humankind due to the fragility of life and its coexistence with death, loss and loneliness. Referring specifically to the deaths of black people and the terminally ill, however, this American lyric clearly states that it will address historical racial violence in America. The text's exploration of the 'terminally ill' is also tied to racial politics, but more specifically to the (un)ethical implications of American capitalism, a system that espouses self-reliance. From the beginning, then, Rankine sets out the thematic concerns of her *American Lyric*: the simultaneity of life and death; the collision of the extraordinary and the ordinary; the echoes of the past that reverberate loudly in the present; and the ways in which racism and capitalism structure the American present.

Don't Let Me Be Lonely documents racist violence for the first time in its graphic and visceral commemoration of the murder of James Byrd, Jr:

> On June 7, 1998, 3 men: John King, Lawrence Brewer, and Shawn Berry, offered James Byrd Jr. a ride home in Berry's pickup truck. Byrd was walking along a road in Jasper, a rural town in East Texas. He was returning home from his niece's bridal shower. Instead of bringing him home, the men brought him to a clearing in the woods where they beat him and chained him to the back of the truck. They then sped along a road just east of the town. Byrd's shredded torso was found first, and then his head, neck, and right arm were found about a mile away. Police said a trail of blood and body parts stretched for 2 miles. (135)

The latent memory of Byrd's murder resurfaces while the lyricist is watching television coverage of the results of the 2004 American Presidential election. She compares the news coverage to 'non-reporting', a 'distraction from Bush himself, the same Bush who can't remember if two or three people were convicted for dragging a black man to his death in his home state of Texas' (21).[72] The omission of racial violence preserves structural racism, while the white noise and (mis)calculations constitutive of news coverage render the television screen a smoke screen. The lyricist's theorisation of 'non-reporting' calls to mind the words of Wallace Stevens, who spoke of the 'extraordinary pressure of news': the 'pressure of an external event or events on the consciousness to the exclusion of any power of contemplation' (*Necessary Angel* 20). The empty and meaningless content of 'non-reporting' is comparable to static or white noise, the (physical) pressure of which saps energy and hope from the lyricist, who states: 'After the initial presidential election results come in, I stop watching the news. I want to continue watching, charting, and discussing the counts, the recounts, the hand counts, but I cannot. I lose hope' (21). The asyndeton used in this passage conveys a sense of the lyricist's exhaustion, caused by excessive 'non-reporting': the seemingly endless barrage of calculations and recalculations that drain the brain and distract from the reality that the murder of a black American citizen can be forgotten by the President with little media or public concern.

The details of Byrd's murder, including his name, are noticeably withheld from the main body of the text, surfacing only in the endnotes to the lyricist's discussion of Bush's inability to remember. Arranging her text in this way, Rankine models the media paradigm for documenting ordinary (white) American violence to implicitly reveal its failings. With his name omitted from

[72] In a 2017 interview with Lorin Stein, Rankine commented on Byrd's murder and Bush's inability to recall the details, stating: 'With *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, the moment that kicked [that book] off was when James Byrd was killed in Jasper, Texas [...] Then I'm in London and I hear Bush say, "oh . . . um . . . yeah, I kind of remember that, yeah. I'm sure those guys are going to go to prison, I don't know." He was the governor of Texas. And the fact that he—that it did not sear him, when it happened, that's when that book [began]. That moment hit me with its sadness... In a sense [the book] was about moral injury' (qtd. in Temple n.pag.). See: Emily Temple, "Claudia Rankine: 'I Think We Need to Be Frightened': Highlights from Her Talk at BAM's Eat, Drink, and Be Literary," *Literary Hub* 11 May 2017, 14 Dec. 2017 <https://lithub.com/claudia-rankine-i-think-we-need-to-be-frightened/>.

the main text, Byrd is rendered another anonymous black man whose death is invisible, nothing more than an after-thought or a footnote in US history. News (non-)reporting operates in this way, enabling Bush to cast Byrd and the details of his gruesome murder into oblivion. Rankine, however, withholds Byrd's name from the main body of the text for a different purpose: to depoliticise it, to ensure that it is not incorporated into an exceptional narrative that frames ordinary acts of white American violence as isolated or singular 'traumas'. This aesthetic strategy dovetails with Stevens' theorisation of 'nobility', which drifts into the lyricist's mind:

> "the peculiarity of the imagination is nobility . . . nobility which is our spiritual height and depth; and while I know how difficult it is to express it, nevertheless I am bound to give a sense of it. Nothing could be more evasive and inaccessible. Nothing distorts itself and seeks disguise more quickly." (Rankine, *Don't* 81)

Nobility is found not in politically didactic verse or narratives, but in the peculiarities of the imagination. Following this logic, Rankine refrains from telling the reader what to think or do with the details she provides in the main text and endnotes. Although the colours of the images scattered through the text are black and white, there is nothing black and white — or, in other words, unequivocal — about her *American Lyric.* This aesthetic strategy activates imaginations and inspires active engagement, offering an antidote to the passive consumption of swathes of (meaningless) information and television episodes that dull the senses and the capacity for critical thought. The mostly page-long pieces of text and images in the book are alternate episodes, incidents appearing in isolation that collectively form a non-linear sequence, which the reader and Rankine assemble together. When re-examined with the benefit of the endnotes, the passage on Byrd and Bush can be read as a non-didactic critique of the differential allocation of value to black lives. The surnames of the protagonists, Byrd and Bush, evoke the proverb, 'a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush'. The failings of the media and re-election of Bush work together to reverse the directive of this proverb: that it is better to value what one already has in the present over the possibility of having something greater in the future. The re-election of the president indicates that the nation values Bush and his (empty) promises for the future much more than present knowledge: that ordinary anti-black racism is not something past but present, ongoing, and apparently the president, and those who re-elected him, do not care. Bush and his supporters live with this, assimilate it into everyday life, still consider this life to be 'good' and vote for it to continue. The exhausted and despairing lyricist, realising this, loses hope for the future and focuses instead on the discontents of the present.

Bush is visualised not as a figure of nobility, but as a transmitter of white noise. The lyricist addresses the television as if it were her interlocutor, or to be more precise, as if it were Bush:

> *You don't remember because you don't care.* Sometimes my mother's voice swells and fills my forehead. Mostly I resist the flooding, but in Bush's case I find myself talking to the television screen: *You don't know because you don't care.* (21; emphasis in original)

As her mother's words return in the form of a fragmented memory, the reader is left unsure of the context in which they were originally spoken. Whilst they could refer to Byrd's murder and Bush's inability to remember whether two or three white men killed Byrd, they could equally refer to the wider systemic failure to care for black life. As noted above, the 'everlasting shrug' of the lyricist's mother implies that she is not only resigned to the stillbirth of her baby, but also to the condition of a life borne from death. The kaleidoscope of memories converging in the present intimates that the lyricist intuits a connection between her mother's words, the stillbirth of her sibling, and Byrd's murder: namely, the simultaneity of black life and death. The brutal murder of Byrd as well as Bush's disinterest in the case are symptomatic of the systemic degradation of black bodies as disposable and ungrievable. As noted in Chapter Three, ungrievable lives 'cannot be mourned because they are always already lost or, rather, never "were"' and, as such, are always already lost from birth (Butler, *Precarious* 33). In the lyricist's eyes, the elision of Byrd from public memory reveals the systemic failure to 'know' of or acknowledge his embodied existence, as well as the failure to care for its premature end. Her mother's shrug in response to stillbirth gains another layer of significance, therefore, as it implies that stillbirth is not an exceptional 'trauma', but a microcosm of black life in America. Seen through the lyricist's lens, to be born black in America is to live in a metaphysical state of still birth.

Don't Let Me Be Lonely counters the erasure of Byrd through its inclusion of a black-and-white photograph of his face and the site where his body parts were found. The first of these photographs is somewhat grainy and grey, featuring bystanders — dressed in black-and-white clothing and footwear — assembled around a pool of liquid consisting of blood and/or water and the reflections of the faces staring down. Welch reads the photograph as a close-up of what appears to be the gravelly surface of a road, a 'photograph from the crime scene — a close-up of the word "HEAD" spray-painted on the gravel road, marking the place where James Byrd, Jr.'s head was found' (139). This visual accounts for the brutal dismemberment of Byrd's body and aestheticises the lyricist's stream of consciousness, or what Berlant refers to as a 'flooding mentality as evidence of an autonomic explosion of sensations and reflections' (*Cruel* 59). The fuzzy liquid surface is evocative of the static or 'non-reporting' of the news and the voice that simultaneously swells, fills, and 'floods' the lyricist's conscious mind, which operates inside her 'foreHEAD'. The image of her over-stimulated or 'exploded' mind is then juxtaposed with a

photograph of Byrd, a head shot taken when he was alive. Levinas asserts that 'the face is a living, naked presence': as such, the presence of Byrd's face on the page makes him present to the living and immortalises his memory (*Totality* 66). The space between the two visuals is interrupted by an impassioned version of the words of the lyricist's mother: 'this voice takes on a life of its own: *You don't know because you don't bloody care. Do you?*' (22; emphasis in original). These words morph into Byrd's image, so that the speaker is not only forced to meet his gaze, but also his haunting accusation. The responsibility for remembering and recognising his suffering and death is thus directed away from Bush and onto the speaker, and as the reader is effectively reading the speaker's mind — through word and image — this question is ultimately directed at the face staring back at him: the reader.

Berlant contra Caruth asserts that an event that 'floods experience, memory, knowledge, and practices of habituation' does not always feel like 'flooding' (*Cruel* 81). In this passage, the (physical) 'pressure' of news non-reporting, the re-election of Bush and the latent memory of a black man's death flood the lyricist's senses, causing an expansion and affective (as well as information) overload. This is possibly another reason why Byrd's name is withheld from the main text: it represents the lyricist's inability to remember his name due to media saturation or 'flooding'. That the image of his face flashes before her eyes (and the reader's) suggests that she does remember his face, however, which she responds to with the following admission:

> I forget things, too. It makes me sad. Or it makes me the saddest. The sadness is not really about George W, or our American optimism; the sadness lives in the recognition that a life can not matter. Or, as there are billions of lives, my sadness is alive alongside the recognition that billions of lives never mattered. (23)

Defining sadness as an emotion that is 'alive', she understands it as an embodied emotion inextricably linked to her recognition that black lives do not matter. She elaborates further on sadness, describing it as 'a color: dark. It meant dark in color, to darken. It meant me. I felt sad' (108). Sadness and colour define the speaker and her feelings, such that sadness becomes synonymous with blackness. Sadness is 'alive' as it defines black (dis)embodiment in America; or, as Rankine states, 'the condition of black life is one of mourning' ("Condition" n.pag.). This condition is neither caused by a singular 'trauma' — most definitely not by '9/11' — nor can it be 'worked through' in standardised stages within a prescribed timeline. Instead, it is chronic, as death is part of black cultural identity or a part of the vernacular:

> Instead of death and dying being unusual, untoward events, or despite being inevitable end-of-lifespan events, the cycles of our daily lives were so persistently interrupted by spectres of death that we worked this experience into the culture's iconography and included it as an aspect of black cultural sensibility. (K. Holloway 6)

This cultural sensibility is revealed in the 'crisis ordinariness' of black (dis)embodiment in America, where driving home from a bridal shower may be as fatal as it was for Byrd. Such incidents are not 'traumatic' events with a point of origin and termination, but interminable and assimilated into ordinary life. This is a source of the lyricist's sadness, which compels her to tune out and 'switch the channel' to temporarily numb her senses to the sad reality of (black) life (23). Choosing to do so, however, facilitates forgetfulness and paradoxically prolongs sadness. Her grief is not only 'complex' in the medico-psychiatric sense, therefore, but also in another sense: it is omnipresent and all-consuming on the one hand, and absent on the other. The medico-psychiatric model of grief assumes that life and death are on opposite ends of the ontological and biological spectrum, but the lyricist's grief complicates this simplistic division, as it invites a reconsideration of what it means to live a life defined by death. If death — whether premature, unexpected, or undeserved — is a defining feature of black life, then grief is an all-encompassing life experience without a definitive starting or end point. It is, in Berlant's terms, a genre of life.

To be disposable, to 'not matter', is to be a waste product. While black bodies were historically enslaved, bought, and sold in America, Rankine asserts that 'terminally ill' bodies are valued only as profitable commodities. Following her assertion that 'people only died on television—if they weren't Black, they were wearing black or were terminally ill', the lyricist considers a friend who is slowly dying from breast cancer, a chronic illness that is, along with depression and liver failure, 'endemic to African American populations' (Rankine, *Don't 5*; Hume 86). The lyricist's assertion that the 'lump was misdiagnosed a year earlier' is juxtaposed with an X-ray image of the clearly visible tumour that the doctor somehow failed to see (8). Despite of, or because of, this (fatal) misdiagnosis, her friend is encouraged to undergo several medical procedures:

> During the mastectomy she has muscle mass and some fatty something or other removed from her abdominal area and used in the reconstruction of her left breast. The plastic surgeon argued she could do a far better job with natural versus artificial tissue. It added an extra day to her hospital stay. (8)

Rankine's use of rhyme in the final sentence of this passage implies that the surgeon's recommendation was a throw-away remark, reflective of her throw-away attitude toward her patient. The privatised medical system is 'incorporated into the labor process for the purpose of turning a profit' and, Rankine implies, more concerned with the health of the economy than the health of those for whom it is paid to care (Hume 87). Though the surgeon's recommendation did not add extra days to the life of her patient, it did add to the cost of her hospital stay, a fact not lost on the lyricist. She intimates that the main priorities of the healthcare system are profit

and productivity, not the sick and suffering, who are treated as objects to be either fixed or commodities to be exploited. Together, these episodes indicate that a systemic lack of care for black people and the terminally ill results only in physical and metaphysical death.

On the following page, Rankine writes:

> After the mastectomy, the chemotherapy, the radiation, and the waiting, we learn the cancer is in this friend's bones and know it is settled. I go to see her two months before she dies. Her skin by then reveals her skeleton. It is easy for the eyes not to stare, easy to accept the fact that the cancer has been replaced by the approach of death. It is easy to accept that her personality has been overshadowed by its condition [...] No second look is necessary. (9)

Rankine uses asyndeton once again to convey the waning sense of hope felt by the lyricist and her friend as they patiently await a sign of life. This wait, however, like that of the lyricist's expectant mother, is fruitless. Her friend slowly withers and wastes until she morphs into the most abject waste of all, a living corpse. Rankine's repetition of the phrase 'It is easy' implies that the lyricist has become accustomed to accepting death, possibly due to its inexorable invasion of black life in America, 'where dead blacks are a part of normal life' (K. Holloway 6). When she visits her terminally ill friend in the familiar surroundings of her home, she is once again confronted with the coexistence of death and abjection in ordinary life. Although 'it is easy' to accept death as a fact of black life, she finds it easier to look away from its embodiment. Just as she distanced herself from the sea of grief falling from her father's eyes, she averts her gaze once more, this time needing no 'second look' at the face of (living) death. She finds safety instead in the protective screen of the television:

> We watch a lot of television the four days I sit at her bedside. We talk. She grows tired. She is sad. She grows tired. She becomes angry. She grows tired. She is accepting. She grows tired. She grows tired. (9)

This passage requires readers to endure the tedium of repetition and a small measure of the exhaustion experienced by both women. The lyricist's friend has already processed her own death, transitioning from sadness, to anger, and, finally, acceptance.[73] The question Byrd (figuratively) asks, '*You don't know because you don't bloody care. Do you?*' is as applicable to the doctor's failure to *know* of or care enough to identify his patient's tumour, as it is to Bush's negligence (22; emphasis in original). The failure to sufficiently care for others has fatal

[73] This transition evokes Elisabeth Kübler-Ross' categorisation of the dying experience into five succinct and sequential stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. This five-stage theory is commonly misapplied to experiences of grief. See: Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying: What the Dying Have to Teach Doctors, Nurses, Clergy and Their Own Families* (New York: Macmillan, 1969).

repercussions, as the lyricist tentatively asks, 'Can we say she might have lived had her doctor not screwed up? If yes—when does her death actually occur?' (8). If so, then the healthcare system — which promises to extend life, whether through surgical procedures or (poisonous) prescription medication — paradoxically quickens slow death.

Fred Moten theorises the political potential of 'exhaustion as a mode or form or way of life', where the breakdown of sovereign expression causes 'the complete lysis of this morbid body/universe' (738; 752). Moten engages with the work of Frantz Fanon who calls for 'nothing short of the liberation of the man of color from himself' (*Black Skin* 10). Arguing that the black man 'is not a man' (as he is always already the product of the white imagination), Fanon asserts that the black man must inhabit an abject 'zone of nonbeing', where the 'complete *lysis* of [his] morbid body' takes place and 'an authentic upheaval can be born' (*Black Skin* 10; 12; 10; emphasis in original). In her reading of linguistic failure in *Citizen,* Hume argues that 'language—even more specifically, *lyric* language—plays a particularly important role in the lysis of the body/universe' (103; emphasis in original). The logic of lyrical lysis is also applicable to the lyrical 'failure' of *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* and the 'failed' American lyricist. Developing Moten's theory that the 'disavowal of self' is 'animated by both lyric and lysis, continually driven toward new fields of exhaustion', Rankine suggests that lyrical lysis — the dissolution of the traditionally sovereign and stable lyric subject — is necessary for the creation of a (failed) lyrical (and ethical) genre for living (Moten 769). She therefore adapts the radical thinking of Fanon and Moten to propose a more ethically charged political ontology. Berlant contends that the urgency to 'reinvent, from the scene of survival, new idioms of the political, and of belonging itself' requires 'debating what the baselines of survival should be in the near future, which is, now, the future we are making' (*Cruel* 262). Rankine suggests that grieving for abject bodies is vital for staying attached to, and surviving, life in a land of (living) death and abjection.

5. A Liver in a Wasteland

Following the lyricist's portrayal of her exhausted and terminally ill friend, she asks: 'Why do people waste away?' (11). This question is particularly apt as *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* contains a parodic diagram of the human digestive system, in which the liver is the only organ labelled and the intestines, organs of waste and abjection, are replaced by a map of North America. The lyricist, who is writing a book about the liver, embodies the liver in the dual sense of the term: she is both the embodiment of the human organ and a survivor of life despite its coexistence with

death. Rankine's rearrangement of the organ system invites the question: what does it mean to be a human liver in an American wasteland? The lyricist's editor reiterates this question:

> My editor asks me to tell her exactly what the liver means to me. She must not have read Laurie Tarkan's article in the *Times* [...] I point to a paragraph and read aloud: *The liver is particularly vulnerable to drugs because one of its functions is to break down or metabolize chemicals that are not water-soluble. . . . But sometimes the breakdown products are toxic to liver cells.* (54; emphasis in original)

The metabolic process of breaking down chemicals that are not water-soluble is analogous with the lyricist's written attempts to process or 'break down' ungrievable crises and deaths that are not 'water-soluble': those for which tears have not been publicly shed. The fusion of biological organs with thought, expression, and affect evokes Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theorisation of 'organic thought': a form of biological thinking 'through which the relation of the "psychic" to the "physiological" becomes conceivable' (89-90). While DeLillo's concept of organic shrapnel reveals the 'awful openness' of the embodied subject within its shared environment, organic thought reveals the inextricability of thought from feeling, and the convergence of affective and geographical landscapes (DeLillo, *Falling* 164). The capacity of the liver to think organically is partly why the lyricist is fascinated with this particular organ. Contemplating her editor's question, she states:

> I could have told her it is because the word *live* hides within it [...] In truth I know the answer to her question, but how can I say to her, *Understand without effort that man is left, at times thinking, as if trying to weep.* I am somewhat rephrasing the poet César Vallejo because Vallejo comes closest to explaining that any kind of knowledge can be a prescription against despair. (54-55; emphasis in original)

The liver function is to break down the toxic material it absorbs and, analogously, the lyricist wishes to process pain through the creation of an embodied literary work that figuratively weeps. Thinking as if trying to weep, she produces a text through which the abject can be figuratively (re)born. As noted in the previous chapter, Hamid describes Changez's experiential response to loss in terms that invoke female reproduction and impregnation. There are echoes of these terms in the language of swelling, saturation, and leaking Rankine uses to portray the lyricist's embodied experience of grief. The engorged body of grief is, in contrast to the barren American wasteland, an abject yet fertile space swelling with creative potential and expectation. While Changez demonstrates the (re)productive potential of grief through his provision of parental nourishment and creation of a care community, the American lyricist shows she cares through her creation of poetry from the pain that passes into her pores. A work that weeps is one that expresses tears of 'sadness', an affective state that characterises black life. The lyricist's work, then, witnesses and

weeps for black bodies, while simultaneously stressing their material facticity. Contrasting the stillbirth of the abject body, the lyricist — and ultimately Rankine — think organically to breathe life into the exhausted black body.

The lyricist's grief is living, it is 'alive', and enables her to *bear* black life in two senses of the term: she stomachs or endures the painful injuries, beatings, and abjection of black bodies; and metaphorically gives life to them in the lived present through embodied witnessing. In one episode, she responds to the suffering and death of two black victims of police brutality, Abner Louima and Ahmed Amadou Diallo, with gut-wrenching grief. The endnotes of the text honour the lives and deaths of Louima and Diallo without censorship or an exoneration of systemic racism. In 1997 Louima was arrested by police officers who 'reportedly beat [him] inside the patrol car' and later 'sodomized him with a broken broomstick' (142). Two years later, in 1999, Diallo 'was shot dead [...] in the vestibule of his Bronx apartment building. Despite being unarmed, four police officers expended 41 rounds shooting at [him]. He was declared dead at the scene' (142). The juxtaposition of a framed image of Louima with a framed image of Diallo compels the reader to respond to their faces, recognising that acts of racial violence are not isolated events but underpinned by structural and routinised racism. The lyricist prefaces her visual and verbal descriptions of these men with accounts of her own bodily torment. Seeing the face of Louima, 'Instinctively, [her] hand braces [her] abdomen' and, although the tears that 'express emotions, the ones that recognize and take responsibility for the soul' do not fall from her eyes, she 'get[s] a sharp pain in [her] gut', feeling her insides 'twisting away from flesh in the form of a blow to the body' (56). These affective responses confer a different more literal connotation on the metaphorical phrase 'gut-wrenching'. The 'gut-wrench' or gut-punch is not unexpected but almost anticipated as she has felt like this 'all [her] life', adding: 'Sometimes I look into someone's face and I must brace myself—the blow on its way' (56). The gut-punch is thus among the affective conventions of the genre that defines black life: grief. The lyricist comes to a conclusion that concurs with the thoughts of the grieving protagonists of *Falling Man* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*: 'There is no innovating loss. It was never invented, it happened as something physical, something physically experienced' (Rankine, *Don't* 57). The physicality of her grief, though painful, is ethically responsible, as it refuses the erasure of bloodied black bodies from memory.

Emphasising the need to remember, Rankine, in a 2010 interview with Elizabeth Hoover, stated:

> There are certain ways in which we are being wounded that we shouldn't forget. What happened to Louima—all the violence that happens to black men in this culture—is not something that should be forgotten. There have been moments when I've felt that if we could still them and keep them present, you could remind people, myself included, of these terrible things that are happening. ("Wounds" n.pag.)

The pangs of grief that pierce the lyricist's flesh remind her of the brutal beatings and bullets that obliterated the bodies of black men such as Diallo and Louima. Along with *Falling Man* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* suggests that the affective experience of grief preserves the memory of the (living) dead in the flesh of the living. The lyricist's grieving body makes history present and the dead a living presence, demonstrating that the 'affective work of memory' is, as Berlant notes, 'just one among many forces that together constitute what gets refracted as the present' (*Cruel* 52). Her affective attachment to the dead is not a pathological symptom, but an embodied (and ethical) response that rescues these men and the reality of police brutality from oblivion.

The lyricist's grief climaxes in her encounter with South Africans suffering from AIDS, who suffer a double (living) death, as they are both black and terminally ill.[74] Together with *Falling Man* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Rankine's *American Lyric* demonstrates that the affective experience of grief and the peculiarities of the imagination enable the embodied subject to become *more* than itself. The lyricist slips into the skin of the AIDS-addled body — through embodied cognition — and feels her insides wriggling and recoiling against themselves, while distress 'physically lodg[es] itself like a virus within' and 'mov[es] in with muscle and bone' (117, 118). Distress, like sadness, is 'alive': it is an embodied feeling that intrusively moves into her tendons and tissues, comparable to a virus that 'moves in' and makes home in the host's body. To identify, as the lyricist does, as a 'skin sack of uselessness' — a worthless disembodied container of skin — is to identify as disposable waste (117). Sharing the (imagined) pain of those suffering from AIDS in this way, the lyricist performs the role of the liver: she thinks 'as if trying to weep' and temporarily inhabits the 'zone of nonbeing' where an 'authentic upheaval can be born' (Rankine, *Don't* 55; Fanon, *Black Skin* 10). There is a glimmer of hope that an 'upheaval'

[74] Due to the exorbitant prices charged by the American pharmaceutical industry, South Africans could not avail of anti-retroviral medication. Following 'an intense lobbying effort by the pharmaceutical industry and the Clinton Administration,' the Medicines Act — legislation that would make it possible for South Africa to 'override drug patents and provide more affordable generics' — was not passed (Power 61). This is another example of the failings of a profit-driven healthcare system that fails to care for the life and liberty of those who interfere with the interests of the US, or for those considered to serve no interest at all. See: Samantha Power, "Letter from South Africa: The AIDS Rebel," *New Yorker* 19 May 2003: 54-67.

in the form of an ethically responsive 'good-life' can be realised when she absorbs into her pores the news that antiretrovirals will be made available to those with AIDS:

> Its entrance by necessity slowly translated my already grief into a tremendously exhausted hope. The translation occurred unconsciously, perhaps occurred simply because I am alive. The translation occurs as a form of life. Then life, which seems so full of waiting, awakes suddenly into a life of hope. (118)

Where there is grief, there is hope, and ultimately, life. In this *American Lyric* — and in the novels examined in this thesis — affection, 'infection', and abjection through (shared) grief are not afflictions, but affirmations of life. This is thus the answer to the lyricist's question: 'Why do people waste away?' (11).

Though she realises — as her expectant mother did — that the wait to be recognised as a life worthy of response and care is a long (and potentially futile) one, the lyricist continues to wait. She is neither deluded nor drowning in the depths of despair; rather, she retains what Du Bois calls 'a hope not hopeless but unhopeful' (131). The evolving yet tautologous syntax of Du Bois' alliterative phrase suggests the complexity and struggle inherent in the hope for a different, and better, 'good' life. In "Black Strivings in a Twilight Civilization" (1996), Cornel West, quoting Du Bois, calls for African Americans to 'fight for radical democracy in the face of the frightening abyss — or terrifying inferno — of the 21st century, clinging to a "hope not hopeless but unhopeful"' (West 112). West invites white readers to be 'intellectually open enough to position [oneself] alongside the sorrowful, suffering, yet striving, ordinary black folk' and to feel their sadness ("Black Strivings" 58). Rankine, who references West's "Black Strivings", makes a similar call for recognition and response in the face of the 'abyss' or 'terrifying inferno' of post-9/11 America. Much like Du Bois' unhopeful hope, the American lyricist feels the suffering of 'ordinary black folk' deep within, while exhibiting a relentless drive to live: to persist in the face of despair and to strive for a life that is 'good' in an ethical sense. Patiently waiting, she affirms life despite its slow death in a barren wasteland of despair and desertion. Her affirmation is not a demonstration of resilience, defined as an expression of 'positive emotions' following a potentially 'traumatic' event (Bonanno, "Resilience" 136). Instead, it is a repudiation and simultaneous continuance: a state of durational exhaustion that brings her — and the abject bodies to whom she responds — back to life. This is where Rankine adapts the thinking of her predecessors, including Fanon and Moten. She suggests that enduring the abjection of a self-absorbed narcissistic (American) subject, through imagining and 'translating' the grief of abject bodies, is necessary for a liver to live on and hope — no matter how 'tremendously exhausted' — to be found (118).

The liver thinks as if trying to weep and the lyricist thinks likewise, creating a weeping body of writing in the hope of affecting and altering the reader. She states:

> Myung Mi Kim did say that the poem is really a responsibility to everyone in a social space. She did say it was okay to cramp, to clog, to fold over at the gut, to have to put hand to flesh, to have to hold the pain, and then to translate it here. She did say, in so many words, that what alerts, alters. (57)

Accordingly, poetic composition begins with an affective and imaginative response to abject bodies in pain. Fulfilling a 'responsibility to everyone in a social space', the lyricist responds to the question, *'You don't know because you don't bloody care. Do you?'* with an affirmation: she cares to know and lets others know of the suffering and death of abject bodies (22; emphasis in original). The compulsion to alert and alter is one Rankine's American lyricist shares with DeLillo's abject artist, who figuratively assaults public consciousness to alter habitual processes of perception. Both of their embodied aesthetics depart from the approved ethical aesthetic of trauma, which uses 'the most indirect and experimental aesthetic forms possible' to 'transmit' trauma (Gibbs 26).[75] Whilst the alleged 'experimentalism' of the trauma aesthetic is now formulaic, *Falling Man* and *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* theorise radical art forms that affect, infect, and activate the imagination. Through different mediums (performance art and poetry), both fictional artists seek neither to traumatise nor console, but to elicit affective (and potentially ethical) responses from receptive and open audiences. In turn, DeLillo and Rankine stir the senses and stimulate the imagination to inspire active engagement in ways that are ethical and, in the words of Stevens, noble.

6, A Work that Weeps: A Poethics of Loss

The possibility of poetic witness and response-ability is explored more fully as *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* progresses. Following her editor's request to explain why she cares about the liver, the lyricist probes the relationship between the liver, organic thought, and ethical responsibility:

[75] Proponents of the sanctioned trauma aesthetic maintain that the only way to engage ethically with trauma is to transmit it through formal experimentation. This is not only impossible, but potentially unethical, as it risks appropriating and universalising subjective experiences of suffering. If Rankine 'transmitted' interminable mourning — a condition specific to black life in America — or the pain suffered by Louima and Diallo, then readers could theoretically claim this pain as their own, regardless of race, nation or ethnicity. Rather than transmitting pain, the lyricist, and, in turn, Rankine, 'translates' her embodied imagination of pain for readers. Despite the difficulty of doing so, it is, as Stevens suggests, a noble and arguably more ethical endeavour than the approved ethics of the trauma aesthetic.

> I understand that what she wants is an explanation of the mysterious connections that exist between an author and her text. If I am present in a subject position what responsibility do I have to the content, to the truth value, of the words themselves? Is "I" even me or am "I" a gear-shift to get from one sentence to the next? Should I say we? Is the voice not various if I take responsibility for it? What does my subject mean to me? (54)

The lyricist, like the grammatical subject, is situated between a beginning and an end, in a liminal space where life and death sentences are coterminous. Questioning whether or not 'we' is more accurate than 'I', she implies that her thoughts and internal voice are porous, constantly shifting gear, and emerging from a process of ongoing dialogues with the voices and faces of the living, the dead, and the in-between. The lyricist is responsible to these voices through her creation of lyrical dialogues that demonstrate a gear-shift of the lyric 'I' and a drive to live. She responds to her mother's words, '*You don't remember because you don't care*', with a form of self-reflexive questioning, comparable to an examination of conscience, asking: '*You don't know because you don't care, do you?*' (21; emphasis in original; 22). She asks herself whether she cares about the suffering of those from whom she turns her gaze — such as her father, Byrd, and her dying friend — or whether she will let them be lonely.

The lyricist listens to the voices flooding her mind and examines her conscience before composing lyric poems, such as the following:

> I thought I was dead
>
> You thought you were dead?
>
> I thought I was.
>
> Did you feel dead?
>
> I said, God rest me.
>
> God rest your soul?
>
> I thought I was dead.
>
> You tried everything?
>
> I waited.
>
> You spoke aloud?
>
> I said, God rest me.

You'd let me be lonely?

I thought I was dead. (16)

This poem is a plea: the lyricist prays for 'rest' and reprieve from the comatose life of loneliness she leads, in which disembodied televisual voices are a source of company. Her prayer is a request, rather than a demand, which depends on the listening ear of God. She waits for God to listen and grant her request to let her soul rest. She hears neither the call of God nor the silence of death, but a voice asking, 'You'd let me be lonely?' (16). This question is, of course, a variation of the title of Rankine's work, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, which has a complex syntactical construction. The title is not a negative imperative due to the word 'let', which implies the presence of another and an infra-creation of space between the self and other (Filreis n.pag.). The construction is complicated further by the presence of 'let me', a syntactical structure of prayer akin to the syntax of 'God, rest me'. Both 'rest me' and 'let me' depend on the presence of another to either grant or deny the petitioner's request. The question, 'You'd let me be lonely?', echoes the plea the lyricist makes throughout, implying that she finds her own voice by listening to a cacophony of others. Despite the difficulties of miscommunication in a world of white noise and non-reporting, the lyricist identifies with the anonymous voice, recognising herself in the echoes and verbal resonance of the words she actively hears. 'You'd let me be lonely?' reminds the lyricist that her presence is necessary to the life of the other: she is asked to live *for* the other. In this dialogue, then, listening to the voice of another creates a space in which loneliness contracts: the speaker stops waiting to be listened to, to die, and listens instead to the second voice willing her to live. Although she expresses a desire to leave the world, she does not have the will power or agency to abandon it, surrendering herself instead to the will of God. Her prayer, like the prayer of *Falling Man*'s Lianne, is not a death wish but a wish for life. While Lianne prays for a (re)union of souls, the lyricist prays for a life free from loneliness. Beseeching God to 'rest [her] soul' from the living death of loneliness, she is implicitly asking, 'don't let me be lonely'. She prays for the death of the solitary self-absorbed 'I' to feel a sense of intimacy or connection in a distant world in which, as a woman of colour, she is socially othered, 'sad', and 'suicidal' in the eyes of doctors. The answer to her prayer is granted by the voice of another, who reminds the speaker of her presence and, in turn, asks her to remain present. This instruction is ethical: it is a call to live through response.

In *Falling Man*, Lianne feels communion with her fathers through the 'divine' intervention of art and prayer, which inspires in her the epiphany that she is not alone but part of a union of souls. Though not in direct conversation, there are resonances of Lianne's divine

encounter in *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*. Close to the conclusion, Rankine explicitly draws on Levinas to position writing and speech as ethical antidotes to loneliness. In the penultimate section of the text, she quotes from Levinas' essay, "The Transcendence of Words":

> Then all life is a form of waiting, but it is the waiting of loneliness. One waits to recognize the other, to see the other as one sees the self. Levinas writes, "The subject who speaks is situated in relation to the other. This privilege of the other ceases to be incomprehensible once we admit that the first fact of existence is neither being in itself nor being for itself but being for the other, in other words, that human existence is a creature. By offering a word, the subject, putting himself forward lays himself open, and, in a sense, prays." (Rankine, *Don't* 120)

Contrary to Jean Paul Sartre's existentialist philosophy, Levinas contends that 'human existence is a creature' as the self and other are always already knotted together in ways unknown and uncontrolled. Behind the denial and delusion at the core of myths of autonomy there lies the reality that a first-person 'I' cannot exist without the presence of a second-person 'you'. Levinas waits for a life in which hierarchies of personhood are unsettled, where the second-person object is recognised as the subject. The American lyricist waits for this life, praying that she and the abject bodies to whom she responds will one day be recognised as 'one sees the self', not as the abject Other (120). She experiences the 'translation' of chronic 'already grief' into 'hope' when words printed on the page are printed on her receptive and responsive body, and she, in turn, writes in the hope that her readers will feel the same (118). Clinging to a 'hope not hopeless but unhopeful', she creates lyric poetry, and in so doing, offers a word, puts herself forward, lays herself open, and prays (Du Bois 131). In this way, being open to others and being affected (and infected) by others exhibits, in DeLillo's words, an 'awful openness', while translating grief and (imagined) pain into poetry is an act of divine intervention that revives 'exhausted hope' (DeLillo, *Falling* 164; Rankine, *Don't* 118).

Grief is not only the genre defining black life but also a literary genre for sustaining life. The American lyricist/liver, and, in turn, Rankine, pour grief into a lyric of loss that weeps for the lives of abject bodies. Rankine's lyric does not conform to the conventions of the lyric mode; rather, it is a 'failed' lyric that aestheticises the lyricist's affective experience of grief. Hume asserts that *Citizen* demonstrates 'the failure of the most basic attempts to communicate in language, the structural edicts of racism', but overlooks the concept of 'failure' and its association with liver — and lyrical — failure in *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* (104). Lyrical failure is a poetic form of liver failure, characterised by the 'break down' of the conventional sovereign lyric subject into a non-sovereign American lyricist, who feels for abject bodies and breaks down in response. As noted in the previous chapter, the spontaneity and pain of the affective exchanges associated with grief

reveal the contingency, rather than sovereign control, of the subject and the experiential realm of being. The liver is responsible for breaking down toxic chemicals to safeguard the health of the body and, analogously, the lyricist is responsible for breaking down the crises of abject bodies *for* others to absorb and digest. Lyrical 'failure' thus has restorative functions: to safeguard the memory of black lives (and deaths) from the loneliness of oblivion and to make their stories and struggles present to the living. Rankine, in turn, enables the (living) dead to live in public memory by filling the pages of her lyric with their presence. More than the novels examined in this thesis, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* suggests that a recognition of the limits of subjective boundaries is essential for extending outward to engage in ethical activity and embrace life.

Rankine incorporates the poetry of Paul Celan into the text, refining Levinasian thought and creating her own theory of speech and ethics. Celan is introduced to the reader for the first time in a sequence that explores the death of the speaker's nephews and brother-in-law. She begins with a series of questions: 'Why are we alive? My sister had a daughter and a son. Is she dead? Is he dead? Yes, they're dead. My sister's children and her husband died in a car crash' (61). She then invokes Celan:

> I listen, but do not speak. I look into her eyes. We sit on the floor of public places, our faces wet. Then, like that, I am in my car, turning the key in the ignition, my own quotidian affairs breaking in. Who will she be when she is too tired to cry? Where does her kind of grief go? Paul Celan whispers in my ear,
>
> All those sleep shapes, crystalline
> that you assumed
> in the language shadow,
>
> to those
> I lead my blood,
>
> those image lines, them
> I'm to harbour
> in the slit-arteries
> of my cognition–,
>
> *my grief, I can see,*
> *is deserting you.*

(61; emphasis in original)

An image featuring two roadside signs on which the words 'FUNERAL NO PARKING' are imprinted is inserted above the speaker's description of her public expression of grief (61). These two roadside signs are poignant for two reasons: firstly, they occupy two parking spaces and are thus temporary obstructions to the usual or routine parking system; and, secondly, the imperative imprinted on them impels drivers not to stop, but to move on or continue forward. Whilst grief halts the fast-pacing pulse of everyday life for these sisters, who tearfully 'sit on the floor of public places,' the liminal space of grief is one where they cannot permanently park due to the continuity of life. The lyricist writes, 'Then, like that, I am in my car, turning the key in the ignition, my own quotidian affairs breaking in,' uninvited, prompting her to drive or move on with daily life, facing its ongoing crisis and finding new ways to continue living (61). However, the lyricist does not endorse the medico-psychiatric imperative of getting over grief and getting on with the future. Although she may no longer break down in public with her sister, she publicly expresses her tears — and the tears of her sister — through her creation of a life-sustaining work that weeps.

The poem that 'Paul Celan whispers in [her] ear' speaks to the touching, embodied poetics of grief the lyricist wishes to write. Celan asserts that the poet, awake among the sleepers, begins with the formless language of shadows and darkness: the subconscious thoughts and feelings of 'you', which have not yet been processed into language. Like *Falling Man*'s abject artist, Celan performs a figurative blood transfusion as he stores 'crystalline shapes' — the subconscious interior and elemental designs of others — beneath his 'slit' skin, where they flow throughout his blood (Rankine, *Don't* 61). Following Celan, the American lyricist slips under the bruised and bloodied skin of abject bodies and translates 'crystalline shapes', as well as the peculiarities of the imagination, into poetry. This translation is, according to Celan, an obligation, which makes possible an embodied relation between the 'I' and 'you' of the poem: 'you' take on crystalline shapes that 'I' can translate and 'you' give 'me' a place for 'my' grief. In her translation and study of Celan's "Alle die Schlafgestalten, kristallin" ["All Those Sleep Shapes, Crystalline"], Anne Carson notes the significance of the German verb *überlaufen* used in the original version: 'meine Trauer, ich seh's,/läuft zu dir über' ['my grief, I can see,/is deserting to you'] (70). Carson points out that *überlaufen* is translated into English as 'to well up and run over' or to 'rise up and run across' and, as such, it connotes an action of transgression and displacement — a movement from here to there, me to you (70-71). Rankine emphasises the last two lines of the poem because she uses Celan's language of 'well[ing] up and run[ning] over', of swelling and overflow, to describe the affective experience of grief. On this occasion of embodied witnessing, the lyricist

'look[s] into her [sister's] eyes' and feels her own eyes welling up with tears of grief, which spill over and stream down her 'wet' face (61). Celan's poem ends in a liminal space and, similarly, the lyricist asks, 'Where does her [sister's] kind of grief go?' (61). While Celan's speaker stores grief in his blood, the American lyricist attempts 'thinking, as if trying to weep' for those who are 'subconscious': those who are physically or metaphysically dead, from her sister to the terminally ill to the unfeeling passive consumers of pills and news (non-)reports (55; 61). The poet who feels for others, or, more precisely, feels *grief* for others is, according to Celan, 'sleepless' and awake in a comatose society of sleepwalkers who are dead to — and deadened by — the world (Rankine, *Don't* 61). Being awake refers to a state of wakefulness or consciousness and evokes the ritual of a 'wake', a ceremony where grief is expressed, and the dead are commemorated. Bearing witness to the pain of abject bodies through grief and poetry, the American lyricist performs a lyrical ritual that wakes the (living) dead to awaken the living.

Following the lyricist's exploration of her sister's grief and recitation of Celan's poem, she asks: 'Why are we here if not for each other?' (62). This question points, by negation, to Levinas' assertion that responsibility for others (including the Other) precedes the existence of the self. Developing this strand of Levinasian thought, the lyricist incorporates Celan's theorisation of the poem as a handshake, and reflects on the ethical implications of the term *here*:

> Or Paul Celan said that the poem was no different from a handshake. *I cannot see any basic difference between a handshake and a poem*—is how Rosemary Waldrop translated his German. The handshake is our decided ritual of both asserting (I am here) and handing over (here) a self to another. Hence the poem is that—Here. I am here. This conflation of the solidity of presence with the offering of this same presence has everything to do with being alive. (Rankine, *Don't* 130; emphasis in original)

Gander makes the perceptive point that the handshake and the poem are 'gesture[s] of self-giving and self-assertion', and, I would add, gestures — or signs — of a divine encounter ("Black and White" 13). The American lyricist gives herself to Others through grief and poetry, and though it causes pain, it prevents her — and others — from giving up on life. Her prayer-poem is a testimony in this sense, a revelation that states: 'Here I am', alive for 'you' through the 'gift' (or present) of the poem.[76] Her openness — or 'awful openness', as DeLillo puts it — and the (imagined) pain she shares with the dead are not signs of psychological disturbance, but of divine

[76] This interpretation of the term 'here' also invokes Levinas' examination of the assertion 'I am here', which rearticulates the biblical formulation 'Here I am'. Levinas explains that this phrase avows the ethical stance of the self towards the Other: 'The tie with the Other is knotted only as responsibility [...] To say: Here I am [*me voici*]. To do something for the Other. To give' (*Ethics and Infinity* 97). See: Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, trans. Philippe Nemo (Ann Arbor: Duquesne University Press, 1985).

revelation (*Falling* 164). Such divine testimony is both aesthetic and ethical: it is an embodied poetic encounter that responds to and makes present those whose presence has been negated, including the dead with whom she converses in her head. She listens to, and metaphorically shakes hands with, the cacophony of (imagined) voices that whisper in her ear — such as Byrd, her mother, Vallejo, Levinas, and Celan — before shaking hands with readers of her living, weeping work. The poetic handshake asserts and confirms the shared 'solidity of presence' of the poet, the reader, and the abject bodies populating the pages that *face* them — irrespective of time, space and mortality. There is thus another point of connection between the creative practices of the poet and DeLillo's abject artist, whose performance stirs the senses and stimulates the imagination. The poet works similarly in the realm of the imaginative, reaching out and touching the receptive and responsive listener through the affective power of poetry. Following Celan, the American lyricist — ultimately Rankine — translates the peculiarities of imagined (shared) pain into poetry for the reader, who, in turn, can only imagine how this pain feels, and, in so doing, think 'as if trying to weep' (55). As this is, according to the American lyricist, a source of life, Rankine fulfils the noble role Stevens assigns to the poet: 'to help people to live their lives' (*Necessary Angel* 29).

The final visual and verbal sequence of *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* calls the reader to be present to and for others. The penultimate page of the main body of the text contains an image of a billboard on which the single word sentence 'HERE.' is printed, followed by a commentary of Celan's poetic handshake (130). Welch asserts that this progression 'highlights the material interconnectedness that occurs as agents interact with one another', while Gander seamlessly connects it to Rankine's 2009 travelogue play *The Provenance of Beauty* (Welch 143; Gander, "Black and White" 12). *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* shares what Gander calls the 'guiding principle' of Rankine's travelogue: 'community', a 'collective feeling of "being here"' ("Black and White" 12). Quoting from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Rankine notes the etymological origins of the word *here* in her endnotes to the text:

> Our contemporary understanding of the word "here," as in "this place" or "the place," finds its origins in the Gothic prefix "hi," meaning this (it is placed before a noun). The pronouns "he," "him," "his," and "here" also come from this source, as well as the pronouns "hither" and "hence." From this source the feminine "she," plural "they," and neuter "it" all eventually evolved. (*Don't* 154)

This citation, as Gander notes, reveals the 'shared lexical genesis of persons and place' ("Black and White" 14). In addition, it reveals the shared lexical genesis of a particular person: neither the first nor second, but the *third* person (in its plural, singular masculine, feminine, and neuter

forms). Throughout *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, the lyricist converses with the 'third person': from Celan to Levinas to abject bodies that, though gendered, are neither subjects nor objects. As such, they fall into the category of the neuter, which is, as Mark C. Taylor notes, 'forever *entre deux*, the neuter is a "third" that "falls" (*tombe*) between all binary opposites' (232; emphasis in original). The language of the third person is the language of Rankine's, as well as Celan's, poetic handshake: 'a language not for you and not for me [...] without any I and without any Thou, nothing but He, nothing but It, do you understand, nothing but She, and that's all [...] Whoever writes it must remain in its company' (Celan qtd. in Levinas, "Being and the Other" 17; 18).[77] The third person is *who* Rankine's American lyricist is 'here' for and why she is 'here': to metaphorically shake hands with the (abject) third person, including the reader; to solidify their presence in the present of the poem; and to 'remain in [their] company', or, in other words, to not let *them* be lonely.

Levinas, writing in response to Celan's handshake metaphor, concludes that the poem is a 'sign made to the other, a handshake, a speaking without speech', where the poet '[m]ake[s] oneself sign—or make[s] oneself trace' ("Being and the Other" 18). Rankine makes a literal and metaphorical 'sign' (or signpost) of herself and her poem in the form of two billboards. On the first, the words DON'T LET ME BE LONELY are plastered in a bold black font against a white background; on the second, the title of the work is replaced by the word HERE. The cover billboard directs the reader to the metaphorical road — the poetic passages — that lie ahead, while its stark black words and bright white background are the colours of the poetic palette Rankine uses to portray racial politics in contemporary America. The substitution of the titular prayer for 'HERE.' can be mapped onto Rankine's substitution of a (self-absorbed) first-person lyric subject for a non-sovereign American lyricist, whose existence is based on being 'here' for the third person. Levinas asserts that this movement — the movement 'from me to the other' — is, for Celan, the movement 'from *here* to u-topia': the space where 'the poet would not know how to keep, in passing to the other, the sovereignty of self' ("Being and the Other" 18; emphasis in original). Summarising Celan's position, Levinas writes: 'The word "utopia" designates the term to the movement which Celan accords the poem': the poem 'which was speaking of me, speaks

[77] In "Being and the Other: On Paul Celan" (1978), Levinas engages primarily with Celan's metaphor of the poetic handshake. He notes that Celan compares poetic language to a '"lovely . . . incomparable road" in the mountains, where "to the left blooms the turk's-cap lily, blooms wild, blooms as nowhere else, and to the right stands the rhapontic"' (16-17). The cover (and colour scheme) of *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* — which features mountains, a road, with orange hues to the left, and wild yellow flowers, mostly sunflowers, to the right — is strikingly similar to, if not a visual representation of, Celan's theorisation of language. These connections along with those made explicitly in the text suggest that *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* is the embodiment of the poetic handshake. See: Levinas, "Being and the Other: On Paul Celan," *Anthology of Contemporary Literature in German* 29.3 (1978): 16-22.

"in the cause of an other"; "a wholly other"; already it speaks with an other, "an 'other' which is not far removed, which is very near"' and 'already "in the light of utopia"' (Levinas, "Being and the Other" 19; 18). The move from 'me' to the third person is one of 'transcendence', which Rankine's American lyricist makes and hopes her readers will follow suit (Levinas, "Being and the Other" 18). The gigantic billboards that speak (or shout) without speech are (divine) signs high in the sky that guide drivers — or livers — in the same direction. While Levinas quotes Nicolas Malebranche's theorisation of attention as the 'natural prayer of the soul', the scale, size, and situation of Rankine's billboards call attention to the titular prayer of the lyricist's soul, and beckon drivers (and passive life passengers) to come 'here' before moving toward a possible 'utopia' ("Being and the Other" 18). Pondering Celan's theorisation of utopia as a 'step beyond human nature' yet 'not devoid of human characteristics', Levinas asserts that 'the poem takes a further step: the strange is the stranger. Nothing is stranger or more alien than the other man, and it is in the light of utopia that one touches man outside of all rootedness and domestication' (Levinas, "Being and the Other" 19). If so, then the scenes depicted on the cover and the penultimate page of *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* gain another layer of significance, as they are seen through the lens of someone (or something) unrooted, possibly lost, either searching for a sign or waiting to be found. This unseen someone — this third person neuter — is not a driver on the highway but, rather, someone (or something) estranged and (presumably) stranded off the highway, looking up from below at the bright sky, billboard, and blooms awaiting on arrival 'HERE.'. To move from the middle of nowhere to 'HERE.', this lost, possibly lonely, person must follow the bright white billboard sign guiding them from above and take the necessary steps to arrive at — or *be* — here. The journey does not necessarily end 'HERE.'; rather, it is ongoing for the alert and attentive explorer who steps further, moving from 'here to utopia' and the blue sky and blooms visible beyond the billboard sign.

The journey does not end 'HERE.' for another third person: the reader, as the main body of *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* is followed by a series of endnotes. These notes act as signposts directing the reader's attention to specific places where knowledge can be found beyond the pages of the text. Aside from a 'natural prayer of the soul', attention is, Levinas writes, a 'mode of consciousness without distraction' without 'power to evade in its shadowy depths; a full light, not to make knowledge possible, but to forbid escape: that is the original sense of the insomnia that is consciousness' ("Being and the Other" 18-19). The American lyricist, a chronic insomniac, alerts and awakens the (deadened) senses of a slumbering society, while the billboards that proclaim her prayer (and answer) are unmissable. The endnotes, in turn, 'make knowledge

possible' *and* inescapable — such as the gruesome details of Byrd's murder that escaped the memory of Bush and, quite possibly, the reader. Though the notes may be interpreted as a prompt for readers to dig beneath into the subtext, they are, primarily, signposts directing readers to look *up.* Like the sign marking 'HERE.', the poem (and poet) is here and searching for the third person, but it is ultimately left to the reader — as it is to the stranger — to reach out, look up, and follow its guidance to be present — to be 'here' — for others within and beyond the shared space of the text. If knowledge is, as Rankine writes, a 'prescription against despair', then looking up the endnotes — and actively undertaking the seek-and-find adventure they encourage — are antidotes to the white noise that renders passive consumers inattentive and insensitive to the pain of abject bodies (55). Rankine, like her American lyricist, is therefore a vital organ that offers lyrical lifelines to the lonely, the lost, and the living dead, while her *American Lyric* is a non-didactic guide to and for living. Resembling a road map in shape and size, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* leads livers through an American wasteland and accompanies them along a 'migrating trail of actions bouncing off of various points on a chronologically heterogeneous grief', creating a 'new route [that] makes possible new genres of reciprocity' (Berlant, *Cruel* 86). This is the route to the ethically responsible 'good' life: the route from a metaphorical wasteland to a land of sunny skies and sunflowers, from death to life, from 'me' to the other — from 'here' to utopia.

Conclusion

This study originated with a question: 'What, politically, might be made of grief besides a cry for war?' (Butler, *Precarious* xii). For nineteen years this question went unanswered — partly due to the transmutation of grief into a war cry in nine days — until this thesis, which has argued for the ethical, social, aesthetic, and political potential of grief in post-9/11 literature. Building on extant scholarship in literary studies as well as grief studies, this project makes an original contribution to both fields in various ways: it is the first to examine grief (counter-)narratives in post-9/11 literature and twenty-first-century American literature; it is the first literary study to theorise the productive potential of lived experiences of grief; it is, to date, the only study of post-9/11 literature that offers sustained engagement with abject bodies; it offers a critical counter-narrative to the plethora of studies reading '9/11 fiction' through the lens of Caruthian trauma theory; it applies and combines various theoretical paradigms to offer new readings of two 'canonical' '9/11 novels' and an *American Lyric* rarely discussed in 9/11 literary studies; it proposes that *Falling Man*, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* move beyond the dominant '9/11' narrative and the prevalent medico-psychiatric model of grief; and, finally, it theorises grief through a literary lens, bridging the extant gap between these two research areas.

1. Is there anything to be gained — politically, socially, ethically, and aesthetically — from lived experiences of grief?

Chapter One noted that the majority of grief scholarship has been conducted by scholars and practitioners within the psy- and social sciences, with few contributions from literary scholars. Despite the sheer amount of studies, most of them adopt an empirical, mechanistic, and rationalising approach to grief and 'recovery'. The readings offered in this thesis have argued against this model, asserting that the prodigious literary writings of Don DeLillo, Mohsin Hamid, and Claudia Rankine paint more nuanced portraits of the affective experience and everyday profundity of grief. These portraits crack the fragile veneer of those painted with the language of science, suggesting that the depth of feeling and complexity of grief — and human consciousness — are not reducible to systematic and categorical terms and concepts. The texts depart from two of the main precepts of the medico-psychiatric (disease) model: firstly, that grief is a psychological

response to loss, processed within a linear timeframe and prescriptive phases through grief-work; and, secondly, that grief is diagnosable as pathological if the bereaved subject has not returned to an (assumed primordial) state of 'efficient and autonomous functioning' within six months (Walter, "New Model" 8). In the selected counter-narratives, grief is an embodied and idiosyncratic experience that exceeds the confines of standardised stages and timelines, while exposing aspirations of 'autonomous' subjectivity as delusions. Using the language of porosity, swell and overflow, DeLillo, Hamid, and Rankine theorise grief as a (re)productive affective experience that reveals the 'awful openness' of embodied subjectivity (DeLillo, *Falling* 164). So, what is the (re)productive potential of grief and what is there to be made of it besides a cry for war?

Chapter Two argued that *Falling Man* theorises grief as an elevating experience that reveals the radiance of the quotidian. Suspension in grief is not pathological, but revelatory in the sense that it inspires in Lianne an epiphany and facilitates a much longed for (re)union with her dead and divine fathers. Through her experiential responses to loss and abject art, she enters the state of 'pure being' she associates with transcendence and divinity (232). In so doing, she finally reconciles herself to her father's suicide and makes peace with the reality of mortality, appreciating the 'awful openness' of embodied subjectivity and venerating the ruins of the dead as relics. Contrary to deafening war cries and tales trumpeting the nation's triumph over 'trauma', *Falling Man* suggests that the silence and stillness of the body suspended in grief is where peace and wonder are found. While the titular artist of *Falling Man* stills life and invites his audience to look attentively at the falling body, and the figuratively falling body of grief, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* recommends tarrying with grief for a prolonged period, reflecting on the relationality of embodied subjectivity, the precarity of life, and sharing pain. Chapter Three argued that Changez — through sustained engagement with grief — imagines, feels, and shares the pain of others, which, he believes, is necessary to turn strangers into familiars and adversaries into intimates. Moved by grief, he is, in turn, moved to mobilise an ethico-political movement, consisting of abject and ungrievable bodies struggling for the rights to self-definition and recognition, while his provision of parental nourishment creates a care community. The ethical potential of grief was explored further in Chapter Four, which read *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* as a poethics of loss. Rankine theorises grief as a complex amalgam of affects and a genre of (and for) black life in a wasteland of systemic racism and ruthless capitalism. Through embodied cognition, the titular American lyricist/liver — like Changez — spontaneously absorbs into her pores the chronic pain suffered by abject bodies. Feeling for them and processing pain through

her body and weeping textual corpus is exhausting, but it is simultaneously the means through which she sustains and withstands life, while keeping the memory of the forgotten — from victims of police brutality to those suffering from AIDS — alive. In so doing, the American lyricist — like DeLillo's "Falling Man", who rescues the memory of the 9/11 jumpers from oblivion — aestheticises grief in an ethically responsible way. In all of the texts, then, grief bears many fruits: a divine encounter and alteration of habitual modes of (over)looking; a (re)discovery of the wonder and awe of the quotidian and an elevated comprehension of life and death; a budding ethico-political movement and care community struggling for recognition and response; and, finally, a creative flowering in performance art and poetry. There is therefore much to be gained from grief, but, most of all: life.

2. How do the texts engage with the grief of abject and ungrievable bodies, and what are the implications of this engagement?

Chapter One noted that the abject body is traditionally associated with disenfranchisement, expulsion, and negation. Developing Kristeva's and Butler's theories of abjection, the following chapters argued that DeLillo, Hamid, and Rankine — to different extents — reclaim and empower abject bodies. DeLillo's titular "Falling Man" is an abject body artist who performs in public the 'fall' of the anonymous man captured in Richard Drew's censored photograph, flouting censorship laws and breaking the frames of recognition regulating who and what has the right to appear in the public and political sphere. Through the silence of his abject body, which causes symbolic and linguistic frameworks to collapse, he stages a silent protest against (self-) censorship and makes man's mortality palpably Real. Though abject, he is not disempowered; rather, he is the fulcrum of DeLillo's counter-narrative and exerts the power of horror, a counter-hegemonic force, that tears a hole in the fabric of symbolic 'reality'. He exercises his counter-hegemonic power in several ways: he performs the 'primal terror' of falling; he assaults the consciousness of the public he holds captive; he stills life and slows the accelerated time of the post-9/11 present; he stretches the spatio-temporal compression of grief; he eschews social mores and codes of conduct; he resists assimilation into 'frames of practised response'; and he possesses the anarchist spirit necessary for overthrowing the socio-symbolic order (DeLillo, "Ruins" n.pag.). The affective power of his suspended fall stimulates feelings of rapture and terror, such that Lianne feels in touch with a divine power during his performance. Departing from Kristeva's assertion that the abject is the antithesis of the sacred, DeLillo theorises the "Falling Man's" abject 'fall' as

a moment of grace, abject ruins as relics, and 'awful openness' as a source of wonder (164). The abject is therefore a living testimony to the communion of souls, which, according to DeLillo, is a (miraculous) sign of the 'daily sweeping taken-for-granted greatness of New York' and the greatness of God ("Ruins" n.pag.).

Chapter Three argued that Erica is the falling woman of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. As the omission of Am from her name suggests, Erica lacks a self: she is a product of Changez's fantasy of the American Dream and a projection of his fears for his homeland (which, like Erica, also lacks self-definition); and she is a chronic melancholic, starving herself of nutrition and affection to reclaim the self she lost with Chris and shrivelling into a suicidal shell of a self as a result. Although Changez is met with rejection and repulsion as Erica's Other, he is neither an apolitical cast-off nor agentless victim; rather, he is a political activist and mentor, who turns political injuries into revolutionary possibilities. Though he is (temporarily) ashamed of his family's fallen status and the precarity of his Pakistani kinsmen — who, within US framings, are recognised as nothing more than the waste products of capitalism and the collateral damage of war — he later protests on their behalf for the right to define identity on both an individual and national level. As a mentor to his politically minded 'comrades', he leads them out of shadowy spaces of abjection and into the spotlight of the public sphere, where they demonstrate against precarity and gain visibility in the US media (205). Though they have been silenced by the inequities of global power structures, they collectively form an assembly of abject and ungrievable bodies, while demanding recognition as human beings, worthy of grief, protection, and care. Peaceful though their protests are, the police intervene and make several arrests; despite this, Changez and his comrades are undeterred. Continuing to persist in the face of the state forces threatening to negate their existence and inclusion in society, they reclaim their abject bodies as empowered sites of resistance.

Finally, Chapter Four considered Rankine's portrayal of the abject bodies of the terminally ill and/or African Americans scattered across an American wasteland. Although the bodies of the (living) dead depicted are powerless against the forces of systemic racism and a capitalist healthcare system that sickens rather than saves, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* theorises abjection as a source of life, not death. To dwell within withering bodies of waste and refuse — through embodied cognition — is, in this *American Lyric*, to refuse to give up on life. Following Frantz Fanon's call to reach toward an abject zone of 'nonbeing' to facilitate the birth of a radical upheaval, the titular American lyricist feels the chronic pain and abjection of bodies suffering from cancer, AIDS, and police brutality and, in so doing, performs the function of the liver:

'thinking, as if trying to weep' (Fanon, *Black Skin* 10; Rankine, *Don't* 55). The liver is the organ of absorption and analogously the lyricist absorbs the poison of racism and capitalism that passes into her pores. Metabolising pain into poetry for others to similarly absorb and digest, she weeps in and through her embodied poetics of grief for ungrievable lives and the ungrievable dead. For the lyricist, therefore, the abject body is both a source of artistic inspiration and the origin of her lyrical lifelines. To this end, *Falling Man*, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* refine earlier conceptualisations of abjection, while reclaiming — to different extents — abject bodies as sites of sacred, affective, counter-hegemonic, political, and aesthetic power.

3. How do the texts depart from the paradigmatic 'trauma' aesthetic to aestheticise loss in new ways?

According to advocates of trauma theory, the only ethical literary approach to trauma is to 'transmit' it through post-modernist stylistic devices. Following this deeply flawed logic, the 'ethical' aesthetic is one that traumatises the reader, theoretically paralysing thought and feeling through 'experimental' literary techniques. Chapter One highlighted the limitations of applying trauma theory as a critical and aesthetic framework before arguing that *Falling Man*, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* aestheticise loss in ways other than the now formulaic trauma aesthetic. Grief is idiosyncratic and so too are the aesthetics of these counter-narratives. Chapter Two explored the radical aesthetics of abjection in *Falling Man*, arguing that the titular artist/terrorist recreates the final fall of Drew's "Falling Man" and (unwittingly) aestheticises Lianne's experience of suspended grief. DeLillo, in turn, transforms the conceptual into the perceptual, incorporating the aesthetic principles of the "Falling Man's" performance art and the concept of abject rubble into the narrative form and structure of *Falling Man*. Through ekphrasis, uncanny repetition, dual nominations, suspending narrative time and using language as the locus of absence, DeLillo stills life and invites onlookers to take a deeper, more attentive look beyond the surface details of his minimalist prose, and to think and feel with an inspired imagination. Chapter Three argued that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is more hybrid in form, mixing and matching elements of several literary genres, such as the dramatic monologue, the thriller, and Sufi poetry, to aestheticise grief and the revelation of the hybridity of embodied subjectivity. These genres depart from the formal disruption and aporia of the established trauma aesthetic, the widespread approval of which has contributed to the marginalisation of non-western aesthetic forms such as Sufi literature. Although Hamid borrows

from these genres, he does not conform to their conventions; rather, he tests their limits to play with and frustrate expectations on the part of the reader. Chapter Four read *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* as a failed lyric, comparable in form to a scrapbook and more hybrid than *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Moving beyond the approved ethics and alleged experimentalism of the trauma aesthetic, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* models a radical form that neither transmits trauma nor consoles. Rather, it affects and figuratively infects the reader in a way that is 'noble' in Wallace Stevens' sense of the term. Translating (imagined) pain into poetry for others is a form of divine testimony that is both aesthetic and ethical: a lyrical wake ritual that pays tribute to, weeps for, and memorialises the ungrievable (living) dead. *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, in turn, sets up a 'divine' encounter between lyricist and reader, offering the latter a poetic handshake and waiting for them to reciprocate: to think as if trying to weep and, in the process, sustain the lives of abject bodies and their own. Contrary to the impossible 'ethical' imperative of transmitting the psychological disturbances of trauma, the heterogeneous aesthetics of grief in *Falling Man*, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* are united by a common theme: life. Both individually and collectively, these texts still life to alter habits of onlooking and overlooking; they bring abject bodies back to life, printing them on the page and the mind; they alert and bring to life the (possibly enervated) imagination; they are ethically responsible to and for bodies either invisible or dehumanised, recognising them as human beings; and, finally, they crack and collapse 'frames of practised response' to create new interpretive frameworks and aesthetics that awaken, contrary to the tired 'trauma' paradigm (DeLillo, "Ruins" n.pag.).

4. To what extent do the texts examined move 'beyond 9/11', countering the narrative of 9/11 as a national trauma?

Each chapter of this thesis passed further beyond '9/11'. Although *Falling Man* has assumed canonical status as an exemplary '9/11 novel', Chapter Two read it as a novel of crisis and continuity, not as a novel of exception. *Falling Man* continues DeLillo's exploration of abjection and ties tighter the knot entwining artists and terrorists with which he has been fascinated throughout his literary career. This knot, incidentally, unravels one of the main threads of the '9/11' narrative: that the Muslim Other is the locus of 'terror'. Continuing DeLillo's discussion of the dialectical relationship between art and terror, *Falling Man* engages with one of the most controversial and taboo topics of critical '9/11' discourse: that the terrorist attacks were an artistic masterpiece, aesthetically pleasing, beautiful, and desired — rather than traumatic. In *Falling*

Man, the attacks are not an exceptional 'trauma' but the backdrop to the visual spectacle of the "Falling Man's" censored (and censured) 'fall' and the relatively 'marginal story' of Jack Glenn's suicide ("Ruins" n.pag.). Chapter Two argued that the story of Jack — and his uncanny embodied cipher, "Falling Man" — is the major source of grief in Lianne's life and in the novel overall. The performance artist's abject art conflicts with and counters the dominant narrative of 'trauma' and resilience in several ways: it violates censorship laws; it reveals the mortality of man in a stark fashion; it operates outside of the symbolic order and throws the (false) logic of state and media interpretations of '9/11' into disarray; and it stirs conflicting feelings of revulsion and rapture, pleasure and pain, all of which characterise Lianne's experience of grief and the *jouissance* conjured by the 'massive spectacle' of terror (DeLillo, "Ruins" n.pag.). For Lianne, the "Falling Man" is a 'falling angel', both a satanic anarchist artist and a divine entity resplendent in beauty and terror (222). The marginal(ised) story of Jack and the "Falling Man" is not only the novel's main source of grief but is also a source of the (overlooked) wonder and awe of the quotidian. Engaging with broader questions of ontological existence and the limits of human consciousness, as well as enduring themes in his pre- and post-post-9/11 fiction, DeLillo moves beyond the ideological remits of the '9/11' narrative to create a timeless counter-narrative.

Chapter Three asserted that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* moves a step further beyond '9/11' than *Falling Man*. Contrary to media discourses such as the "Portraits of Resilience", which provided political leaders with a platform to convince readers that the War on Terror was both just and necessary due to the depth of the wound suffered by the nation and apparently the globe, the novel offers a searing critique of the US government's military exploits in the Middle East. Through the comparatively marginal stories of Changez and Erica, the novel extends its gaze beyond the spatio-temporal co-ordinates of a 'traumatised' America on September 11th, 2001 to explore the (pre- and post-9/11) geopolitical repercussions of the neo-colonial style missions of US capitalism and the War on Terror. Theorising these US missions as forms of fundamentalism forcing ungrievable victims to live in chronic conditions of precarity, Hamid expands the parameters of the term 'fundamentalism' beyond its post-9/11 associations with the Muslim Other, whom, he notes, suffered escalating racist abuse and mounting suspicion after the 9/11 attacks. Contrary to popular portrayals, America, in Hamid's eyes, is neither sovereign nor strong, traumatised nor innocent, but abject: a chronic melancholic on a suicidal quest to reclaim a lost (racial and moral) purity, as well as an uncanny double of Pakistan, a nation depicted in the US media as the diametrical opposite of America. Extending the arc of vision further than US framings of 'reality,' Hamid adapts the morality tale of '9/11,' redefining and recasting the

roles of innocent victim, evil villain, us and them, and here and there. Broader in scope, the novel explores wider geopolitical concerns of twenty-first-century America and Pakistan, speaking to a context both before and beyond September 2001. Sharing thematic and aesthetic similarities with Hamid's post-post-9/11 fiction, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* — like *Falling Man* — is neither a novel of exception nor a generic '9/11' novel, but one that tests the limits of the '9/11' narrative and creates a counter-narrative.

Though published earlier than *Falling Man* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Chapter Four argued that *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* moves furthest beyond '9/11' and the events of September 11th, 2001. Collecting pre- and post-9/11 stories of abjection and terror in an American wasteland, Rankine topples the 2001 terrorist attacks from the top spot in the hierarchy of trauma and complicates the widespread assumption that they traumatised the nation, repositioning them as another episode in a series of ordinary crises. The crises Rankine covers are caused primarily by contemporary permutations of the terror and commerce associated with Ground Zero during the Transatlantic slave trade: systemic anti-black racism and chronic capitalism, which disposes of, commodifies, and exploits the abject bodies of the terminally ill. Documenting incidents of police brutality and George Bush's failure to recall details of racist killings in his home state, Rankine's lyric conflicts with the celebration of 'heroic' figures — such as the police and the president — after the attacks. Rankine is especially critical of Bush, reframing him as a transmitter of characteristically white noise who, with the assistance of the mass media, drowned out dissenting voices and deafened white American citizens, such that they could feel a (false) sense of security and unity in the wake of the attacks. As Chapter Four noted, several African American novelists and poets spoke of their unsurprise at the attacks and suggested that the events forced white Americans to experience a measure of the terror black Americans endure every day of their lives. Rankine engages with the discord and discrepancies between white American and African American perspectives, revealing the simplicity of interpreting '9/11' as an exceptional trauma that wounded a united and perennially innocent nation. Her American lyricist eschews self-absorption and narcissism, living instead for — and sustaining the life of — (black) abject bodies expunged from mainstream '9/11' narratives, such as *TIME*'s anniversary special. In different ways and to different extents, therefore, *Falling Man*, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* critique, counter, and move beyond the dominant '9/11' narrative, such that they maintain relevance almost twenty years beyond '9/11'.

5. Beyond 9/11: Post-post-9/11 Contexts

In "Beyond 9/11: Portraits of Resilience", Bush defends his decision to wage the pre-emptive War on Terror, proudly stating that 'the biggest accomplishment' of his presidency was that there was 'no further attack' on home soil (n.pag.). For Bush, the (violent) display of resilience made the US appear stronger and more impenetrable than before, as it had demonstrated to the world that it had confronted and overcome grief and 'evil' forces. Since the publication of "Beyond 9/11," the long-term implications of Bush's War on Terror are still becoming apparent, including the rise (and fall) of ISIS, which has, in turn, strengthened post-9/11 associations of terrorism with Muslims and migrants from the Middle East. The most prominent terrorist threat in the US today is posed not by individuals adhering to jihadist ideology, however, but by 'individuals adhering to racially motivated violent extremism ideology', who have been 'responsible for the most lethal incidents among domestic terrorists in recent years' (McGarrity and Shivers n.pag.).[78] The attackers are not lone-acting white supremacists and the killings are not isolated incidents, but, as Rankine's *American Lyric* demonstrates, part of everyday life in a land that has, since its inception, been defined by racist violence and oppression. Though the history of racial discrimination in the US stretches back to the years long before (and beyond) 2001, the resurgence of white supremacist terrorist attacks and the prevalence of police brutality has brought the reality of racism into clear focus. To this end, Hamid's and Rankine's critiques of purity and (white) American innocence resonate with the present, while their portraits of ungrievable people of colour experiencing the ongoing death, brutality, and precarity produced by systemic racism, capitalism, and war remain poignant.

The absence of representation in discourse such as *TIME*'s "Beyond 9/11" indicates that the lives, deaths, and grief of African Americans matter less than white victims of terror. This thesis has argued that the need to make black lives matter animates *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, an *American Lyric* that points out the state's failure to care for murdered black men and victims of police brutality, such as James Byrd Jnr., Ahmed Amadou Diallo, and Abner Louima. This need also animates the international activist Black Lives Matter movement, albeit in different ways. In

[78] A 2020 Anti-Defamation League (ADL) report found that right-wing extremists killed more people in 2019 than any other murderous extremists. See: "ADL Report: Right-Wing Extremists Killed 38 People in 2019, Far Surpassing All Other Murderous Extremists," *Anti-Defamation League* 2019, 6 Jan. 2020 <https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/adl-report-right-wing-extremists-killed-38-people-in-2019-far-surpassing-all>.

a 2018 article entitled "Black Lives Matter is Not a Terrorist Organisation", one of the movement's co-founders, Alicia Garza, explained that Black Lives Matter works to 'point out the failings in the basic premise of the founding of [America], that there would be liberty and justice for all', and to build 'the kind of society where black people can live with dignity and respect' (n.pag.). The movement originated with the social media hashtag #BlackLivesMatter following the acquittal of George Zimmerman, a neighbourhood watchman who shot dead the unarmed seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin in February 2012. The organisation gained international attention for its street demonstrations against the 2014 fatal police shootings of Michael Brown and Eric Garner and the subsequent acquittals of their killers. For Rankine, Black Lives Matter protests attempt to 'keep mourning an open dynamic' in the hope of gaining a public acknowledgment of the 'devaluation' of black lives in America ("Condition" n.pag.). This devaluation is part of a four-hundred-year-old tradition of US law enforcement that is still very much alive, as the police killing of George Floyd on 25th May 2020 made painfully clear.[79] The asphyxiation of Floyd was captured on camera and shared on media platforms, compelling viewers to look at the overlooked: the still, silent, (and silenced) abject body and the wider reality of systemic racism and police brutality in the US. In this context, to look at the overlooked is to refuse to turn away from or cast into oblivion the memory of Floyd's murder and the reality that saddens Rankine's American lyricist: that black lives do not matter. This study and the counter-narratives examined make a small contribution to the wider project of making abject bodies — from the falling body to the demonised Muslim to brutalised black bodies — and their lived experiences of grief — matter.

Following Roland S. Martin's assertion that there is an urgent need to 'further the conversation and open up the floor to different viewpoints and perspectives on the terrible and senseless tragedy of September 11,' this thesis has opened up the floor and moved beyond established commemorative narratives such as "Beyond 9/11: Portraits of Resilience" ahead of the twentieth anniversary of the attacks (83). In conclusion, then, "Beyond '9/11': Counter-narratives of Grief in Post-9/11 Literature," through its collation and exploration of a colourful collection of grief portraits and a constellation of voices that speak to the present, has provided a critical counter-narrative and a new and necessary literary lens through which to re-read grief and '9/11' as tragic co-ordinates within the American continuum.

[79] From 2013 to 2019, black people were three times more likely than white people to be killed by the police (and two-and-a-half times more likely in 2019 alone). For further information on methodology and definitions, see: https://mappingpoliceviolence.org/.

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