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Phantomogenic Ekphrasis: Traumatizing Images in Michael Cunningham's *Specimen Days* and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*

1 Introduction

The distressing sight of people jumping or falling out of the World Trade Center has become an integral part of our collective imaginary of 9/11. Photographs capturing their jump and subsequent fall into the abyss have burned into our memories. Although such traumatizing images were quickly taken out of circulation in print media, they have had a long afterlife on the Internet and in the arts. In the realm of literature, a number of texts, especially novels, have addressed 9/11's falling bodies, or "jumpers," as they were also called: Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004), Frédéric Beigbeder's *Windows on the World* (2004), Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) are perhaps the best-known. Michael Cunningham's *Specimen Days* (2005), although rarely discussed as a 9/11 novel, and even less so in relation to the falling bodies, also evokes images of the falling people, albeit differently from these novels. This chapter compares Cunningham's and DeLillo's novels on the basis of the techniques they employ to represent images of the 9/11 jumpers.

The notion of ekphrasis will serve as a lens through which to compare the two novels. An ancient rhetorical tool for describing visual images through words, ekphrasis has been defined and applied in a variety of ways (Hagstrum 1958; Krieger 1967; Heffernan 1993; Wagner 1996). Most significantly for my purposes in this chapter, W. J. T. Mitchell (1994) distinguishes three moments of ekphrasis: indifference, hope, and fear, each of which describes the writer's emotional disposition towards the image/text dialectic. After discussing the problematic relationship between image and text in relation to photographs of the jumpers, I use Mitchell's terminology to look at ekphrasis as a means of verbalizing terrorizing images. Subsequently, I introduce the term "phantomogenic ekphrasis" to examine how *Specimen Days* and *Falling Man* approximate images of the 9/11 jumpers.

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2 Falling and jumping

Emphasizing photography's significant role in the public response to the terrorist attacks, Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett (2003:13) described 9/11 as the ultimate "Kodak moment." Accordingly, visual representations of the traumatic experience of 9/11 have raised substantial scholarly attention in the past nine years with the works of Marianne Hirsch (2003, 2004), E. Ann Kaplan (2003), Barbie Zelizer (2002), and Rob Kroes (2007) defining the main paths of inquiry. Images of the jumpers, however, attest to a particular category within the photographic archive of 9/11. They present a kind of horror that differs from the sight of carnage. While the hero-cult of the victims obviously serves the purpose of translating trauma into a narrative, whereby loss gains meaning as an act of sacrifice (as the term "hero" suggests),[1] the only deaths that involved agency on the part of the victims were those of the firefighters who were killed in the collapse and the people who jumped out of the towers to escape death by fire. This latter form of intentionality, however, would not pass smoothly as heroism. The terrorizing force of these images lies not so much in their "graphic" content as in their potential to be perceived as a conflation of incongruent narrative schemes.

Frank van Vree (2010: 276) calls these images "grounding images" because they "give proof of and epitomize the atrocious tragedy in its barest form, but as such they are – also in this respect – 'indigestible,' not letting themselves be absorbed by a story that takes the viewer away" (278). These images' indigestibility is underscored by the crisis of language posed by their description in words. For as much as they depict *falling* bodies, they are also imbued with the act of *jumping* that preceded their fall. It is thus not merely these people's deaths that the viewer is compelled to imagine, but also the decision that renders their fall a result of a voluntary act: suicide. Given both the hopelessness of the situation in the burning towers as well as the stigma attributed to the word "suicide" – not to mention, as Laura Frost reminds us, the term's consonance with "the other suicides of that day, the hijackers" (2008: 188) – this interpretation is, of course, highly problematic. As Joanne Faulkner contends in relation to Richard Drew's photograph of the "Falling Man," the image "reveals and embodies a traumatic horror, difficult to encounter: the horror of *choosing* the means of one's own particular death in the face of a less certain but more protracted demise at the hands of another" (2008: 68).

1 As Jürgen Habermas remarked in the wake of 9/11: "But why do they need to be called heroes? Perhaps this word has different connotations in American English than it does in German" (quoted in Simpson 2006: viii).

Simultaneously, however, our contextual knowledge of the hopeless situation inside the buildings cancels out the narrative of suicide. Used synonymously, the terms "jumpers" and "falling people" are pitted against each other once considering their connotations. Frost (2008) registers this crisis of signification in the context of the burgeoning glorification of the victims in the wake of 9/11. She contends that

> [b]oth accounts involve an imposition of an explanatory narrative upon the falling people: "These people were forced out" or "They were choosing to die". Unlike the deaths of passengers on United 93, which sources such as *The 9/11 Commission Report,* A&E's drama *Flight 93,* and the film *United 93* narrated as a proactive deed of heroism, the falling people present a catch-22. If they were victims of horrendous circumstances, driven to act out of blind instinct, then their story is one of pure loss, nightmare, passivity, victimhood. If they had some degree of agency, then there is a possibility of heroism, but also an excruciating choice to jump or to burn. [...] The falling bodies have been seen, but they have not been understood; and their representations, by news sources and artistic forms alike, suggests a general desire that they remain beyond the reaches of understanding. (188 – 189)

To extend Frost's argument, these "explanatory narratives" are not merely imposed for the sake of "understanding" but it is *by virtue* of these narratives that the falling people are produced as subjects in discourse. In this sense, the indigestibility of these visual representations lies, at least in part, with the binary opposition of "falling" vs. "jumping."

3 "Do you remember this photograph?": Trauma and ekphrasis

If ekphrasis consists in the translation of visual images into words, the fall/jump binary marks a lack of a better word, a crisis of semiosis, which manifests itself in the inability of language as a means of description. Although the photographs themselves are nothing more than representations of events, it is through language that they are invested with meaning. Once words falter in describing them, they occupy a blind spot of meaning, a terrain of semiotic indigestibility, which is key to the structure of trauma. Trauma, as Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (1992: 102) contend, is an "event without a referent" which the traumatized subject unwillingly relives in various forms of reenactment. The immediacy and inaccessibility of the traumatic imprint is, as Cathy Caruth suggests, inherently paradoxical insofar as "the greatest confrontation with reality may also occur as an absolute numbing to it, that immediacy, paradoxically enough, may take the form of belatedness" (1995: 6). One may rightfully assume that this sense

of belatedness or deferral jeopardizes the potential of ekphrasis as a descriptive tool. However, such a deferral of meaning concomitant with the process of translation from one medium into another is central to the ekphrastic act. The difference between the medial qualities of words and images always renders the former belated or deferred vis-à-vis the latter. "Words can 'cite,'" W. J. T. Mitchell writes, "but never 'sight' their objects" (1994: 152). And citation, we may add, is a performative act that not only describes but also produces its object.

Mitchell identifies three moments of ekphrasis, each marking an affective disposition towards the image/word dialectic. He calls the first phase "ekphrastic indifference," which is predicated on the impossibility of ekphrasis. "A verbal representation," Mitchell contends, "cannot represent – that is, make present – its object in the same way a visual representation can. It may refer to an object, describe it, invoke it, but it can never bring its visual presence before us in the way pictures do" (152). This phase is followed by "ekphrastic hope" when "the impossibility of ekphrasis is overcome in imagination or metaphor, when we discover a 'sense' in which language can do what so many writers wanted to do: 'to make us see'" (152). As a result, "[t]he estrangement of the image/text division is overcome, and a sutured, synthetic form, a verbal icon or imagetext, arises in its place" (154). Whereas ekphrastic indifference dwells on difference, ekphrastic hope is fueled by the imagination, which trustfully embraces the representational power of words. This moment is, in turn, undercut by the third phase, which Mitchell calls "ekphrastic fear":

> the moment of resistance or counterdesire that occurs when we sense that the difference between the verbal and visual representation might collapse and the figurative, imaginary desire of ekphrasis might be realized literally and actually. [...] It is the moment in aesthetics when the difference between verbal and visual mediation becomes a moral, aesthetic imperative rather than (as in the first, "indifferent" phase of ekphrasis) a natural fact that can be relied on. (154)

Thus, this third moment of ekphrasis consists in the realization that, ultimately, both visual and verbal representations are nothing more than representations, and the ontological and hierarchical difference between them is arbitrary.

Associated Press photographer Richard Drew's iconic image of "Falling Man" reveals a peculiar dimension of ekphrastic fear. Showing a man falling headfirst with the vertical girders of the towers behind him, Drew's photograph was not only trimmed to meet the aesthetic criterion of symmetry but, when it appeared in the September 12, 2001 issue of the *New York Times*, it was accompanied by the following caption: "A person falls headfirst after jumping from the north tower of the World Trade Center. It was a horrific sight that was repeated in the moments after the planes struck the towers" (Kleinfield 2001: A7). By virtue

of explaining what the photograph depicts, the caption expands the temporal horizon of the image and transforms it into a headfirst fall. For even if the man never really fell headfirst (except for a fraction of a second), he is *made* to do so by the caption. Thus, both image and text function as performatives that produce, rather than describe, the man's fall as a *headfirst* fall.

The tabooing of Drew's photograph reveals, however, that the realization of the illusory nature of the photograph played little role in its perception by the general public. Rather, the terrorizing force of the image had more to do with its perceived indexicality or what Roland Barthes describes as "this has been" in his work *Camera Lucida* (1993: 96). In this relation, ekphrastic fear gains a new dimension: how to write about images that defy description? Whereas Mitchell bases his three phases of ekphrasis on the radio program *Bob and Ray*, in which listeners had to imagine Bob's photographs of his summer vacation on the basis of his conversation about them with Ray, the caption to Drew's photograph in the *New York Times* is predicated on readers' exposure to the image as they open the newspaper. The image is not to be imagined, but seen. Consequently, the caption's relation to the image is informed by the photo's traumatizing force, which lends an ethical dimension to ekphrasis.

The efforts of two journalists to trace the identity of the man in Drew's photo further illustrate this dimension. Tom Junod, one of the journalists, describes Falling Man in terms of the Unknown Soldier and designates Drew's photograph as an unmarked grave (2003: 199). While instigating bearing witness to the tabooed photograph as an ethical imperative, Junod's ekphrasis constitutes a metaphor, which mitigates the traumatizing power of the image through its contextualization within familiar narratives of war, sacrifice, and heroism (see Munteán 2013). Junod begins his article by asking, "Do you remember this photograph?" (2003: 177). This question is significant in the sense that it renders imagination an act of memory. The article elicits the photograph as a tabooed relic of 9/11 and demands that readers bear witness to it. If ekphrastic hope relies on the power of the imagination, in the case of "Falling Man," as well as in other images of the falling bodies, hope consists in the act of recollection more than in imagination. This mnemonic gesture is key to both Cunningham's and DeLillo's novels, to which I turn next.

4 "Faint but discernible": *Specimen Days*

Caleb Cain, a reviewer of Michael Cunningham's *Specimen Days*, describes the three tales that make up the novel as three interlocking "novellas": a ghost story ("In the Machine"), a detective story ("The Children's Crusade"), and a sci-

ence fiction story ("Like Beauty") (Cain 2005: n.p.). As a form-within-a-form, each novella is built up of recurring images that intersect through multiple intratextual relations in the novel as a whole. Most conspicuously, following in the vein of Cunningham's earlier bestseller, *The Hours* (1998), the novellas in *Specimen Days* are interlocked by three characters that appear and reappear in various disguises and timeframes, with Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855) weaving them together as an overarching intertext.

At first glance, the novel's relevance to 9/11 is most obviously indicated by the second story, "The Children's Crusade," set in the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks when the towers' ruins were still visible at Ground Zero. This historical allusion, however, is inserted into a fictional world of teenage suicide terrorists who, inspired by *Leaves of Grass*, randomly blow up people and themselves in the act of a loving embrace. Instead of limiting my discussion to the scope of this second novella, I will focus on the first one, "In the Machine," set about a hundred years earlier, in turn-of-the-century Lower Manhattan. The protagonist of this story is Lucas, a 12-year-old Irish boy traumatized by the death of his brother Simon in an industrial accident.

Nicolas Abraham's (1987) notion of the phantom is particularly useful to explore the dynamics of ekphrasis at work in the first two novellas of *Specimen Days*. Phantoms, Abraham contends, are secreted traumas passed on within families from generation to generation in the form of verbal traces that indicate the phantom's incessant presence in the psyche of the traumatized person. "What haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others" (287), secrets that have not been verbalized. Thus, the phantom embodies secreted traumas and is sustained by what Abraham calls "phantomogenic words [that] become travesties and can be acted out or expressed in phobias of all kinds (such as impulse phobia), obsessions, restricted phantasmagorias..." (292). In what follows, I will demonstrate how such phantomogenic words constitute ekphrastic constellations that recall 9/11's falling bodies.

Lucas's compulsion to recite lines from *Leaves of Grass* is more than mere fascination with Whitman's poetry: "He hadn't meant to speak as the book. He never did, but when he was excited he couldn't help himself" (Cunningham 2005: 4). Indeed, when he quotes Whitman, he does so in the form of an uncontrollable speaking fit. Especially in situations where he cannot find the right words to express himself, Whitman's poem, which he simply calls "the book," speaks through him. For instance, uttered as a sentence, the Whitman line "Every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you" (5) serves him well to express what remains unspeakable to him: his adoration for his dead brother's fiancée Catherine. His speaking in fits, therefore, has a double meaning. On the one hand, the word "fit" refers to his inability to control "his Whitman,"

while on the other hand, it also denotes his ability to apply Whitman fittingly, albeit unwittingly.

Upon presenting Catherine with a bowl to express his love for her, Lucas utters two Whitman lines in which Catherine "recognizes" Simon's voice addressing her:

> He said, "The spinning-girl retreats and advances to the hum of the big wheel."
>
> [...]
>
> "The prostitute draggles her shawl, her bonnet bobs on her tipsy and pimpled neck. The nine months' gone is in the parturition chamber, her faintness and pains are advancing."
>
> Catherine paused. She looked at him with a new recognition.
>
> "What did you say?"
>
> He didn't know. She had never before seemed to hear him when he spoke as the book.
>
> "Lucas, please repeat what you just said."
>
> "I've forgotten."
>
> "You spoke of a spinning-girl. You spoke of a bride, and ... a prostitute. And a woman about to give birth."
>
> "It was the book."
>
> "But why did you say it?"
>
> "The words come through me. I never know."
>
> She leaned closer, gazing into his face as if words were written there, faint but discernible, difficult to read. (Cunningham 2005: 54 – 55)

The "new recognition" that Lucas's utterance elicits is, in fact, the uncanny recognition of the self in the other. By unknowingly speaking in a fit, Lucas performs a text that "fits" Catherine's own trauma. His speaking fit consequently becomes an interface for Catherine to confront her own repressed trauma. In Abraham's terms, Lucas acts like a "ventriloquist" (1987: 290), a voice articulating not only Whitman but Catherine as well. As a result, Catherine collapses and discloses to Lucas what she perceives as her complicity in Simon's death: "'I told your brother he must marry me. I don't know if the child is his. It probably isn't. But Simon was willing. [...] I suspect. He had his accident because he was unhappy. He may have been so distracted by the thought of our wedding that he allowed it to happen'" (Cunningham 2005: 69). This muted trauma lies in Catherine's haunting suspicion of her own responsibility for Simon's death – a realization of guilt that informs her understanding of Lucas's words.

I want to argue that Catherine's reading of Lucas also teaches us, readers of Cunningham's novel, how to read the text at hand. In the same way that the words "spinning girl," "prostitute," "nine months," and "bride" are (mis)read by Catherine and construed in her reading as reverberations of her own complicity in Simon's death, *Specimen Days* presents us with words "faint but discerni-

ble" exposing the phantomogenic contours of 9/11's falling bodies in the form of a phantomogenic ekphrasis. In order to identify these contours, let me focus on two scenes, one that concludes "In the Machine" and one in "The Children's Crusade." To prevent Catherine from going to work, Lucas self-mutilates by allowing his hand to be devoured by the machine so that Catherine will take him to the hospital. Waiting for treatment with the girl at his side, he suddenly succumbs to the pull of an irresistible drive and, with his mangled hand soaking in blood, dashes out of the hospital and runs to the site where Catherine's workplace, the Mannahatta Company, is already ablaze.

Cunningham's description of the fire at the fictitious Mannahatta Company uncannily resembles the historical event of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire of March 25, 1911, which took the lives of 146 female garment workers, many of whom jumped to their deaths from the top floors of the building (von Drehle 2003: 152–156). A scene in the second novella, "The Children's Crusade," further substantiates the connection between the fictitious and the historic buildings. In it, the police psychologist Cat sets up an interview with a Whitman specialist at New York University, the present-day owner of what used to be the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. Upon her entrance to the building, the narration gestures toward a historical reality outside the text (the NYU building is indeed identical to the old Triangle Factory), through the textual coordinates of the horrific fire at the Mannahatta Company:

> One of these buildings, Cat had never been quite sure which, had been that sweatshop, where the fire was. She knew the story only vaguely – the exits had been blocked to keep the workers from sneaking out early. Something like that. There'd been a fire, and all those women were trapped inside. Some of them had jumped. From one of these buildings – was it the one she was entering? – women with their dresses on fire had fallen, had hit this pavement right here or the pavement just down the street. Now it was all NYU. (Cunningham 2005: 156)

Focalized through Cat, Cunningham's description ekphrastically evokes photographs of dead women lying on the pavement at the foot of the building, though it is the story, not the images *per se*, that Cat "vaguely" recalls.

There is, however, another ekphrastic gesture that is even less direct than the above reference to the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. The NYU building offers an intratextual gateway for the reader to "recognize" Cat as Catherine and retroactively "re-read" the fire of the Mannahatta Company not only in terms of the disaster of the Triangle catastrophe, but also in terms of 9/11. In this relation, Lucas's apocalyptic vision of the "unspeakable beauty" (Cunningham 2005: 101) of the catastrophe at the Mannahatta Company recalls the symmetry of the "Falling Man" photograph. In the same way that the "words [that] come through" Lucas

allowed Catherine to face up to her own trauma, so does Catherine's reading of Lucas's words give us a model for reading Cunningham's novel as a mnemonic device that evokes 9/11's falling bodies in terms of the Mannahatta/Triangle catastrophe.

The type of ekphrasis at work in *Specimen Days* is essentially different from Junod's application of the metaphor of the Unknown Soldier. Here, ekphrastic hope is anchored on readers' familiarity with images of the falling bodies so that they can flash up as a phantom, in Abraham's sense, from within the description of another catastrophe. The following passage further illustrates the mechanism of this phantomogenic ekphrasis. Witnessing the building on fire, Lucas looks up at one of the workers:

> The woman stood in the window, holding to its frame. Her blue skirt billowed. The square of brilliant orange made of her a blue silhouette, fragile and precise. She was like a goddess of the fire, come to her platform to tell those gathered below what the fire meant, what it wanted of them. From so far away, her face was indistinct. She turned her head to look back into the room, as if someone had called to her. She was radiant and terrifying. She listened to something the fire told her.
>
> She jumped.
>
> [...]
>
> The woman's skirt rose around her as she fell. She lifted her arms, as if to take hold of invisible hands that reached for her.
>
> When she struck the pavement, she disappeared. She'd been a woman in midair, she'd been the flowering of her skirt, and then in an instant she was only the dress, puddle on the cobblestones, still lifting slightly at its edges as if it lived on. (Cunningham 2005: 98)

Another passage of the same event yields an even more distressing configuration of the dilemma of aesthetics in Drew's photograph. As Lucas catches sight of another woman just about to jump out of the building, he visualizes her fall as flight:

> She looked down. She looked at Lucas.
>
> [...]
>
> He returned her gaze. He could do nothing else. His heart raged and burned, full of its own fire. [...] She said (though she did not speak in words), We are this now. We were weary and put-upon, we lived in tiny rooms, we ate candy in secret, but now we are radiant and glorious. We are no longer anyone. We are part of something vaster and more marvelous than the living can imagine.
>
> [...]
>
> The fire woman spread her wings and flew.
>
> [...] He saw the woman cross the sky. [...] He knew that his heart had stopped. He wanted to say, I am large, I contain multitudes. I am in the grass under your feet. (100 – 101)

Cognizant of Junod's 2003 article, it is difficult not to read this passage as a phantomogenic text that evokes the composed posture of the Falling Man in Drew's photograph. "Although he has not chosen his fate," Junod writes, "he appears to have, in his last instants of life, embraced it. If he were not falling, he might very well be flying. [...] Some people who look at the picture see stoicism, willpower, a portrait of resignation; others see something else – something discordant and terrible: freedom" (Junod 2003: 177). What Lucas perceives as an "unspeakable beauty" (Cunningham 2005: 101) once he visualizes the woman's fall as flight, uncannily dovetails with the "terrible freedom" suffused with the unsettling aporia of jumping and falling, in Junod's description of Drew's photograph (Junod 2003: 177).

While the image of the Unknown Soldier in Junod's article uses ekphrasis as a means of healing, Cunningham's text constitutes a counter-narrative of trauma insofar as it evokes, rather than describes, the falling bodies of 9/11. Cunningham's evocation of the Mannahatta/Triangle catastrophe is not to contextualize "Falling Man"; on the contrary, it functions as a phantomogenic text that beguiles informed readers into recalling the jumpers.

5 "Died by his own hand": *Falling Man*

Inflating "Falling Man" into an overarching image emerging from the open wound of 9/11, Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* settles deep into the void that Cunningham's *Specimen Days* pries open. Instead of evoking the falling bodies of 9/11 as an emphatic absence emanating from the iconography of another event, *Falling Man* features the mysterious performance artist David Janiak, who mimics the pose of the man in Richard Drew's photograph by attaching himself to a harness and executing jumps at various locations in the city. Like Lucas in *Specimen Days*, Janiak, known as the Falling Man, "speaks" phantomogenic words that "point to a gap, that is, to the unspeakable" (Abraham 1987: 290).

Pierre Nora (1989) defines *lieux de mémoire* as sites that emerge out of a communal deliberation to "create archives, maintain anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and notarize bills because such activities no longer occur naturally." These sites are significant because "[w]e buttress our identities upon such bastions..." (12). In contrast, as we have seen, Drew's photograph offers a figure that is collectively willed away but nevertheless prevails as a "grounding image" (van Vree 2010: 276), leaving an indelible mark in the memory of those who have seen it. With a twist on Nora's term, one can argue that "Falling Man" is at the very least a counter-site of memory in the sense that it obstructs identification (both by relating *to* the photograph and relating the pho-

tograph as a representation *of* a particular act by a particular person). Paradoxically, it asserts itself as a site by means of refusing to be identified as a site of memory in Nora's sense. Janiak's repeated performances in public spaces attest to an embodied voice of a collectively repressed trauma that, as a phantomogenic performance, wreaks havoc in the city. By choreographically mimicking the pose of Drew's "Falling Man," Janiak builds a three-dimensional model of the photograph every time he executes a jump.

Why does he do this? And why does he choose this particular photograph? Once the novel's female protagonist Lianne catches sight of the artist dangling on his harness at Grand Central Station, she recognizes the "original" of Janiak's model: "There was the awful openness of it, something we'd not seen, the single falling figure that trails a collective dread, body come down among us all" (DeLillo 2007: 33). Janiak not only replicates the "original" but also activates and reconfigures the public space in which he situates his model. In so doing, onlookers are encapsulated in a diorama in which they themselves are made to bear witness to a familiar but repressed aspect of 9/11 through Janiak's mediation. On one occasion, he performs at the subway station at 125th Street. Lianne sees him standing still, preparing for his jump, and ponders his purpose:

> She thought of the passengers. The train would bust out of the tunnel south of here and then begin to slow down, approaching the station at 125th Street, three-quarters of a mile ahead. It would pass and he would jump. There would be those aboard who see him standing and those who see him jump, all jarred out of their reveries or their newspapers or muttering stunned into their cell phones. These people had not seen him attach the safety harness. They would only see him fall out of sight. Then, she thought, the ones already speaking into phones, the others groping for phones, all would try to describe what they've seen or what others nearby have seen and are now trying to describe to them. (164–165)

In line with the dazzling texture of Drew's photograph, in which the Falling Man paradoxically constitutes the only fixed point of reference, here Janiak's performance renders the fall a sequence of still images framed by the windows of the subway. As such, his performance reenacts the dazzling effect of Drew's sequence suspended by the well-known frame. In a paradoxical fashion, while his pose is controlled, the passengers catching sight of him are made to "fall" as they continue their ride irreversibly to the next stop. The setting, in this case, the subway, is thus a screen that Janiak fully incorporates in his model: by way of inscribing himself into public space as a performer, his performance phantomogenically puts Drew's tabooed image back into circulation.

One might be tempted to suggest, as Kristiaan Versluys (2009: 23) has, that in DeLillo's novel, Janiak stands in "for the people who had no choice but to submit to their fate." However, I would like to suggest that Lianne's fixation on the work

of the performance artist demonstrates that, rather, what he stands in for is the ambiguity and uncertainty surrounding their choice to take the fall. In Lianne's eyes, the "flash" of the performance compels her to recall a memory predating 9/11. For her, Janiak's jump is an embodied yet hollow cipher for the suicide of her own father. By watching Janiak's performance of Drew's photograph, Lianne is visually confronted with her own silenced trauma in much the same way that Catherine reads herself in Lucas's Whitman lines in Cunningham's *Specimen Days*. Upon witnessing his jump at 125th Street, Lianne's ponderings are conveyed in free indirect speech: "Jumps or falls. He keels forward, body rigid, and falls full-length, headfirst, drawing a rustle of awe from the schoolyard with isolated cries of alarm that are only partly smothered by the passing roar of the train" (DeLillo 2007: 168). Then she starts running as if losing control over her body:

> She thought, Died by his own hand.
>
> She stopped running then and stood bent over, breathing heavily. She looked into the pavement. When she ran in the mornings she went long distances and never felt this drained and wasted. She was doubled over, like there were two of her, the one who'd done the running and the one who didn't know why. (169)

Similarly to Catherine's reading of Lucas, Lianne reads a text "faint but discernible" into Janiak's performance (Cunningham 2005: 55). In a deferred fashion, the performance activates a repressed memory that surfaces in the form of the fragment "Died by his own hand" (DeLillo 2007: 67, 218) – perhaps written in the coroner's report upon her father's death. As a recurring textual trace, the sentence becomes a catalyst of traumatic displacement evidenced by Lianne's psychosomatic drive to run without a logically comprehensible reason.

For Lianne, as well as for the reader, the phrase "Jumps or falls" gives a thrill when juxtaposed with the conflict of signification in the iconography of Drew's photograph. We have already seen that it is the dilemmatic nature of the man's agency, signified by the words "jump" and "fall," which renders "Falling Man" a site of undecidability and therefore a traumatizing image. This particular problem is addressed by the preceding sentence: "The train comes slamming through and he turns his head and looks into it (into his death by fire) and then brings his head back around and jumps" (DeLillo 2007: 167). It is, therefore, not simply the reenactment of the posture of the man, but rather what remains invisible in Drew's photograph that is at stake in Janiak's performances: the jump. He performs choice, the act of decision that precedes his fall.

As part of her reenactment of this trauma, the term "muzzle blast" (DeLillo 2007: 41, 130), which Lianne associates with the method of her father's death, receives a poignant edge in the context of suicide: "The news of his death seemed to ride on the arc of those two words. They were awful words but she

tried to tell herself he'd done a brave thing. It was way too soon" (41). Like Janiak's public appearances, "muzzle blast" functions as a memory trigger that takes her to "counter-sites" that she has failed to inhabit as narratable memories. Situated in the context of "Falling Man," the expression "brave thing," which Lianne devises as a narrative to contextualize her father's suicide, reverberates the rhetoric of heroism burgeoning after 9/11 and yet falters once applied to the jumpers. DeLillo's novel inhabits this counter-site by mapping the suicide of Lianne's father onto David Janiak's performance, thus turning the traumatic memory of the suicide into a gateway for Janiak's performances to retroactively inscribe the taboo of suicide onto the "Falling Man" photograph. In other words, the suicide of Lianne's father is mapped onto Janiak's performance, thereby reframing the act of the Falling Man in terms of suicide. Consequently, what Janiak models is not so much the photographic image *per se* but, as DeLillo focalizes the performance through Lianne, he addresses *why* the image is inassimilable. To modify Versluys's remark, rather than standing in for those who had "no choice but to submit to their fate" (2009: 23), Janiak's performance problematizes the ambiguity of choice itself.

Although not carried out through words, the act of the performance artist is ekphrastic insofar as it describes what Drew's iconic and tabooed photograph depicts. But rather than bringing the performance itself into the foreground, DeLillo's prose focalizes it from the viewpoint of the passersby and Lianne who, like many of the readers of the novel, are compelled to remember one of 9/11's most disturbing events. Consequently, DeLillo provides a literary description of a fictitious reenactment of a documentary image. By way of reminding readers of Drew's photograph through a fictitious performance, he keeps the object of ekphrasis at a remove. This kind of ekphrasis, not unlike Cunningham's tactics in *Specimen Days,* describes inasmuch as it withholds the healing power of narrative. No wonder that Tom Junod, the "builder" of the metaphoric cenotaph for Falling Man, finds DeLillo's method ethically questionable. For Junod, as he says in a review, the novel is "a portrait of grief, to be sure but it puts grief in the air, as a cultural atmospheric, without giving us anything to mourn" (2007: n.p.). What Junod finds deplorable, however, is perhaps DeLillo's greatest achievement in this novel: a phantomogenic ekphrasis that maintains, rather than absorbs, the traumatizing force of the image.

6 Conclusion

Departing from the conventional understanding of ekphrasis as the verbal representation of a visual representation, this chapter explored the potential of ek-

phrasis to recall, rather than describe, visual images. In particular, I focused on the ekphrastic power of literature to recall traumatizing images of 9/11. While ekphrasis, in its traditional sense, relies on the imagination of readers to achieve its purpose, the kind of ekphrasis examined here builds on readers' memories of a particular event. Owing to the traumatizing nature of these events, such as the sight of people jumping out of the burning towers of the World Trade Center, visual documents thereof had been repressed and censored. Employing Abraham's notion of the phantom, I developed the concept of phantomogenic ekphrasis that recalls the memory of these tabooed images obliquely, as a mnemonic tool that instigates recollection without direct description.

As opposed to the optimism that characterizes the phase of ekphrastic hope in Mitchell's formulation, phantomogenic ekphrasis is ominous and unsettling. As we have seen, in both *Specimen Days* and *Falling Man*, confrontation with the repressed memories of the falling bodies of 9/11 is contingent on readers' familiarity with the photographs. Although the two novels differ with regard to their plot, structure, and style, their technique of recalling these traumatizing images is similar. The way in which images of 9/11's falling bodies uncannily emerge from within the interstices of the layered temporalities of Cunningham's novel is comparable to the figure of the fictitious performance artist in DeLillo's novel who enacts in the form of performance what DeLillo's novel does in the realm of literature: compelling readers to bear witness. Likewise, both novels feature particular characters – Catherine in *Specimen Days* and Lianne in *Falling Man* – whose practices of looking, listening, and reading conjure up the 9/11 jumpers as specters to be contended with.

Although ekphrasis is conventionally text-based, its phantomogenic application is not confined exclusively to literature. For instance, James Marsh's 2008 documentary *Man on Wire* constitutes a filmic counterpart of Cunningham's and DeLillo's novels. The film tells the story of French tightrope walker Philippe Petit's unauthorized walk on a high wire strung between the towers of the World Trade Center in August 1974. Whereas 9/11 is never referenced in the documentary, upon viewing the climactic scene that features archival images of Petit's stunt in midair accompanied by interviews with members of his team, it is difficult not to be reminded of photographs of the 9/11 jumpers that similarly show human bodies with the iconic façade of the World Trade Center in the background. In much the same way that the fire at the Mannahatta Company in *Specimen Days* and the performance artist in *Falling Man* function as memory triggers, so do images of Petit's bold performance in Marsh's film approximate 9/11 without directly referencing it. Although one may dismiss, as Junod probably would, the phantomogenic mechanism of such textual and filmic representations, this

chapter has argued for the creative potential of this technique as a mnemonic device.

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