LUIGI MARFÈ

FALLING MAN AND THE INTERICONICITY OF 9/11 PICTURES

Visualizing Trauma

ABSTRACT: After the attack on the WTC on September 11, 2001, a debate began around its artistic representability: according to some, visualizing the horror was a way of traversing the trauma, while others characterized it as an even crueler sort of violence. Some photographers hesitated to publish their images. Which iconographical forms did they reproduce, challenge, or renew? Did the horror emerge in its bleeding materiality or in its metaphysical essentiality? Did these photos influence the writers who devoted stories to the attack? Examining in particular Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007), together with the mimetic capital it faces, this paper reflects on the relationship between the intericonicity of 9/11 pictures and the artistic representability of collective traumas.

KEYWORDS: 9/11, Novel, Photography, Don DeLillo, Morphology, Intericonicity.

Intericonicity and 9/11 Pictures

In *September* (2005), Gerhard Richter outlined his image of the attack on the World Trade Center that occurred on September 11, 2001.[1] The painting-on-photos technique used in this work blurs the profiles of the towers, representing the evanescence of any attempt to attribute sense to an event that has been seen so many times but remains indecipherable.

The collapse of the towers was viewed live on television, reaching people through pictures that instantly became icons of horror. "Some unbreachable rupture with the past" seemed to have taken place at that moment (Berger 2003, 56), opening a "new period in history" (Hirsch 2003, 85). Jean Baudrillard went so far as to write that "the whole play of history and power is distorted by this event" (2002, 51). However, after only four years, the event had become a blurry figure, as inescapable as it was enigmatic.

The primary weapon of terrorism is the image, according to W.J.T. Mitchell (2011, 64). The shock and awe aroused by violent actions is directly proportional to their visual power. In this regard, the images of 9/11 can be considered paradigmatic, as they instantly acquired the status of "world

[1] G. Richter, *September*, 2005, oil on canvas, 52x72cm, New York, MoMA. On Richter and 9/11 see Storr 2010.

pictures": a "large image formation" that has "a simultaneous collective existence" and thus shapes the collective imagination (2005, 93).

For twenty years, the discourse on 9/11 has saturated every space of the American social imagination. The memory of the event, explicitly or latently, has also haunted contemporary fiction, and the great number of critical studies on it (including the present one) tends to duplicate a frustrating sense of *déjà vu*. This discourse, indeed, seems to be affected by a sort of "hauntology," in Jacques Derrida's terms (1993), that made 9/11 a cultural obsession—omnipresent, hypertrophically interpreted, and yet unintelligible. Rather than focusing on the historical and collective meaning of the event, it enumerates an endless series of individual reworkings of the trauma, as if the only way to cope with it was to withdraw into one's own "selfish gene" (Dawkins 1976).

Clément Chéroux (2009) wrote that the sense of *déjà vu* produced by 9/11 depends on the intericonicity of the pictures that represented it, that is their relationship with preexisting visual forms. Indeed, despite all the assertions about the uniqueness of the event, according to Sabine Sielke (2010) and Lucy Bond (2011), artistic representations of 9/11 have been used to rework a recurring series of images, motives, and tropes. Mitchell argued that images also "live in genealogical or genetic series, reproducing themselves over time, migrating from one culture to another" (2005, 93). "World pictures" are thus at the crossroads between synchronicity and the historical sequence.

In recent years, the "9/11 novel" has become a well-defined field of study for critics.[2] Which iconographical tradition did it reproduce, challenge, or renew? What kinds of intericonic and intertextual relations are involved? In the following pages, I focus in particular on Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007), together with the mimetic capital it faces, to reflect on the relationship between the intericonicity of 9/11 pictures and the artistic representability of collective traumas.

Shipwreck with Spectators

"We could all imagine it. It's the fact of it that annihilated the fantasy," wrote Siri Hustvedt soon after the 9/11 attack (Baer 2002, 158). The common reaction to the pictures that represented it was that they were highly shocking, as they put forward the emergence of reality in a society disaccustomed to historical trauma. Paradoxically, the media coverage did not produce any substantial advances in the understandability of the event. Derrida wrote that the "meaning of this 'event' remains ineffable, like an

[2] On the "9/11 novel," see Houen 2004, 419-437; Keniston, Follansbee Quinn 2009; Gray 2011; Irom 2012, 517-547.

intuition without concept" (2003, 86). According to Baudrillard, images of 9/11 played a "highly ambiguous" role because, in replicating the event, they also took it hostage and neutralized it: "The image consumes the event, in the sense that it absorbs it and offers it for consumption" (2002, 27).

Slavoj Žižek suggested that 9/11 pictures provoke an uneasy feeling because the "Real" is perceived through images as a spectral apparition. According to Žižek, the meaning of the WTC's collapse was not elusive because of "the intrusion of the Real" in "our illusory Sphere" but, on the contrary, because "the image entered and shattered our reality." "The Real which returns has the status of a(nother) semblance," he wrote, "Precisely because it is real, that is, on account of its traumatic/excessive character, we are unable to integrate it into […] our reality and are therefore compelled to experience it as a nightmarish apparition" (2002, 16-19). Many people have focused on the movie-like appearance of the attack to render it bearable. Žižek observed that traversing the trauma implies an avoidance of naïve oppositions between truth and fiction to find the "right way" to face this "nightmarish apparition." "Traumas we are not ready or able to remember haunt us all the more forcefully," he wrote, "In order really to forget an event, we must first summon up the strength to remember it properly" (*ibid*., 26).

In the words of Marianne Hirsch, photography is "the visual genre that best captures the trauma and loss associated with September 2001" because it "interrupts time" and is "inherently elegiac" (2003, 71). Nonetheless, a vibrant debate has been raised in regard to the "right way" of representing it. While some have agreed that visualizing the event was a way of traversing the trauma, others have characterized it as a crueler sort of violence.

One of the most controversial images of 9/11 was taken by Thomas Hoepker, who was the vice president of Magnum Photos. In this photograph, a group of young people leaves for a trip without any care for the towers behind them, unconsciously impersonating—in Hans Blumenberg's terms—the tradition of the "shipwreck with spectator" (1979).

This picture was compared to the *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* (1560) by Pieter Bruegel the Elder. The painting depicts the cycle of life as it continues on the mainland, unresponsive to the disaster, while Icarus[3] is drowning, overwhelmed by the waves. As stated by W.H. Auden, "everything turns away/ Quite leisurely from the disaster" and "the sun shone/ As it had on the white legs disappearing into the green/ Water" (1991 [1938], 179).

Hoepker realized the iconic power of his photograph, but he experienced a long period of ethical distress leading up to its publication. "It took me a

[3] P. Bruegel the Elder, *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, 1560, oil on canvas, 73.5x112cm, Bruxelles, Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique. On the myth of Icarus and 9/11, see Thurschwell 2008, 201-233. In lower Manhattan, several blocks north of Ground Zero, a sculpture of Icarus by Roy Shifrin gained a new meaning after the attack (Kroes 2009, 67-80).

while," he wrote, "to understand that this was a very interesting, unusual way to approach such a horror" (2015). Neither Bruegel's nor Hoepker's characters are looking at the disaster; rather, the obsessive pleasure of the voyeur is experienced by the spectators.

In *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), Susan Sontag analyzed this malicious pleasure—Michel de Montaigne's "volupté maligne"[4]—by focusing on the ethical issues surrounding the aestheticization of pain. "For the photography of atrocity," she wrote, "people want the weight of witnessing without the taint of artistry, which is equated with insincerity. Pictures of hellish events seem more authentic when they don't have the look that comes from being 'properly' lighted and composed" (26).[5]

Even in documentary photography, Sontag suggested that authenticity is a premeditated notion, that is, the result of the art of concealing art. Images of 9/11 such as those by Steve McCurry, Gilles Peress, and Larry Towell display both referential urgency and formal accuracy. In a collective book on the attack by Magnum Photos, Hoepker excluded some pictures because of their formal elaboration: "When I looked at the pictures from our photographers, there were some that were wonderful or clever compositions, but they emphasized the artistry in photography rather than telling the story" (Magnum Photographers 2001).[6]

Outlining the morphology of 9/11 pictures would be a demanding task. However, two opposite forms appear to have prevailed in these images. In the first one, horror emerges in its brutality. For example, *The Hand, 9/11* by Todd Maisel is a photo in which the cut hand of a victim is pointing toward an impossible escape, a yearning for justice, or possibly the spectators.[7] If this hand is so striking, it is also because it is part of what Mitchell called a "genetic series." In many paintings, severed hands represent a form of dismembered

[4] "Je ne sçay quelle aigre-douce poincte de volupté maligne à voir souffrir autruy": Montaigne 2004 [1588], 791 (III.1, *De l'utile et de l'honneste*). Also, see Oliver 2019, 120.

[5] On the aesthetics of violence, see Kristeva 1980 and Butler 2004. Sterritt analyzed images of 9/11 in relation to other representations of atrocity (2004, 63-78).

[6] On photographic representations of the attack, see Wosk 2002, 771-776, Zuber 2006, 269-299, Boggs and Pollard 2006, 335-351, Frost 2008, 180-206, Good 2015. Another controversial set of pictures was the 1,910 "Portraits of Grief" published by the *New York Times* between September and December 2001, which were collected into a volume in 2002 (see Gray 2011, 19).

[7] Photographs like that of Maisel deeply influenced many books on 9/11. In *American Ground* (2002), for example, William Langewiesche described how the horror of clearing out Ground Zero was exacerbated by the presence of human remains: "The pile was an extreme in itself […] terrain of tangled steel on an unimaginable scale, with mountainous slopes breathing smoke and flame, roamed by diesel dinosaurs and filled with the human dead" (72). On Langewiesche, Ground Zero, and the Fresh Kills Landfill, see Scarpino 2011, 237-253.

pain. Again, the theme of the shipwreck comes to mind, as Théodore Géricault depicted human limbs to prepare *The Raft of the Medusa* (1819).[8]

Other pictures have visualized evil in its metaphysical essentiality. One well-known example of this form is *The Falling Man* by Richard Drew, an iconic "world picture" that fixed 9/11 in the public imagination. This photo represents a man who, instead of waiting for the flames, threw himself out of a window. He was not the only one who did this, nor was he the only one to be photographed.[9] However, his vertical position—upside-down with a raised leg—lends visual power to the photograph. "He departs from this earth like an arrow," wrote Tom Junod, "Although he has not chosen his fate, he appears to have, in his last instants of life, embraced it" (2003, 17).

Junod revealed that *The Falling Man* did not account for the true dynamics of the fall. Other photographs show the man sprawling "like everyone else, like all the other jumpers—trying to hold on to the life he was leaving, which is to say that he fell desperately, inelegantly" (*ibid*., 18).[10]

In the disorder of the fall, Drew chose a moment at which the image seemed to be a sort of "falling angel," in DeLillo's words, whose "beauty was horrific" (2007, 222). With its choreographic grace, *The Falling Man* appears to represent the revolt of form against fate. The photograph evokes Walter Benjamin's *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* (*Philosophy of History*, 1940) only to overthrow it. Indeed, this picture turns the horizontal dialectics between past and future into a vertical notion of the historical sequence, according to which one movement is possible: falling.

Falling is "a master metaphor, a governing trope of Western storytelling." According to Pamela Thurschwell, "falls are metaphorical and not metaphorical; they are mythological and biblical; they are predicted, expected, dreamt about" (2008, 206). Falling is a predictable movement, and yet falls are often unforeseen. In the ongoing moment of photography, falling is almost indistinguishable from flying.[11]

Drew was not the first to take photographs of people falling out of windows. This motif was already codified in the photographic tradition and had been mentioned in Roland Barthes's *La Chambre claire* (*Camera Lucida*, 1980). However, the images produced by Francis Apesteguy and Stanley Forman that were examined by Barthes emphasized their authors' ability to

[8] T. Géricault, *Étude de pieds et de main*, 1817-1819, oil on canvas, 52x64cm, Montpellier, Musée Fabre.

[9] W. Szymborska's devoted the poem "Photograph from September 11" ("Fotografi a z 11 Wrzesnia") to these victims: "They jumped from the burning stories, down /—one, two, a few more / higher, lower" (2005, 69).

[10] The disorder of the fall would be later depicted by E. Fischl, *Tumbling Woman*, 2002, bronze sculpture, Private Collection.

[11] See Herren 2014, 159-176. On 9/11 and the "allegories of falling" see Anker 2011, 463-482.

seize the *instant decisif*, as termed by Henri Cartier-Bresson. In this view, these images are not tragic at all.

The intericonic roots of *The Falling Man* differ from those examined by Barthes. Drew's picture recalls the iconographic tradition of Ovid's characters, such as Icarus and Phaeton, whose falls act as tiles in the mosaic of universal metamorphosis. Alternatively, its roots could plunge into Christian iconography of the damned, such as medieval images of people being torn down the ladder to heaven.

In *The Last Judgment* (1467–1471) by Hans Memling, the damned are cast into the flames of hell.[12] Similar to *The Falling Man*, one of the damned has a leg that is bent at the knee. However, the damned in Memling's work collectively serve as an allegory, while Drew's man is a real, innocent person whose composure appears to ask for the reason for his death.

Again, Sontag's question resounds: what is the ethical commitment of an art based on the pain of others? Many contemporary writers—such as Don DeLillo, Ian McEwan, Jonathan Safran Foer, Paul Auster, and Thomas Pynchon—have seemed to share Sontag's doubts, but few have felt exempt from their duty to face what had happened.

Toward an Aesthetics of Repetition

"Nobody has a vocabulary for what happened this year," wrote DeLillo in *Underworld* (1997), as if he anticipated the collective aphasia provoked by 9/11. The relationship between literature and terror was a recurring theme in his works well before the attack. For example, in *Mao II* (1991), he argued that terrorism deprived writers of their role in subverting public imagination: "the more clearly we see terror, the less impact we feel from art" (157).

In the aftermath of the attack, in an article entitled "In the Ruins of the Future" (2001), DeLillo linked this sense of impotence to the media's overexposure of the event, which warped the perceptions of what was real and what was not:

> The event […] was bright and totalizing, and some of us said it was unreal. When we say a thing is unreal, we mean it is too real, a phenomenon so unaccountable and yet so bound to the power of objective fact that we can't tilt it to the slant of our perceptions. […] We could not catch up with it. But it was real, punishingly so, an expression of the physics of structural limits and a void in one's soul. (DeLillo 2001)

However, according to DeLillo, the writer's task consists of venturing beyond the limits and trying to "understand what this day has done to us."

[12] H. Memling, *The Last Judgment*, 1467-1471, oil on panel, 223,5×306 cm, Gdańsk, National Museum.

The writer "begins in the towers, trying to imagine the moment, desperately. Before politics [...], there is the primal terror. People falling from the towers hand in hand. This is part of the counter-narrative, hands and spirits joining, human beauty in the crush of meshed steel" (2001).[13]

To shape this *counter-narrative*—a sort of Blanchotian "writing of disaster" (1980)—DeLillo referred to Drew's photograph in the novel *Falling Man*, which stages "a mosaic of arrested moments, still-lives of paintings, a frieze of memories" against the rectilinear violence of terrorism (Kauffman 2009, 649). The novel expresses skepticism toward the possibility of visualizing the trauma through writing: "if you're trying to match what you read and what you see, they don't necessarily match." However, DeLillo argues that photographs contain a trace of what has been as well as the "innocence and vulnerability" of unknown people (2007, 183).

According to Cathy Caruth, trauma is "an affront to understanding" that relates to a lack of "direct access." Caruth's theory harkens back to Freud's "afterward-ness" (*Nachträglichkeit*): a "mode of belated understanding or retroactive attribution" of meaning to traumatic events.[14] This kind of understanding does not offer relief. Coping with trauma is a process that will accompany the victims for their entire lives. "The story of trauma," wrote Caruth, does not tell of "an escape from reality" but "rather attests to its endless impact on a life" (1996, 7).

From this perspective, "not to speak is impossible" (*ibid*., 154), and this urge to speak was especially compelling for writers. Most artistic responses to the attack intertwined private events with public events.[15] Some critics saw in this the failure of literary attempts to represent contemporary history. Others considered it a strategy to capture an essential feature of trauma, which is determined by the intrusiveness of history in individual lives. Not by chance, Art Spiegelman defined 9/11 as the "faultline where World History and Personal History collide" (2004, 1).

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[13] DeLillo's article was analyzed by Abel 2003, 1236-1250, and Thurschwell 2007, 277-302.

[14] Freud 1914, 485-491, was the germinative essay on the relationship between repetition and trauma. In this essay, Freud postulated that the compulsion to repeat is a form of late appropriation typical of traumatic neurosis. See Caruth 1995, 4: "The pathology [of trauma] consists […] solely in the structure of its experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly." On *Nachträglichkeit* and the 9/11 novel, see Haviland 2010, 429-449.

[15] Bond 2011 saw in this private turn a sort of mythologization (and therefore neutralization) of the event: "The date 11 September is recurrently portrayed not as an occurrence of historical magnitude, but as the catalyst for emotional private events, including marital reunions (DeLillo, Foer, Glass), adultery (Abbott, Mclnerney, Schulman), divorce (O'Neill), familial estrangements and homecomings (Allen, Kingsbury, Maynard), bullying (Friedman, Prose), and illness (Nissenson, Price). In short, the attacks form the background for a number of smaller, everyday 'traumas,' into which they are subsumed and by which they become defined" (750).

In *Falling Man*, DeLillo echoed: "These three years past since that day in September, all life had become public" (2007, 182). The novel focuses on the reactions of a couple in crisis to the "dazed reality" of 9/11 (*ibid*., 91). The husband (Keith), who worked at the WTC, falls into a depressive condition. His condition is worsened by his gambling problems, which arise from his attempts to forget the past. In contrast, his wife (Lianne) devotes her life to helping others in a support center for Alzheimer's disease. This couple's story serves as a powerful allegory of "the repression of memory and the memory of repression" (Kauffman 2008, 353).[16]

Still shocked by "the fleeted sprint that carried lives and histories […] into some other distance" (134), Lianne has an altered perception of reality, even if her medical reports attributed a "normal morphology" to her. "It's a movie," she frequently repeats, everywhere looking, desperately, for the signs of a meaning: indeed, she is driven by "the urge to ask, examine, delve, draw things out, trade secrets, tell everything" (105). At first she seems to reject the idea that art could answer this urge: "People read poems. People I know, they read poetry to ease the shock and pain, give them a kind of space, something beautiful in language […]. I don't read poems. I read newspapers. I put my head in the pages and get angry and crazy" (42). However, later on, she seems to find some relief in contemplating paintings, writing poems, and in the therapeutic writing lessons she gave to a group of Alzheimer's patients, as ways to rework the trauma through a sort of indirect repetition.

One day she reads the obituary of an artist, David Janiak, who used to perform on the streets of New York. A former "Brechtian dwarf" (223), this artist ("known as the Falling Man") tried to elaborate an artistic answer to the event by means of aesthetic repetition:

> He'd appeared several times in the last week, unannounced, in various parts of the city, suspended from one or another structure, always upside down, wearing a suit, a tie and dress shoes. […] He brought it back, of course, those stark moments in the burning towers when people fell or were forced to jump. (DeLillo 2007, 33)

The pose of Janiak's falling recalls Drew's photo, even if he never referred explicitly to it. His story "once again underscores DeLillo's longstanding concern with the role of the artist in contemporary society" (Duvall 2008, 9). Janiak staged the ethical dilemma of representing the pain of others: is he a "heartless exhibitionist" or the "Brave New Chronicler of the Age of Terror"? (DeLillo 2007, 220).

As the other characters in the novel do not understand Janiak, the critical response to *Falling Man* was generally unfavorable.[17] This was predictable, as

[16] On memory and loss in *Falling Man,* see Daniele 2011, 47-64, and Marshall 2013, 621-636.
[17] On the critical debate surrounding *Falling Man*, see Mauro 2011, 584-606, and Spahr 2012, 221-237.

DeLillo was not looking for a soothing escape or reassuring justifications, but to represent the irrationality of what happened, and its distressing indelibility. Traumatic violence coincides in the novel with the irreversibility of falling: "It was not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night," reads the incipit. Everyone and everything—the drops of rain sliding down the windowpane in Lianne's poems, the men throwing themselves out of the towers, the same towers falling to the ground—are doomed to "collapse," and the solidarity of falling together marks the moral value of the "men in misfortune" (2007, 117). The "rough tumble through space" visualizes the "tricky" singularity of each of them, as they were "odd numbers" claiming the right to be themselves.

Janiak endlessly repeats the event to challenge and subvert the rectilinear doom of the falling, even at the cost of hurting himself: "the linear narrative of the terrorist is a form of invective; the nonlinear counter-narrative of *Falling Man* is a form of persuasion" (Conte 2011, 568). His fallings are the equivalent of the novelist's counter-narrative, which does not suggest a sense for the event, nor try to mitigate the trauma, but follows the path of a meta-discursive reworking. As Keith, readers "needed to hear what [they]'d lost in the tracings of memory" (DeLillo 2007, 91) and the writer's task is to explore the representative limits of fiction, as well as the possibilities of reworking collective traumas by the means of literary language.

Intericonicity is the representational space where this meta-discursive reworking takes place. At one point in the novel, indeed, Lianne sees a photo of Janiak's performance, which recalls Drew's picture. In this mazy intersection of images, the irreversibility of falling seems to vanish, for a moment, giving her time to contemplate the abyss of trauma. Nothing is revealed, however, except emptiness, since the overlapping of pictures soon brings them back in their "hauntological" opacity.

From this perspective, Janiak is compared by Lianne to a Tarot de Marseille card, the "Hanged Man," which is "properly regarded as a figure of suspension, not termination" (Conte 2011, 580).

Figures of Suspension

The cultural history of the "shipwreck with spectator," according to Blumenberg (1979), evolved from a clear separation of the two roles involved (the castaway and the voyeur) toward their complete interchangeability.

The *Unheimlichkeit* of 9/11 images lies in the impossibility of visualizing trauma from a safe distance. In an age of simulacra, the ontological border between the real and the image is an open threshold. "Everything that's born has to die, which means our lives are like skyscrapers," wrote Jonathan Safran

Foer in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2005), "The smoke rises at different speeds, but they're all on fire" (245).

The invention of Janiak's character—as with other representative strategies of 9/11 novels, such as the flipbook that ends Safran Foer's novel[18]—does not represent the mirage of reversing time, but reveals the "prolonged suspension" (Spahr 2012, 221) of trauma, which continues to harm for an extended period of time.

Through the repetition of his performance, Janiak's body acquires the status of a "surviving image"—as termed by Georges Didi-Huberman—which keeps the wound open:

> The image is burning with the memory of the fact that it is still burning, even when it is only ashes: a way of expressing its crucial vocation for survival, against all odds. But in order to know this, in order to feel it, it is necessary to dare, it is necessary to put one's face close to the ashes. And blow gently on them so that the embers underneath begin to emit their heat, their glow, their danger. As if a voice rose from the gray image saying: "Can't you see I'm burning?" (Didi-Huberman 2007, 63)[19]

"History is what hurts," wrote Fredric Jameson (1981, 102). DeLillo's aesthetics of repetition aimed to represent these wounds, facing trauma without overcoming it. If art can no longer work its "transformative magic" (Versluys 2009, 30), then reflecting on the imagery of falling, reworking this imagery, and contesting its irreversibility can serve as narrative strategies to preserve the event from being lost to oblivion. This meta-discourse explores the fluctuation of time in traumatic memory, endlessly overlapping the past and the present: "maybe there was a deep fold in the grain of things, the way things pass through the mind, the way time swings in the mind, which is the only place it meaningfully exists" (DeLillo 2007, 105).[20]

According to DeLillo, the collapse of the towers left "something empty in the sky" (2007, 39); thus, the paradox of trauma is that of living in a sort of

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[18] Safran Foer's novel embeds some 9/11 pictures in an iconotext of drawings, photos, and unusual graphic experiments that highlight the inadequacy of verbal language. The last pages contain photographs of a man falling from the WTC. It is not Drew's picture but an edited version of a photograph by Lyle Owerko. By turning the pages quickly, as one would do with a flipbook, one can see the man rising back into the sky; thus, the descent to the ground is transformed into an ascent.

[19] "Enfin, l'image brûle de la *mémoire*, c'est-à-dire qu'elle brûle encore, lors même qu'elle n'est que cendre : façon de dire son essentielle vocation à la survivance, au *malgré tout*. Mais, pour le savoir, pour le sentir, il faut oser, il faut approcher son visage de la cendre. Et souffler doucement pour que la braise, dessous, recommence d'émettre sa chaleur, sa lueur, son danger. Comme si, de l'image grise, s'élevait une voix : 'Ne vois-tu pas que je brûle?'" (Didi-Huberman 2004, 73).

[20] Also, see Spahr 2012, 235: "If they fail to imagine a literary vision of the future, they simultaneously (and perhaps unconsciously) display the need for such visions and represent the social and political contradictions from which they could arise."

oxymoronic absent presence.[21] In the dialectics of traumatic memory, DeLillo's figures of repetition oscillate between the two poles of "acting out" and "working through" (LaCapra 1998, 55), refusing definitive positioning. These figures relentlessly return to the memory of the event—in spite of its woeful lacerations and incommensurability—to keep it alive and continue to question its meaning, regardless of whether these efforts are in vain. As the ontology of the event recedes, becoming increasingly incoherent and enigmatic, the chasing of its narrative reenactments becomes increasingly urgent and persistent—a dizzying, abysmal "hauntology."

Lianne is fascinated by Giorgio Morandi's still life paintings. Looking at the bottles and boxes he depicted, she cannot help but "see" the towers (2007, 49). However, the analogy is not direct. The geometrical austerity of Morandi's art is too enigmatic to enter the rigid schemes of any explicit allegory: "These shapes are not translatable to modern towers, twin towers. It's works that rejects that kind of extension or projection. It takes you inward, down and in," says Lianne's mother (DeLillo 2007, 111).

DeLillo's novel, too, aims to explore "inward, down and in" the abysmal nature of trauma. In this perspective, Morandi's *natura morta* (the Italian name for still life painting, which etymologically means 'dead nature') is the visual model for "something deeper than things or shapes of things." It seems to allude to the power of time and the fate of mortality that pertains to everyone: "Being human, being mortal. I think these pictures are what I'll look at when I've stopped looking at everything else" (*ibid*., 111).[22]

[21] A similar attitude was expressed in Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004).

[22] On Morandi and DeLillo, see Kauffman 2008, 353-377, Longmuir 2011, 42-57, and Daniele 2011, 47-64. On the difference between the expressions "still life" and "natura morta," the novel presents a revealing observation by Lianne: "The Italian term for still life seemed stronger than it had to be, somewhat ominous, even, but these were matters she hadn't talked about with her mother. Let the latent meanings turn and bend in the wind, free from authoritative comment" (2007, 12).

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