

THE CITY AND CATASTROPHE IN 9/11 NOVELS

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THE CITY AND CATASTROPHE IN 9/11 NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

The City and Catastrophe in 9/11 Novels

In this thesis, I formulate ways of ethical responses to 9/11 as a *catastrophe*, problematizing how different strategies of ethical engagement change memory objects from an amalgamation of closed personal histories to relational and social constructs. Using Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011), Ottessa Moshfegh's *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* (2018), and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007), I propose to analyze how different strategies of ethical engagement figure in the contemporary 9/11 novels. From the protagonist of *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* who already seeks a way out of connection with the rest of the outside of world with all its petty traumatic events and banalities; to the protagonists of *Falling Man* as immediate victims of a horrific event, the event par excellence; and the distant flaneur émigré of *Open City* who flattens all catastrophes into a general pattern of suffering in history is a line that meanders through the ethical implications of an engagement and disengagement with the city, its geography, and its inhabitants.

ÖZET

11 Eylül Romanlarında Şehir ve Felaket

Bu tez, bir “felaket” olarak 11 Eylül’e etik tepkilerin farklı biçimlerini formüle ediyor ve bu farklı ahlaki angajman stratejilerinin hafıza objelerini kapalı kişisel tarihlerin bir karışımından ilişkisel ve sosyal yapılara nasıl değiştirdiğini sorunsallaştırıyor. Teju Cole’un *Open City* (2011), Ottessa Moshfegh’in *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* (2018) ve Don DeLillo’nun *Falling Man* (2007) romanlarını kullanarak çağdaş 11 Eylül romanlarında farklı etik angajman stratejilerinin nasıl şekillendiğini analiz ediyor. *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*’ın tüm küçük travmatik olayları ve bayağılıklarıyla dünyanın geri kalanıyla ilişkiden çıkmamanın bir yolunu arayan kahramanından *Falling Man*’in yıkıcı bir olayın doğrudan kurbanlarına ve *Open City*’nin tüm felaketleri tarihteki genel bir acı örüntüsüne sığdıran *flaneur* kahramanlarına bakarken bu tez; şehir, şehrin coğrafyası ve şehrin sakinleri ile bir yakınlık ve uzaklığın etik sonuçlarına dair bir çizgi çiziyor.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Will the horrid altercation of America’s greatest city also alter the American novel?” asks James Wood in his essay, “Tell Me How Does It Feel?,” written merely three weeks after the towers came down (Wood, 2001). Perhaps this is a strange, rather premature question, but the connection between the city and the novel is one that no literary critic can turn away from. In this thesis, I want to expand on this question and formulate how city and catastrophe is figured in 9/11 novels. Using Teju Cole’s *Open City* (2011), Ottessa Moshfegh’s *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* (2018), and Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* (2007), I propose to analyze how space and city figure in the contemporary 9/11 novels.

These three novels take place in different time frames. The majority of the events of Moshfegh’s novel, although the most recently published one of the three, occurs before 9/11; DeLillo’s *Falling Man* starts in the immediate aftermath of the event; and Cole’s narrative takes place after a few years of September 2001. The variety in time presents ample opportunities to see how novelists represent the city before, during, and after the traumatic event, as well as creating a challenge on both the authors’ and the reader’s part to maintain a critical distance from the traumatic nature of the event and the artful representation of the catastrophe as a content in literature. From the protagonist of *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* who already seeks a way out of connection with the rest of the outside of world with all its petty traumatic events and banalities; to the protagonists of *Falling Man* as immediate victims of a horrific event, *the event par excellence*; and the distant flaneur émigré of

Open City who flattens all catastrophes into a general pattern of suffering in history is a line that meanders through the ethical implications of an engagement and disengagement with the city and its inhabitants.

1.1 The varieties of 9/11: The metropolitans in catastrophe

“It was above all from the exploration of enormous cities and from the convergence of their innumerable connections [du croisement de leurs innombrables rapports] that this obsessive ideal [la vie moderne] was born.”
- Charles Baudelaire, “Preface,” *Paris Spleen*

In his seminal essay, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” Georg Simmel (1903) takes a look at the metropolitans at the turn of 20th century. According to Simmel, “man is a creature whose existence is dependent on differences” (p. 2), he is very susceptible to external physical stimuli, to the changes in the environment. The metropolis as the place of “rapid telescoping of changing images,” “the unexpectedness of violent stimuli,” “the pronounced differences within what is grasped at a single space” puts much pressure on the metropolitan, demanding an enormous amount of mental energy against the chaotic environment. “Protection of the inner life against the domination of the metropolis” (p. 3) is the main challenge of the modern man who struggles to maintain an equilibrium between the outside and inside, whilst also trying to establish his autonomy. Simmel’s essay on the metropolitan outlook is so influential that it reads as a cliché from a late capitalist point of view. However, his characterization of the blasé outlook (p. 5) of the metropolitan who, being constantly fed with stimuli (what Benjamin calls “the shock experience” of urban life in his essay, “Motifs”), resorts to developing a detached approach to differences, putting on a purely rational, abstracting, reaction to anything and everything he sees is much related to our texts at hand. The blasé metropolitan attitude, “apathy” as Simmel later

in the essay calls, is a one that displays “indifference between distinction of things,” not because he does not perceive the differences, but because he simply becomes dull to such experiences which by now have lost all their meaning for him. This blasé attitude, with its “flat,” “gray,” “homogeneous” inclinations, connects well with the themes of cosmopolitanism and engagement as tackled by the 9/11 novels.

Moreover, the physicalist approach to the “totality of the form of metropolitan life” (Simmel, 1903, p. 15) brings up the question of distance and proximity which is directly linked to the theme of the city. In literary history, from Simmel’s blasé metropolitans to Baudelaire’s *ennui* sprung many protagonists, including the ones that this study engages with, but how those numbed personalities react to true catastrophes, such as 9/11, is one of the main inquiries of this thesis.

“Seeing Manhattan from the 110th floor of the World Trade Center,” is the portentous opening line of Michel de Certeau’s (1980) chapter, “Walking in the City,” from his book *The Practices of Everyday Life*. Presenting the towers as “the tallest letters in the world,” Certeau sets do a reading of these structures as “a gigantic rhetoric of excess in both expenditure and production” (p. 102). Looking from above, Certeau writes

The gigantic mass is immobilized before the eyes. It is transformed into a texturology in which extremes coincide—extremes of ambition and degradation, brutal oppositions of races and styles, contrasts between yesterday's buildings, already transformed into trash cans, and today's urban irruptions that block out its space (p. 102).

The use of “gigantic” twice in the first paragraph turns the towers into a monstrous achievement, something that disturbs the natural proportions of the cityscape, turning others into a mass. The gargantuan size of the towers leads to a feeling of separateness from below, providing a heavenly access to the mass, enabling, and

inviting, a “texturology” which works through an ability to see the mass as a whole to be observed, judged, and read. The below turns into a “human text” with this totalizing access.” To be lifted to the summit of the World Trade Center is to be lifted out of the city's grasp;” to relieve oneself from the “so many differences” (Certeau, 1980, p. 103) of the chaos below. Certeau’s description paints the towers in the colors of the Tower of Babel, only instead of enjoying a unified code of understanding in the tower, one gains great interpretative skills with regard to everyone outside of it. This plays well with the many symbolic readings of the towers, from both prelapsarian times (such as in *Mao II* of Don DeLillo) to after 9/11 accounts by famous intellectuals and philosophers (Zizek, Baudrillard, Habermas et al), WTC stands for the established, all-encompassing global power of the States and the question of what happens to the “voyeur-god created by this fiction” (p. 103) is a recurring theme in many critical pieces of writing.

However, the view from above is rarely the point of entry for novelistic treatments of the city. The “walkers” (*Wandersmänner*) are the ones who follow and create “the urban text” (Certeau, 1980, p. 104), and their “pedestrian speech acts” (p. 108) offer enormous complexity and a manifold of richness as they trade/tread the *langue* of the geometric city with the *parole* of their paths. Drawing a distinction between the two, Certeau declares “space is a practiced place” (*espace/lieu*). As Certeau puts, “the networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces: in relation to representations, it remains daily and indefinitely other” (p. 105). Certeau presents a rhetoric of walking as the “art of “turning’ phrases find an equivalent in an art of composing a path (*tourner un parcours*)” (p. 110). I aim to approach the three NYC novels with this framework in

my mind, paying attention to both the style of the walker-protagonists (in connection with Certeau's claim "to walk is to lack" in p. 112) and the world-building efforts of the writers.

Although Certeau does not directly engage with the differences among differences (i.e., New York City as a postcolonial city), the selected novels, especially *OC*, complicates the indeterminable nature of city-walking even further. As Mbembe puts in his essay, "Aesthetics of Superfluity" (Mbembe, 2004).

All these instances belie any notion of the city as a symbolic totality. The appropriation of its different styles is not necessarily optical—as shown, for example, by the ease with which old buildings may be left to ruin as silent witnesses to the past. Mostly, the appropriation of the city space is tactile, allegorical, and onomatopoeic. Behind its disorderly convulsions and apparent formlessness, there is a recognition that the metropolis is fundamentally fragmented and kaleidoscopic—not as an art form but as a compositional process that is theatrical and marked by polyphonic dissonances (Mbembe 2004, p. 400).

Although Mbembe does not make a literary point here, his description of the post-apartheid city connects well with the open form of the city, as well as the open thread of the novel as a genre. The polyphonic and kaleidoscopic nature of the city invites an unfixed reading of the space, as it is constantly in flux, even without great disasters to cause disturbance.

Certeau's account of city-walking eventually leads to a discussion of memory and space. He says, in fact, "memory is a sort of anti-museum; it is not localizable" (Certeau, 1980, p. 117). All of the three novels I focus on take space and memory as a problem, after all, 9/11 is an event that changes the structure of the city, along with the walking practices of the locals. However, especially with *Open City* which is

set in the years following the event and not in the immediate days of the catastrophe, the question of commemoration is also an important issue. In his influential paper, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” historian Pierre Nora conceptualizes what he calls “sites of memory” as the places where “memory crystallizes and secretes itself” (Nora, 1989, p. 7). For Nora, especially after the rise of modernity, the lived memory, memory as an all-encompassing mode of experience, lost its power, and it is “compartmentalized” (Olick and Robbins 1998, p. 121). What this entails is that in modern life, there appear certain places that are assigned (mostly institutionally) to fulfill the function of being mnemonic, and to evoke certain recollections of historical and national importance, as opposed to the old (and in Nora’s work, implicitly, traditional) way of seeing space as always-already imbued with memory – a mode of life that gives a holistic communal experience of the past. Thus, the idea is not only that “memory takes root in the concrete” (Nora, 1998, p. 9), it has always been that, but it takes root in specific places (the typical examples being museums, monuments or mausoleums). If memory used to be an almost total way of seeing things with an implicit charm in it, it is now, as Weber would say, disenchanted.

Nora’s concept of sites of memory has two central theoretical implications. The first one is about the difference between memory and history, and the second one is this concept’s implicitly political and ethical overtone. For Nora and subsequent memory scholars, the role of history and historians should become contested when we think their relation to, and handling of the place of memory in modern society. History’s role in eradicating the lived memory (what Nora calls “milieux de memoire”) is crucial as it “eliminates all (...) differences and reorganizes its facts within a homogeneous historical context in which nothing is unique,

everything is comparable to everything” (Assman 2011, p. 28). This uniqueness, obviously, refers to the eradication of communal and local realms of memory by the growing importance of national consciousness. Axiomatically, the lived memory, memory as a mode of experience, exclude any act of cataloguing of this sort. What we live, for Nora, is not the lived memory, but “reconstructed history” (Legg 2005, p. 484). Hence, the second implication is all too obvious and related to the first: how a site turns into a site of memory, and who propels this change is a deeply political and ethical question. Making a holistic world delimited or catalogued is itself a political act (Legg, 2005), as the act of leaving certain sites aside, depriving them of engagement, or simply, forgetting them.

If memory and history are opposed in this way (the former is an unconscious realm, attaching to communal/eternal heritage while the latter is conscious with an explicit political construction), the corollary argument would be to claim that any sites of memory is at risk of becoming an invention. The primary question for me is how the relations between the sites of memory are established, namely, how to connect distinct sites of memory in a way that makes sense, that underlies both their singularities and their connections, and make an ethical and political recognition out of them? In recent years, memory scholars have criticized Pierre Nora for being too reductionist in equating memory with tradition and history with modernity and proposing a new understanding of “multidirectional memory” as an attempt to see, in place of closed sites of memory, “rhizomatic networks of temporality and cultural reference that exceed attempts at territorialization” (Rothberg, 2010, p. 7). For these scholars, memory emerges from “unexpected, multidirectional encounters” (p. 10), and it is open to resignification and reconfiguration. As they convincingly suggest, what we need, instead of sites of memory, is knots of memory (“noeuds de

mémoire"), which involve not only a focus on intersections of memory-sources or self-contained spatial histories, but also the very agency involved in the production and reception of memory.

Yet, the singularities must be given their due diligence. If 9/11 is an absolute event, it is also a "Manhattan event" (Baudrillard 2002, p. 52). The ruins of WTC constitute what Pierre Nora calls "sites of memory" (Nora, 1989), or the locations where "memory crystallizes and secretes itself" (p. 7), the imprint of spatial encounters on how the subject is forged and memory is deployed. The 9/11's singularity opens the city as the container of all memories and traces of the event: as long as New York is the real capital of modernity, the 9/11 Memorial Museum is the cut that separates before and after precisely in Nora's sense: the time is crystallized in the city, in the point where the catastrophe occurred. If 9/11 calls for an ethical engagement, then it is calling from the ruins of the catastrophe. However, the placement of the memorial in the place of the towers also disturbs the before-ness of the space, as the commemorated absence and the exactness of the place invites a spiral reading into the monument. Goodall and Lee (2015) argue that the memorial with its design to "capture the unutterability of loss in [Arad's, the architect] designation of the memorials as 'voids,' 9/11 Memorial "mimics" the "void of melancholia on a national scale" (p. 132). As such, the memorial's primary function is to reflect, or duplicate, the towers' destruction, "creating an external 'void' in the place of an internal one" (p. 132). Benjaminian detritus of history literally takes place in the memorials whose reflection as an "homage" (p. 134) to trauma and loss inviting a Freudian melancholy where the loss is absorbed by the subject instead of working through it (p. 134). Of course, since the preceding disaster veritably provides memorials' its foundations and ground, a traumatized space is "always

already a space of melancholy” (Boulter, p. 10), no matter how is designed or curated.

The attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11 prompted strong textual responses to *catastrophes*, particularly the spectacular and grandiose characteristics of *the event* par excellence. In his *Ground Zero* (2002), Paul Virilio describes the event as the culmination of decades long technological acceleration but also as an irreversible point of change in the coordinates of Western capitalism. In similar fashion, Baudrillard (2002) declares 9/11 an absolute event that disrupts “the whole play of history and power” (p. 4), and “a zone of impossible exchange” (p. 52), while Žižek (2002) talks about “the absolute Truth (...) unconditional Power (...) and) the Truth Event” (p. 80-81). These allusions to the Real, or impossible exchanges, are allusions to the strong implications of 9/11: it opens up an ambiguous zone where catastrophes, ruins and disasters affect the subject. Hence, one important dimension of 9/11 is that it *crystalizes* individuals’ reactions into ethical positions.

There are certain terms emerging from this discussion, most notably positions, sites, and encounters – all, in one sense or another, points toward the relational qualities of 9/11, the ones that allow us to ask how individuals *engage* with catastrophic events. Let us use Caroline Levine’s (2015) network metaphor, which is rooted in Latour’s (2005) Actor-Network Theory: the ruin of 9/11 is, in this lingo, the most centralized node of an overarching network. It works as the hub of an electric grid, connecting different sites, objects, and people, or pumping different connections to these objects. In other words, 9/11 harbors more than the attacks themselves: it is the point over which fundamentally heterogeneous positions clash and all these positions are situated in a wide network of conflicting memories and ethical strategies. Hence, the network metaphor captures both aspects of the 9/11: (a)

as long as it is a New York event, it means that there is a variety of connections between people, ruins, and memories; and (b) as long as it is an event that calls for ethical engagement, it means that there are clashing positions, “the visions and divisions” (Bourdieu, 1996) of the event.

1.2 Why the novel?

In his groundbreaking book, *Imagined Communities* (1983), Benedict Anderson offers a careful study of nationalism and how the national state became the prevailing political structure in modernity. As posited in this study, imagined communities are imagined because despite not meeting, or knowing most of their compatriots, the members of any nation state hold an image of communion with their fellow members in their mind (p. 6) The work of imagination is enabled by the advent of, what Benjamin (1969) calls, “homogenous, empty time” (p. 24), replacing medieval conception of simultaneity with a modern simultaneity which is characterized as “transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfillment but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar” (p. 24).

According to Anderson, the birth of imagined community of the nation and the new simultaneity were established by a transformation brought by two new forms in the eighteenth century, the novel and the newspaper, which provided “technical means for representing the kind of the imagined community that is the nation.” (Anderson, 1983, p. 25) Approaching the newspaper as a kind of novel, as a short-lived best-seller, or an “extreme form of the book” (p. 34), Anderson describes how both the novel, and the newspaper present an analogical connection with the nation, all presenting “the idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through

homogeneous, empty time,” giving a “hypnotic confirmation of the solidarity of a single community” (p. 27).

Accordingly, print-capitalism made it possible for an increasing number of people to “think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways” (Anderson, 1983, p. 36). As such, Anderson’s framework includes the museum and “museumizing imagination” (p. 178), along with the census and the map (p. 184) as some of the driving innovations that helped solidify imagined communities; his work further helps us to approach several common themes within our three novels.

Of course, Anderson’s main focus in the above-mentioned process is how print capitalism can explain the rise of the nation state. However, we can shift our focus for our purposes at hand. As Anderson’s work shows, the novel as a genre bears considerable resemblances to how we understand the world, its structure, and our places in it. In our imagination, the question “what does the novel do?,” is intractably related to our lives as members of a community, be it the nation state or the city of New York. The novel makes us think about ourselves in relation to others in ways that are not very different from our conception of reality. The world and the novel make sense in the same way: we imagine that we occupy the same timeframe with the others; the vernacular provides a code for us to understand other people; we think things are of relevance to us because we read them in a vastly distributed piece of media. Surely, the effective potency of the novel, or the nation state, on our imagination is variable. It is easier for some people to imagine being a part of the community than others, for the simple reason that the novel, or the nation state, looks more compatible with their own lives, its language closer to their own. I do not wish to introduce here the controversial topic of the novel as a bourgeois form (see for

example, Franco Moretti's 2013 book, *The Bourgeois: Between History and Literature*. I merely wish to point out that the ways in which the novel or the reality make sense in our imagination is not a neutral, but the interconnectedness of the two is a strong justification for my study of the New York City novels after 9/11. After all, any catastrophe is a tremendous blow to our usual routes of meaning-making even though not everyone is affected by them in the same degree or fashion.

In *What is Philosophy*, Deleuze and Guattari (1991) consider different modes of thought in their discussion of philosophy. Their account of art and literature is of particular importance for an understanding of the novel as a genre that upholds openness, difference, and becoming; instead of approaching it as recreating and representing close systems and being. Their work sees art as a deterritorializing force, much dissimilar to, for example, Benedict Anderson's framework. Discussing painting, particularly works of Mondrian, Deleuze and Guattari say that the painter's action leaves the frame; it does not stay within it, nor does it begin with it (p. 188). In other words, the action of painting does not reach its culmination within the limits of the frame, in a work of art that is separated from the outside, that stands alone or is autogenic. The same is applicable to literature as well, the measure of good literature is not whether the characters are consistent with their social type and characteristics.

What matters is "the relations of counterpoint" into which they enter, and sensations that these characters either experience firsthand, or "make felt" in their becomings and their visions. The function of "counterpoint" is not limited to delivering real or fictional conversations; its purpose is to expose "the madness of all conversation and of all dialogue, even interior dialogue" (p. 188). The novelist as the extractor of psychosocial "models" must make sure that their characters are raised to carry the precepts and affects of their models, "without holding on to any other life."

This way, the broad “plane of composition” is not “abstractly preconceived,” but built up “as the work progresses, opening, mixing, dismantling, and reassembling increasingly unlimited compounds in accordance with the penetration of cosmic forces.” Surely, Deleuze and Guattari offer here a brilliant approach to the art of novel writing as a continuous process which does take in from life, but also presents many different configurations, indentations, and aggregations. The “hybrid geniuses” of Deleuze and Guattari are ones that “branch out and do not stop branching out” (p. 67).

There is a helpful connection between landscape painting and literature. When we look at a landscape, we do not see ourselves looking at it, but nonetheless, we are present in it. “But why do we say this, since in all these cases the landscape is not independent of the supposed perceptions of the characters and, through them, of the author's perceptions and memories? How could the town exist without or before man, or the mirror without the old woman it reflects, even if she does not look at herself in it?” ask Deleuze and Guattari, trivializing the question whether the novelist writes of the characters’ perception of the novelistic space or of their own experiences within space. In other words, the degree of fidelity to reality or the degree to which the novelist is visible in their work is not really a question. There is no perception that does not involve our becoming with the world because “we are not in the world, we become with the world; we become by contemplating it” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1991, p. 168). Hence, the novel in this sense does not do anything differently when it presents us a “compound of sensations.”

As literature maintains, perhaps more than any other art, an “equivocal relationship with the lived” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1991, p. 170), there is much space for a misunderstanding: people often think that they can write with their own

memories and “archives,” of their experiences within world. However, the novel is not an additive note keeping medium that compiles interesting observations and sound opinions of a writer. As Deleuze and Guattari put:

“We may well have great powers of observation and much imagination, but is it possible to write with perceptions, affections, and opinions? Even in the least autobiographical novels we see the confrontation and intersection of the opinions of a multitude of characters, all in accordance with the perceptions and affections of each character with his social situation and individual adventures, and all of it swept up in the vast current of the author's opinion, which, however, divides itself so as to rebound on the characters, or which hides itself so that readers can form their own” (p. 170).

The multiplicity of sounds, situations, manners are what makes the novel an unpredictable genre. Despite the author's controlling interventions, the reader can still enjoy an open artwork in becoming. The author may include certain characters and affections in order to parody or criticize them, but their involvement in the novel, much like in real life, will always reinforce plurality and flux as opposed to fixed, linear, and closed conclusions. Of course, the novelist sometimes must try to stay close to the reality, “to lie down on the earth, like the painter does,” to get their motifs or models right but, we are again reminded that “creative fabulation has nothing to do with a memory, however exaggerated, or with a fantasy: “[...Style] is always a question of freeing life wherever it is imprisoned, or of tempting it into an uncertain combat” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1991, p. 171). Writing is a process that goes beyond the livable and the lived (p. 225). Although it always refers to singular agents, as Melville says, “a novel includes an infinite number of interesting characters but just one original Figure” (p. 65), literature is a “collective assemblage of enunciation” (Deleuze, 1997, p. 229). Literature is a delirium, but it is not a delirium that we can approach just within psychoanalytical framework of “father-

mother affair.” Delirium is always a collective affair, as Deleuze and Guattari put, “there is no delirium that does not pass-through peoples, races, and tribes and that does not haunt universal history” (p. 229).

Of course, Deleuze and Guattari’s work on literature and particularly, on the novel owes a great deal to Bakhtin whose theory of the novel follows a similar course. According to our duo, Bakhtin theorizes the novel as a genre where the “contrapuntal, polyphonic and plurivocal” coexist as compounds within an “architectonic, or symphonic plane of composition” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1991, p. 188). Indeed, in his “Discourse in the Novel,” Bakhtin (2013) shows how the novel “orchestrates” (p. 1079) all of its themes by means of the social diversity of speech types and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions. In the essay, Bakhtin defines the novel as “a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized” (p. 1079). Thereon, he introduces the concept heteroglossia: “Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental unities with whose help heteroglossia can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized).” For Bakhtin, heteroglossia is not a minor, or contingent feature of the novel, on the contrary, it is the very fundamental “prerequisite for authentic novelistic prose” (p. 1080). This way, the novelistic “word” can register “the tiniest shifts and oscillations of the social atmosphere” (p. 1106) with great subtlety. Furthermore, it can also register it as “a whole, in all of its aspects.”

Both Deleuze and Guattari, and Jacques Rancière turn to Virginia Woolf’s essay, “Modern Fiction,” in their discussion of the novel. The question for Deleuze

and Guattari is “How can a moment of the world be rendered durable or made to exist by itself?” Woolf’s answer is to “saturate every atom.”

“I want to put practically everything in; yet to saturate,” (Woolf, 2014, p. 172) declares the creator of Mrs. Dalloway who “sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on.” Reading the same essay by Woolf, Ranci re, in his “The Thread of the Novel” (2014), introduces the work of the thread that “can be drawn by words assembled in the form of fiction.” The problem with this concept of the thread, he writes, is about “the possibility of combining two powers of words: their power to draw a line between one fact and another and their capacity to tell the truth about those facts by so doing” (p. 28).

This “wandering” thread links the material succession of atoms, as well as making “the light of the halo shine and let the spiritual texture of the envelope provide a new sense of the whole.” The novel, in this sense, is a store of countless plots (as Woolf says, “modern fiction has no proper stuff”), multiplicity of “expressions,” as well as the “visible manifestation of a network of laws.” Here lies the democratic idea of the novel, Ranci re argues, as modern fiction is free from all the “threads” connecting it with “the rules of social identification and poetic legislation,” it aims to “extract the impersonal, anonymous power of life.” It both does the work identified by Woolf as “[recording] the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order which they fall” (p. 160), as well as rebelling against the hierarchical distribution of forms of life, along with the “tyranny of plot.”

Choosing the novel as my object of analysis, I aim to follow the path of these theorists and critics who provide fruitful insights into the genre. I plan to pay attention to what the form of the novel offers to our three authors in their treatment of the city before, during, and after the catastrophe; how they take advantage of the

affordances of the form, the degree to which they include different voices and registers to depict the social atmosphere. The novels that I have chosen for this study display a variety of hospitality, or hostility, to the novelistic style, one of them, *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*, can even be seen as an attempt at an antinovel. I hope to give due diligence to this variety, as it will help me investigate how the narrative engages with the world and literature, with other forms (such as the city), and with people who populate both the world and the novel. “The life of the soul—the life of the impersonal— only be told as a combination of heterogeneous stories,” Ranci re writes, “[t]he wandering thread must remain a broken thread” (p. 160). In my thesis, I aim to follow the wandering thread of the novel, and how the novelists weave a nubbly cloth with it.

1.3 Why the novel and 9/11?

The novelistic representations of 9/11 have strong potential to examine these considerations in at least two domains. First, the novel form leads to the construction of what Anderson (1995) calls the “spectacular possibilities for the representation of simultaneous actions in homogeneous empty time” (p. 194), meaning that the novel form, with its “omniscient” narrative, cultivates the “different kinds of speech or discourse [enacting] the possibility of a community larger than any one individual can know” (Cullen 1999, p. 24). The connections between the novelistic form and the construction of ethical and political sensibilities *without strong proximity to the events* make the novelistic treatments of 9/11 contested mediums of different socio-political positions. In similar fashion, Levine, in her *Forms* (2015), contends that “the form that best captures the experience of colliding forms is narrative,” as

“narrative form affords is a careful attention to the ways in which forms come together, and to what happens when and after they meet” (p. 19).

Second, the novel is particularly amenable to the metaphor of networks. Levine proposes using network heuristics with their full force: we should ask whether these networks are dense or sparse, centralized or not centralized, complex or simple.

Finally, the understanding of the *city* as a site where the traveler/wanderer makes strong (or weak) connections or emphasizes one important place (or many hubs of engagement) is one example of the usefulness of the network metaphor, as well as the potential of the novels within this framework.

CHAPTER 2

THE CITY OF NEW YORK

2.1 The city before the catastrophe

Ottessa Moshfegh's novel is an anomaly among our three novels because it both takes place before 9/11 and displays an aversion towards the exploration of and engagement with NYC—hence, a good place to start our investigation of the city and how it is represented in literary texts. In *My Year of Rest and Relaxation (MYRR)*, we see a radically different relationship with the city. As the unnamed protagonist tries to cut her ties with the outside world, her interaction with the city is immensely minimized as well. Let us turn to the opening paragraphs of the novel to see how the city is strategically avoided by the protagonist who starts her narration with the lines:

“Whenever I woke up, night or day, I’d shuffle through the bright marble foyer of my building and go up the block and around the corner where there was a bodega that never closed. I’d get two large coffees with cream and six sugars each, chug the first one in the elevator on the way back up to my apartment[.]” (p, 1).

At the beginning of the novel, the only part of the city the protagonist acquaints is the distance between her apartment and the bodega that she visits daily, which happens to be on the same block as her apartment. The novel's unnamed protagonist starts her “hibernating” period around 2000, at the age of twenty-four, and to do so she drastically limits the time she goes out of her apartment to the point of having her muscles withered. She has an approximated relation to the city: she orders delivery from a Thai restaurant across the street; she has her laundry picked up and cleaned, again, via delivery service; all of her bills are on automatic payment

plans. When she needs to get pills that are essential to her sleeping excursions, she has to “[venture] out” (*MYRR*, p. 3) to the Rite Aid three blocks away from her apartment. She describes this undertaking as a “painful passage” where having to walk up to First Avenue makes her “cringe” as the stimulation of the environment hurts her, like a newborn baby who is having trouble adjusting to the chaotic reality outside of the womb. She says, “the details of the world [seems] garish and hostile” (*MYRR*, p. 3), she relies on alcohol to numb herself to the hostilities of an uncontrolled environment. During these visits, she passes the “little bistros and cafes and shops” she used to frequent, when she was “out there, pretending to live a life.” Apart from this digression, she tries to limit herself to a “one-block radius” around her apartment. Correspondingly, the only people she sees on a regular basis are the young Egyptians who work at the bodega store, her psychiatrist, Dr. Tuttle, the doorman at her building and her friend Reva.

During the first four years of living in her apartment on East Eighty-fourth Street, the protagonist does not have a single conversation with any of her neighbors, riding the elevator in complete silence with a “performance of hypnotized space out” (*MYRR*, p. 17). The town houses lining her block each have a placard warning people to abstain from damaging the brownstone and honoring the traditional outlook of the neighborhood. Her neighbors are well-off, “uptight” (p. 18) people who all look professional and “well-groomed.” They sport Burberry scarves and pearl earrings with black leather briefcases. Her “slovenly” lack of self-care makes her stand out from her neighbors, apart from “elderly Jews who lives with rent-controlled apartments” (p. 18); she in fact feels like she is committing a “crime,” appearing in the lobby wearing pajamas and slippers. However, she does not care because, even at her worst, she still looks good, as she is “tall and thin and blond and pretty and

young” (p. 18). On top of her good looks, there is also the implication that her slovenliness does not matter because she belongs into the Upper East Side milieu as she too is an affluent person who can afford to flaunt similar items of fashion, unlike those living in rent-controlled apartments, enjoying a fluke of an egalitarian intervention into the composition of the district.

In any big city, a neighborhood is always tinted with certain colors, dispositions and, of course, fashion items. The protagonist chooses Yorkville over Chelsea because she wants to be separated from “the beauty pageants and cockfights of the art scene” (*MYRR*, p. 18). But living uptown still infects her with its own “virus,” making her try to look like the women of her neighborhood with their blond hair, speed walking in spandex, and Bluetooth speaker in the ear. She does what “young women in New York like [her are] supposed to do” (p. 18): she goes to the right overpriced gym, get facials, lays in the hammam, visits galleries to meet men. Much as she tries to act the part of the young city girl, nothing comes out of her outings in terms of “love” or having significant connections with other people.

If the protagonist is not a walker, or a socially active member of the city, she has other means to form connections with the others and to maintain a link to the city, mainly through consumption and gathering of objects. When it becomes “too much trouble” (p. 1) to put her dirty clothes in the laundry bag, she switches to ordering clothes and underwear through the mail, packages from such places as Barneys and Sacks arrive at her apartment as she makes many purchases that she cannot even remember making in the next day. Although, she does not physically participate in the city atmosphere, through consumerism, she still gets to enjoy being a New Yorker with its cosmopolitan culture (Thai cuisine and Egyptian bodega owners) and its long-established brand names that connote an upper middle-class

lifestyle (Barneys and Sacks). Unlike the characters of our two other novels, this protagonist is very keen to point out where things are bought from: her sofa is from Pottery Barn; she ironically buys “tacky” lingerie from Victoria’s Secret; she is quick to detect a knockoff designer bag, bought in Chinatown, sported by her not-rich, not-too-thin, averagely pretty friend, Reva.

In *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Thorstein Veblen (2016) introduces several forms of vicarious consumption as they apply to people from different positions in terms of class. Forms of consumption regarding “food, clothing, dwelling, and furniture” (Veblen, 2016, p. 49) are signifiers of “marks of a superior status, and so tend to become virtues and commend the deference of the community” (p. 51). As the cultivation of “aesthetic faculty” (p. 90) in Veblen’s work, or “taste” in Bourdieu (1992), requires time, being a connoisseur of beverages, trinkets, clothes, architecture, etc. is of outmost importance for a member of the leisure class who must learn “how to live a life of ostensible leisure in a becoming way” (Veblen, 2016, p. 53). Veblen’s term for such practices is “conspicuous consumption,” and it applies well to the protagonist who both rejects being a member of a community, while also flaunting her learnedness of markers of status. Her practices in terms of consumption of goods and services are very different from her friend Reva who, not being just as in the know, tries too hard to emulate practices of a class that she just is not a member of.

Whereas having an eye for detecting and determining the status-displaying side of objects and practices, the narrator gets her coffee, which she deems “consistently bad” (*MYRR*, p. 4), from the Bodega both because of the store’s proximity and also its humble affordances. She enjoys that she does not have to “confront” anyone ordering a “brioche bun or no-foam latte” there, or any children

with Swedish au-pairs, “sterilized professionals” and people on dates. She describes, rather sarcastically, the bodega coffee as a “working class” coffee, coffee without veneer, coffee for “doormen and deliverymen and handmen and busboys and housekeepers” (p. 4). Her remark that she “could have gone to any number of places for coffee, but [she] liked the bodega,” emphasizes further how she is not a working-class person who has to frequent there but chooses to. The sententious tirade she gives on the humbleness of the bodega coffee is another case of conspicuous consumption, this time turned upside down as a display of nonchalance, or ironic quiescence. Her studied acknowledgment of the relationship between social status and consumption and her subsequent behavior to do the contrary show her as someone who is *au fait* with socially ingrained dispositions, as well as a person self-righteously above them.

Delivery services and ironically frequenting a local Bodega is one of the only connection the protagonist has to the city. Another instance where she finds connection through purchase and foraging is her habit of buying secondhand clothes from the Jewish Women’s Council Thrift Shop. Characteristically, she does not remember frequenting the thrift store, she just happens to find that she has been buying from them when she was under. These senseless habits underlie a desire to connect with the city and its inhabitants, a desire that only influences action when the protagonist is not intentionally in control of the situation. Importantly, after her “rebirth” at the end of her project, she discovers the Goodwill store on 126th Street, this time consciously. A sign of her return to the society is when she says that she likes “looking at things other people had let go of” (*MYRR*, p. 179). She even speculates about the story of objects and how they come to the store. These speculations characteristically involve people leading normal lives, making love,

having thousands of TV dinners, having noisy babies. She chooses to refurnish her apartment with the objects she gets from the Goodwill, the used-ness of the objects keeping her company and hinting at a life lived among other people. Her choice to gather these objects indicates a change in her outlook, this time she will not run away from connecting with the people of her city, no matter how insignificant their lives may be.

The novel forces the reader to realize many particular ways that the city connects. One of the protagonist's favorite things about her apartment is having a trash chute which offers an urbane unity in disposal. The narrator thinks that the chute makes her feel "important" (*MYRR*, p. 74), like she is "participating in the world." She says, "My trash mixed with the trash of others. The things I touched things other people had touched. I was contributing. I was connecting." This connection is a one that is both impersonal, no physical interactions between people; and intimate through the mediacy of objects. Emphasize on touching in this quote is also important to show how the mingling of garbage is a tactile, fleshly, and, perhaps, a little obscene, act where the unseen personal lives of neighbors commingle with one another to create a strange garbage compound as a sign of their cohabitation from a distance. Of course, this is a cynical, distant way to contribute to and connect with the society, but it is also a sign of the times, a fin de siècle where globalism's earlier promise of multicultural, multipluralist connection now decidedly looks like a unity only in consumption through the open market. As Andreas Huyssen (2003) puts, "if the 1980s were the decade of a happy postmodern pluralism, the 1990s seemed to be haunted by trauma as the dark underside of neoliberal triumphalism" (p. 8) The new technologies of consumption, as shown in the example of indirect shopping in the novel, leads the protagonist to imagine a

community, á la Benedict Anderson, but this time, it is a community of consumption and disposal.

Of course, as we will see later in the discussion of Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (FM), news too is a medium that extends the outside world into our lives. For this reason, Moshfegh's narrator-protagonist avoids watching TV (as it "[arouses] too much" (MYRR, p. 2) in her), the only news that she can bring herself into reading are the headlines of local daily papers with their sensationalist headlines at the bodega. Similarly, she steers away from the magazine section for fear of reading something that would vex her intellect or make her envious or anxious. She avoids "agitating" herself with TV which only evokes scoffing from her, anyway. She skims stories of celebrity gossip, death of "somebody important," of corruption by local administrators; and most tellingly, of the presidential election between George W. Bush and Al Gore. She acknowledges the existence of such happenings; however, she says:

"Things were happening in New York City—they always are—but none of it affected me. This was the beauty of sleep—reality detached itself and appeared in my mind as casually as a movie or a dream. It was easy to ignore things that didn't concern me. Subway workers went on strike. A hurricane came and went. It didn't matter. Extraterrestrials could have invaded, locusts could have swarmed, and I would have noted it, but I wouldn't have worried" (p. 2-3).

On the one hand, her project of sleeping is a way for her to disengage herself from reality, a means for her to avoid anxiety about the many possible ways NYC, or the nation, may be affected by imaginable, and beyond-imagination, ghastly circumstances of disasters. On the other hand, her inattention to *political* happenings around her, such as the upcoming election or worker strikes, lays bare her privileged status in the society, with her inherited investments from her dead parents, rent

money from their apartment, on top of the unemployment benefits she enjoys during this period of hibernation. She has a blasé outlook on the normalcy of things always “happening” in the city; she nurtures a detachment from the events both emotionally and politically.

2.1.1 Outside the city

With the notable exception of Teju Cole’s *Open City (OC)*, the novels of this thesis offer small vignettes of the city borders or non-cityscapes where the outside cities or city borders stand in opposition to the sights and practices of the city. In *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*, it is Farningdale which is a village on Long Island. When the protagonist goes to the funeral of her friend Reva’s mother, she leaves her usual abode at the center to arrive at the city skirts, namely Farmingdale. She finds there “ugly” (*MYRR*, p. 78) where “gray landscape” is spiked with telephone poles, and long rows of two-story buildings with beige aluminum siding covers the area. Indeed, she is far away from the beautiful, “pristine” (p. 18) brownstones of her neighborhood. Here, people wear not tasteful camelhair coats, but they “bundle” themselves in nondescript coats, scarves, and hats. They drive cheap sedans, too; they do not hire good cars to drive them to work in Downtown. The narrator cannot fathom why anyone would want to live in such a place, and thinks it explains why Reva tries so hard to fit in NYC. Even before arriving at Reva’s house, the narrator is able to pre-guess that the house must have “wall-to-wall carpeting, humid, sticky air, low ceilings” (p. 82). Reva’s house is the opposite of the protagonist’s parents’ house with oriental rugs and tasteful furniture.

“There is no culture here,” (*MYRR*, p. 88) Reva says as she describes how she hates where she lives and how she finds there “barbaric” with no culture or, most

importantly, no buildings for culture such as an opera house or a symphony orchestra. Of course, the narrator is quick to point out, Reva does not frequent such places when she is in New York City proper either, not knowing anything about art (p. 88). But the perks of living in the city precisely lie in the option that you do not have to attend to the events of the city, by virtue of proximity to the culture-d spaces you get to be an urban person without the necessary urbane activities.

2.1.2 The city to come

In Moshfegh's novel, Reva gets a promotion that means she must work in the Twin Towers. She says: "I kind of like the Twin Towers. It's peaceful up there." (*MYRR*, p. 133) Of course, this is a case of dramatic irony. Although her promotion means that she gets to work at the hub of business at the end of 20th century, it also means, from the point of view of the readers and the protagonist who gives these accounts after 9/11, that Reva will not find WTC peaceful for long, as all will come down in just one year after her relocation.

As the narrative does not provide much information about NYC before the disaster, this single mention of the Twin Towers gains more ominous qualities. On the one hand, surely this is an instance where the novel displays an ironic foreshadowing, further mocking Reva's groundless optimism. On the other hand, possibly uncharacteristic of the protagonist, this inclusion of Reva's hopeful musings about her future at work in WTC, is most elegiac of the prelapsarian NYC and the lives lost to the catastrophe. At the time of their building and after, the Twin Towers were frequently criticized both for its architecture and due to its symbolic provocations. "Architecturally plain if not ugly" (p. 93), Huyssen (2003) writes in his *Present Past* and remarks that its construction was strongly opposed at the time by

many New Yorkers. Due to their relative featurelessness, they “did not seem to capture the public imagination as did the Empire State building with its iconic associations with King Kong, or the Chrysler building with its splendid art deco ornamentation” (Crinson, 2005, p. 170). Or, to borrow from *Falling Man*, they were an obvious “provocation” “as fantasies of wealth and power that would one day become fantasies of destruction” (*FM*, p. 116).

However much the Towers symbolized a fantasy of world domination on greater scale, on a personal level, they also stand for hope for normal citizens such as Reva who, disillusioned by her love life, sees Towers as a place to begin a new life. It is important to note here that the protagonist’s former boyfriend, Trevor, too works in the Towers, and he is a character much devoted to further pursue “fantasies of wealth and power” on a microlevel. He is a stock trader who is the embodiment of neoliberal state and its connections to globalism as he is emotionally distanced, sexually sadistic, and morally obtuse. Of course, one final irony of the novel is that Trevor is not affected by 9/11 as he is on his honeymoon, tellingly, in Barbados at the time of the event. It is the hopeful Reva who naively seeks a peaceful beginning that dies on 9/11, whereas the Trevors of the world continue their businesses untouched.

2.2. The city as the site of catastrophe

Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man*, starts its narrative right in the middle of the attack with Keith on the street, having barely survived the collapse of the Towers. Due to the enormity of the destruction and Keith’s inability to process the reality around himself, the city we are introduced to turns into a world that is chaotic, overwhelming, and incomprehensible: “It was not a street anymore but a world, a

time and space of falling ash and near night” (*FM*, p. 3) is the opening line of our novel. The world that once was simply a street is described with its terrifying details:

“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 and turning corners, busting around corners, seismic tides of smoke, with office paper flashing past, standard sheets with cutting edge, skimming, whipping past, otherworldly things in the morning pall” (p. 3).

DeLillo’s *Ground Zero* still shows a New York City as the hub of business, with “contracts and resumés blowing by” (p. 4), in a cosmopolitan setting where the members of a tai chi group watching the event “in a state of abeyance.”

The event takes the city and turns it into a terrible new world, a new reality. The streets and the corners of the city, ordinary items of an office, the sign of “Breakfast Special” at one corner, become out of place all of a second; the event makes everyday scenes eerie as they become “otherworldly” things, not belonging to their usual places. An empty supermarket cart, the cobbled street, cart iron buildings, shop windows, members of a tai chi group standing in “a state of abeyance” (*FM*, p. 4); the protagonist starts to see these things “differently” (p. 5) as if there was something “critically missing from them.” He thinks they are somehow “unfinished” and finally makes the conclusion that perhaps this is “what things look like when there is no one here to see them” (p. 5). As Freud (2013) discusses in his seminal work on the uncanny, *heimlich* (“homely” is one rendition of the term) can be used, curiously, in opposite situations. On the one hand, it means “what is familiar and aggregable” (p. 933), and on the other, “what is concealed and kept out sight.”

Unheimlich occurs when something is kept from sight; it also arrives when something hidden comes to light. In this sense, the novel begins with the uncanny images of *Ground Zero*. The mundane objects of everyday life suddenly take up

uncanny qualities as they appear “otherworldly,” or incomplete. As the uncanny is nothing “new or alien” in the mind (Freud, 2013, p. 944) but something which has become “alienated” from it, the impact of the trauma makes the subject suspicious of the familiar environment and its regular objects, as if they are seen for the first time as they are.

What Keith is going through in the first part of the novel is, of course, a genuinely traumatic experience. “Trauma is the wound of the mind” (p. 4), Cathy Caruth (1996) says in *Unclaimed Experience*. When the subject goes through an event that is experienced “too soon, too unexpectedly” to be fully known and therefore registered in the conscious mind, that unassimilated event comes back to “haunt” the survivor later on. It is not only the violence of the accident, but also the very “incomprehensibility” of the event plagues the survivor. In short, trauma occurs when the subject has an overwhelming experience, and as the subject fails to fully know the event as they experience it, they have a compulsion to return to it. The latency or the belatedness is inherent within the traumatic experience itself (p. 17) and the unbearableness of trauma is not only related to the destructive nature of the event, or its violence that has not yet been fully known” (p. 6), but also to the “enigma of survival (p. 58) and what it means to survive. “That survival becomes for the human being, paradoxically, an endless testimony to the impossibility of living” (p. 62) because in the traumatic event, the subject confronts death and survives it, albeit unknowingly (p. 64).

A foundational text in trauma studies, Cathy Caruth’s (1991) *Unclaimed Experience* justifies a literary approach to trauma by pointing out that Freud himself resorts to literature to explain traumatic experience. “It is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not

knowing” (p. 3), Caruth ascertains, drawing a similarity between literature and trauma as they are positioned at the limits of knowledge.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud (1980) introduces repetition compulsion as an attempt for the subject to not only come into terms with their violent experience, but also to “claim” their own survival (p. 62). The traumatic nature of the event is laid bare in the first scene: “Nothing is next. There is no next [...] The time to be afraid is when there is no reason to be afraid. It is too late now,” (p. 10) shows how the belated realization of surviving a destructive experience is a disturbing feature of the disaster, which is always felt a little too late, when things are already done. The protagonist “[walks] away from it and into it at the same time,” he keeps “going until he [has] to stop” when he comes to the realization that no matter how far he runs, “he [cannot] go any further” (p. 5) as this ash colored scene of the fall will follow him throughout the novel because of the fact that the trauma and all the coping mechanisms it introduces will linger far longer than the experience of the destructive event. On a meta level, the novel itself will return to, as it is to be discussed later in the thesis, the scene of the trauma, ending right where it begins, as Keith makes his way away from the center. Hence, repetition compulsion is introduced not just at the level of character development, but also at the larger narrative itself, coaxing the reader to question if the novel as a genre can work as a vessel for preserving or working through trauma.

Although Keith survives the Fall, he goes through a symbolic death. As Žižek (1989) puts in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, symbolic death is not “the death of the so-called ‘real object’ in its symbol, but the obliteration of the signifying network itself” (p. 132). Keith loses his place of work of the last ten years; he relocates back to his estranged wife’s home; he loses his coworkers and poker partners in

September 11. His symbolic death is directly linked to the loss of his network, and for this, he has to take up exercises ritually to assert back himself as a surviving subject of the disaster.

9/11, for New Yorkers is an intimate event. The plumber who drives Keith to his estranged wife's home describes his experience is important to see how the event affects not just the survivor but also by passers as well. The plumber hears the sirens when he is driving as his radio was previously stolen. There is difference between getting the news on the radio and not needing the radio to get the news. The event is in their immediate environment; it is an intimate experience. The city has a certain typography, and the locals are trained all their lives to read it. The aesthetic features or the historical significations of the buildings are, of course, important, but one of the reasons that makes 9/11 a city event is that it forcefully makes New Yorkers into illiterates at an instance. As Neil Leach puts in his essay titled '9/11' (Crimson, 2005), "it is as though buildings sink into the recesses of our consciousness as a form of background landscape – almost unnoticeable because of their very familiarity – unless some event happens there that leaves them indelibly imprinted on our minds, such as a tragic accident" (p. 169). Or, as Walter Benjamin in *One-Way Street* (2021) discusses, "more frequent, perhaps, are the cases when the half-light of habit denies the plate the necessary light for years, until one day from an alien source it flashes as if from burning magnesium powder, and now a snapshot transfixes the room's image on the plate" (p. 342). The familiar sights of the city destroyed all of a sudden, the city becomes a text that one does not know how to read.

The plumber continues to narrate his experience: while he is driving, he only sees the one tower, thinking the second one was hidden behind the smoke as "one tower made no sense" (*FM*, p. 21). There is of course, a point to blowing both

towers. As Matthew Gumpert (2012) says in his *The End of Meaning*, 9/11 proffers two revelations, two events, the second one revealing “the duplicity of the first” or, being “a reading of the first” (p. xix). Imagine what the poor plumber thinks when he realizes there is not even a single tower to make no sense—catastrophic events are a crash course in unlearning for the city-dwellers.

Keith cannot go to his home because it is too close to the towers, the event necessitates a relocation both in terms of logistics and metaphorical need for a home with his wife and son, comfortably not geographically at the center of the catastrophe. As the event unfolds, the familiar hustle and bustle of the city turns into a military zone with policeman and the army officials, and most importantly, checkpoints. The very existence of checkpoints at each block decidedly shows how the everyday practice of walking, along with city-geography changes with the catastrophe, further establishing it as a New York City event.

The first cop told him to go to the checkpoint one block east of here and he did this and there were military police and troops in Humvees and a convoy of dump trucks and sanitation sweepers moving south through the parted sawhorse barriers. He showed proof of address with picture ID and the second cop told him to go to the next checkpoint, east of here, and he did this and saw a chain-link barrier stretching down the middle of Broadway, patrolled by troops in gas masks” (*FM*, pp. 23-24).

With the state officials treating the city as a war zone, the familiar language to refer to the city changes. Now, the reference point to describe places retain a more neutral, physical aspect: “one block east of here,” instead of more familiar terms of NYC dwellers. Correspondingly, the status of the city walker becomes more suspect to processes of official identification with the requirement to show identity and intention for being on the street as there are only a handful of “civilians” (*FM*, p. 24)

at the scene. After he manages to get into his apartment, Keith packs “his passport, checkbooks, birth certificate, and a few other documents, the state papers of identity” (p. 27) into his suitcase, showcasing how quickly a new state of urbanity emerges in the immediate aftermath of the event, not even requiring an intentional effort on the part of the New Yorkers. A similarly easy moment of understanding of the new everyday life is shown when Keith opts to walk instead of getting a taxi as he thinks it would be hard to find one in a city where every cabdriver is called Muhammed (p. 28).

Keith is described as “[working] his way through the frozen zone, south and west, passing through smaller checkpoints and detouring around others” (*FM*, p. 24). The frozen zone that is Downtown Manhattan is in a state out of time and space where all references established culturally and historically are erased to make way for the eternal-now of the disaster. As he is walking and navigating the new configuration of the city, Keith is looking for something that he can identify as familiar. “A skeletal remnant of the tower where he’d work for ten years” (p. 25) hovers above, a “stink” that “infiltrates the skin” is in the air, and dead “everywhere, in the air, in the rubble, in the breezes that carried from the river.” As “everything was gray, it was limp and failed” (p. 25), he describes what he sees as “a city somewhere else, under permanent siege.” To him, he is no longer in NYC but in a different city, somewhere more familiar with such sights of death and destruction, perhaps an overseas warzone where one might expect to be in such a state. Lianne, his estranged wife, has a similar understanding, not being accustomed to “the sight of police and state troopers in tight clusters or guardsmen with dogs” (p. 32), she thinks these images belong to “other places,” “other worlds,” where this is the routine and “will always be.”

However, the narrator is quick to point out that her thoughts are not a “reflection” but a “downdraft of memory” of the cities she has visited before, places of “crowds and heat” (*FM*, p. 32). Of course, the description of her thoughts as not intentional thinking but as an airy memory brought by connotation is tainted by the affiliation of “crowds and heat” with the places she reminisces about. Heat and crowds betray an exoticizing touristic gaze that sees the state of current NYC as a reproach, as foreign.

Of course, the barriers in the middle of the city, the parted barricades, and the sound of hell machines” (*FM*, p. 24), with military men wearing gas masks is a haunting image, unthinkable before or perhaps even after the event.

“It was something that belonged to another landscape, something inserted, a conjuring that resembled for the briefest second some half-seen image only half believed in the seeing, when the witness wonders what has happened to the meaning of things, to tree, street, stone, wind, simple words lost in the falling ash” (p. 103).

Keith thinks upon seeing a mounted policewoman. Here we can turn to Žižek who approaches 9/11 as fantasy fulfilled in *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, or we can turn to the novel’s European, Lianne’s mother’s lover, to make the same point almost in verbatim:

“But 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? You build a thing like that so you can see it come down. The provocation is obvious. What other reason would there be to go so high and then to double it, do it twice? It’s a fantasy, so why not do it twice? You are saying, ‘Here it is, bring it down’” (p. 116).

The event changes people’s relationship with the city in small but profound ways also. Keith’s company, for example, relocates across the novel and he describes the opportunity sardonically as: “We’ll have a nice view of lower Manhattan. What’s

left of it” (*FM*, p. 108). Of course, the city changes after 9/11, but there is also a sense of returning to the normal in the air, especially by the youth (a student’s use of “hopefully” and “oh my god” uttered in delight on the telephone is noted by Lianne), the tourists who take pictures of Grand Central Station, and the commuters in running “flurries” (p. 32). Although he is to be discussed later in the thesis, it is important to note here that just as Lianne picks up the evidence for the “normal order” (p. 32), Falling Man, the performance artist, makes his first appearance in the novel. His introduction in the scene is a reminder of the earlier event, but the very fact of his commemorating act in public is a one that indeed solidifies 9/11 as an already past disaster that needs to be reenacted to make people not forget.

It is important to note here that as *Falling Man* takes place in the immediate aftermath of the event, there are not official sites of commemoration for 9/11 victims; hence, the need for a performance artist to reenact the gesture of falling in place of physical memorials. Florence, whose briefcase Keith rescues from the Towers, describes how people create non-official murals for memorials:

“I went to St. Paul’s yesterday. I wanted to be with people, down there in particular. I knew there would be people there. I looked at the flowers and the personal things people left, the homemade memorials. I didn’t look at the photographs of the missing. I couldn’t do that. I sat in the chapel for an hour and people came in and prayed or just walked around, only looking, reading the marble plaques. In memory of, in memory of” (p. 89).

It will be interesting to see how the unofficial commemoration practices differ from the official ones when we turn to *Open City*, where there are so many venues for 9/11 commemoration and museums, memorials, and tourists all crowd up the city.

The end of the novel, significantly returns to the beginning, gesturing towards trauma and repetition compulsion both on the level of the characters but also on the level of the literary object at hand:

“He went past a line of fire trucks, and they stood empty now, headlights flashing. He could not find himself in the things he saw and heard. Two men ran by with a stretcher, someone facedown, smoke seeping out of his hair and clothes. He watched them move into the stunned distance. That’s where everything was, all around him, falling away, street signs, people, things he could not name. Then he saw a shirt come down out of the sky. He walked and saw it fall, arms waving like nothing in this life” (p. 246).

Again, back to the street level, to the mayhem we are thrown. If Keith’s non-progress or the novel’s circularity do not offer a process of overcoming trauma, the at least functions as a place where trauma is stored and recollected, like a museum or a memorial does.

2.2.1 City attentiveness

As it will be discussed in the second chapter of the thesis, Lianne, more than anything, is a reader, of other people’s traumas, memories, books, and, most importantly, of the city. Lianne has a yearning to locate her Alzheimer patients’ memories in real space as a commemoration practice. The Jihadists’ of the novel, in stark contrast to Lianne, show an inattentiveness to the particularities of the space. As Hamad remarks, “One man on a visit did not know the name of the town they were in, outside another town called Venice. He’d forgotten the name or had never learned it” (*FM*, p. 174). Hammad too thinks it does not matter if it is Nomokis or some other place. “What does it matter? Let these things fade into dust. Leave these things behind even as we sleep and eat here. All dust. Cars, houses, people. This is all a particle of dust in the fire and light of the days to come” (p. 174). The jihadists

aim for a messianic cleansing of difference not just in terms of different subjectivities, but they also want to erase difference in space as well.

Lianne, however, tries to connect the fading city memories of a Rosellen, an Alzheimer patient, to her forgotten streets and corners. Her act is to be a witness to Rosellen's city, to remember her in her city. She in fact finds herself, without conscious thinking, following Rosellen's past steps in her neighborhood:

“She walked without plan, west on 116th Street past the barbershop and record shop, the fruit markets and bakery. She turned south for five blocks and then glanced to her right and saw the high wall of weathered granite that supported the elevated tracks, where trains carry commuters to and from the city. She thought at once of Rosellen S. but didn't know why. [...] She thought of the conversation with Dr. Apter concerning the day when Rosellen could not remember where she lived. This was an occasion that haunted Lianne, the breathless moment when things fall away, streets, names, all sense of direction and location, every fixed grid of memory. Now she understood why Rosellen seemed to be a presence in this street. Here was the place, this temple whose name was a hallelujah shout, where she'd found refuge and assistance” (p. 156).

Some New Yorkers of these novels find a solace in either walking or remembering having walked the streets of the city. Moshfegh's protagonist is one of them. Whereas the Jihadists reject paying attention to the particularities of the cities they occupy as they plan to let “these things fade into dust,” Lianne tries to salvage Rosellen's fading memory to recreate her walking practices in the city so that at least she will remember her memories in the setting. Moshfegh's protagonist is a different case. Whenever she remembers the embarrassing details of leaving her job at the art gallery, Ducat, she tries to remember her commute to work instead:

“Whenever Ducat had popped into my mind, I'd tried to winnow my focus down to the simple memory of the long walk to the Eighty-sixth Street subway station, the express train to Union Square, the L train across town, the walk up Eighth Avenue and left on Twenty-third Street, the hobble over the old cobblestones in my high heels. Remembering the geography of Manhattan seemed worth hanging on to. But I would have

preferred to forget the names and details of the people I'd met in Chelsea" (p. 117).

She chooses remembering the geography of Manhattan over remembering the experiences at her work. She desires to keep the memories of the city minus the people in it. Lianne arrives at places from memories of people, she wants to marry the place and the memory together. Moshfegh's narrator only wants an experience of the city geography, without its connections to people.

2.2.2. Other kinds of city-walking

There is another kind of city-walking that *Falling Man* and *Open City* show: public protests and gathering. Now three years after 9/11, the New Yorkers unite once again to protest against the invasion of Iraq and the on-going war. Lianne and her son Justin walk with "five hundred thousand others, a bright swarm of people ranging sidewalk to sidewalk, banners and posters, printed shirts, coffins draped in black, a march against the war, the president, the policies" (*FM*, p. 181). Although Lianne feels "remote" (181) from the occasion, she still participates in the protest.

The cosmopolitan nature of the protest must be given its due notice. Justin takes a leaflet from a woman in black headscarf. The crowd becomes "dense, collapsing in on itself" (*FM*, p. 181). Although the riot police are visible, they are there to "detain the overcommitted and uncontrollable" (p. 181), a sense that the protest is not a radical act but an act of justified civic participation. Which in itself is a celebration of those cosmopolitan citizens. Half a million people with "running shoes and sunhats and symbol-bearing paraphernalia" (p. 182). People handing out material "on behalf of peace, justice, voter registration, paranoid truth moments" (p. 183). On the leaflet: "Mourn the Dead. Heal the Wounded. End the War." On one of

the literatures, the word Islam, and some information on Islam with the words the Hajj, Shahadah, Ramadan, There is no god but Allah and Muhammed is His prophet. Compared to their suspicion of Islam and its culture three years ago, the New Yorker seems to find a way to make sense of the other and their culture. No more radical otherness of the Jihadist, now they have a culture that can be explored, their literature within reach in NYC.

Lianne, however being “an infidel in current geopolitical parlance” (*FM*, p. 232), she does not feel at home as she participates in the protests. In fact, she starts to see herself as a tourist, again because the words of Islam as it is carried in the banners and leaflets are familiar to her as she has visited those places and those words before in her trip to Egypt which she has received as a graduation gift. Although the others seem to be more at peace with those words and the culture, “she was in that memory and on this sidewalk simultaneously, the ghost of one city, the frontal thunder of another, and she needed to flee both crowds” (p. 185), and “what she began to feel, aside from helplessness, was a heightened sense of who she was in relation to the others, thousands of them, orderly but all-enclosing” (p. 184).

Positioning Lianne and the crowds with the narrator of *Open City* will yield striking results as well as he too has an aversion to the masses, but whereas his aversion leads total separation, Lianne manages to make some attachments along the way. “This crowd did not return to her a sense of belonging. She was here for the kid, to allow him to walk in the midst of dissent, to see and feel the argument against war and misrule. She wanted, herself, to be away from it all” (*FM*, 182). She senses an artifice in this gathering, hints of performativity: “She was marching apart from the handheld slogans and cardboard coffins, the mounted police, the anarchists throwing bottles. It was all choreography, to be shredded in seconds” (p. 182). As

“all life” becomes “public” (p. 182) in the last three years, “the stricken community pours forth voices and the solitary night mind is shaped by the outcry” (p. 182).

2.2.3 Alternative spaces and rhythms

After his near-death experience, Keith return to playing poker, this time professionally in casinos. “This was never over. That was the point. There was nothing outside the game but faded space” (*FM*, p. 189). Keith says, revealing the tight connection between the space of the trauma and avoiding mechanisms against it. Built in the middle of a desert, casinos are radically different spaces from the cityscapes. The “small dawn of tunneled meaning” (p. 189). Keith relishes in is due to casinos strange features as a space. With no light but artificial neon lighting, players there are not aware of the time. “There was no language, it seemed to tell them how he spent his days and nights,” Keith remarks as he forgets himself and the city in the desert space. Compared to Lianne who clings so hard to language, the city, the memory; Keith rejects everything the city brings. “Soon he felt the need to be there. When his plane came down over the desert, he could easily believe that this was a place he’d always known. There were standard methods and routines.” (p. 197).

Keith’s utopian place, the casino in the middle of the desert plays well with Jean Baudrillard’s hyperreality as he defines in his book, *Simulacra and Simulation* (1983). Writing on the Pompidou Center, Baudrillard describes the hyperspace as an “enigma of this carcass of flux and signs, of networks and circuits” (p. 43), and as a “monument to the games of mass simulation” (in *FM*, it is poker). “All around, the neighborhood is nothing but a protective zone - remodeling, disinfection, a snobbish and hygienic design - but above all in a figurative sense: it is a machine for making emptiness,” (p. 43) is the way Baudrillard characterizes the hyperspace that is the

Pompidou Center. But his descriptions may very well apply to Keith's casino as well. When, for instance, Keith stares into the waterfall," he realized he didn't know whether it was real or simulated. The flow was unruffled, and the sound of the falling water might easily be a digital effect like the water itself" (p. 204). Much like Baudrillard's Center, Keith's casino functions as a "[m]onument to total disconnection, to hyperreality and to the implosion of culture-achieved today" (p. 44) and it brings him comfort because he can only face a non-space in his current condition at throes of trauma.

2.3 Our City of the Various Sorrows

"The flâneur is still on the threshold, of the city as of the bourgeois class. Neither has yet engulfed him; in neither is he at home."
—Walter Benjamin, "Baudelaire, or the Streets of Paris," p. 171

Taking place in 2006 and narrated through the eyes of an immigrant, *Open City* (2011) and its treatment of NYC is radically different from both Moshfegh's and DeLillo's novels. In Cole's New York, the Towers have long been gone and the invasion of Iraq by USA has already taken place. Moreover, Julius, the protagonist, is a relatively new arrival to the city and he has not experienced the events of 9/11 firsthand. 9/11 is not a central piece in his narration; he in fact repeatedly tries to undermine its importance by portraying it as a catastrophe among many catastrophes taking place in the great city. As I have done before, looking at the first paragraph of the novel will show how the city is generally represented in the whole narrative:

"And so when I began to go on evening walks last fall, I found Morningside Heights an easy place from which to set out into the city. The path that drops down from the Cathedral of St. John the Divine and crosses Morningside Park is only fifteen minutes from Central Park. [...] These walks, a counterpoint to my busy days at the hospital, steadily

lengthened, taking me farther and farther afield each time, so that I often found myself at quite a distance from home late at night, and was compelled to return home by subway. In this way, at the beginning of the final year of my psychiatry fellowship, New York City worked itself into my life at walking pace” (p. 3).

Tolerably reminiscent of Seamus Heaney’s 2000 translation of “hwæt” as “So!”¹, *Open City* opens with a rhetorical, rather than narrative, in medias res, “And so,” invoking both oral and epic tradition, as well as introducing, at the very beginning, the fragmented, elliptical style of the narration. The protagonist “set[s] out into the city,” a sense of embarking and adventure in the air, the tension between the manmade urbanity (traffic noise) and the natural surroundings of the city is established. “These walks” are an agent of their own, lengthening themselves steadily, as if independent from the walker who finds himself having to take the subway in order to reach back home. Alike, contrary to the activeness of the initial term, “setting out,” New York City not so passively works itself into the narrator’s life as he is walking the streets.

However, the narrator has had an earlier habit before he takes up walking and that is bird watching and pondering about natural migration:

“Not long before this aimless wandering began, I had fallen into the habit of watching bird migrations from my apartment, and I wonder now if the two are connected. On the days when I was home early enough from the hospital, I used to look out the window like someone taking auspices, hoping to see the miracle of natural immigration. Each time I caught sight of geese swooping in formation across the sky, I wondered how our life below might look from their perspective, and imagined that, were they ever to indulge in such speculation, the high-rises might seem to them like firs massed in a grove” (pp. 3-4)

Continuing nonlinear narration, the narrator introduces this volta of introducing his earlier habit. As an immigrant himself, he “falls into,” he happens to,

¹ A controversial choice of translation, absolutely not related to our discussion.

watching bird migrations from his window. He displays an involuntary desire to connect first with the creaturely which is a concept defined by Eric L. Santner in *On Creaturely Life* (2006) as “a dimension of human existence called into being at such natural historical fissures or caesuras in the space of meaning” (p. xv). “As a piece of human history that has become an enigmatic ruin beyond our capacity to endow it with meaning, to integrate it into our symbolic universe” (p. xv), “we find ourselves in the midst of natural history” (p. xv). Not being able to locate his presence in the non-natural sights that he first sees when he moves to live in the NYC, Julius’s first proceeds to seek connection with the creaturely. Only after familiarizing himself with the streets and buildings of the city can he seek other forms of connection through which he will seek to find meaning.

There is a continuous tension in his narrative between his active intentions and passive, senseless inclinations, he does not know about the connection between his two unconsciously established habits. It is important to note how the initial term “bird migration” turns later into “miracle of natural *immigration*.” Immigration is not the term used to refer to the natural movement of animals. Being an immigrant himself, he establishes an analogy between his movement in the world (from Nigeria to the States and Belgium) and that of animals. Miraculous side of his relative freedom of movement is of course contestable, as immigration is not an opportunity allowed to just anyone who decides to change places. Similarly, miracle of *natural* bird migration is not purely natural when we consider how birds need to navigate the high structures in the city; how they make certain detours to accommodate the challenges of a cityscape, often falling victim to the architectural choices of city planners who at times do not consider the natural impacts of their endeavors. His speculation whether or not birds see high-rises as firs is also an optimistic one where

the creaturely and the synthetic have a smooth, harmonious relationship. Auspices too is a strange choice of word when his status as a psychiatrist, a man of science, is considered. This is the first instance when Julius, the narrator, occasionally uses mythology and folkloric elements to make sense of the city, although he, as will be argued later, is decidedly a universalist enlightened person who dislikes localist motifs.

As Julius considers the birds' perspective flying above the city, he displays a fundamental part of his character: he is a person that is obsessed with pondering about other people's perspectives, their dispositions that make them act in certain ways. But, of course, this passage also highlights how he yearns for a bird's-eye view which would enable him to see the totality without being a part of it. Let us return to de Certeau and his description of the city-voyeur who is like an Icarus flying over the city:

“His elevation transfigures him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was ‘possessed’ into a text that lies before one’s eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god. The exaltation of a scopic and gnostic drive: the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more” (Certeau, 1980, p. 92).

Julius too is an Icarus with his voyeuristic yearning for knowledge of the city, seen from above and away from the crowds.

Later, Julius introduces us his cultivated taste in music, mainly classical music, decidedly European. While he listens to a European radio with the host's voice coming from thousands of miles away, he connects “those disembodied voices” coming from the radio with the “apparition of migrating geese,” (OC, p. 5) hinting at a transcultural migration of art and artful sensibilities, again connected with his status as an immigrant, and by analogy, avian migration:

“At first, I encountered the streets as an incessant loudness, a shock after the day’s focus and relative tranquility, as though someone had shattered the calm of a silent private chapel with the blare of a TV set. Walking through busy parts of town meant I laid eyes on more people [...] but the impress of these countless faces did nothing to assuage my feelings of isolation; if anything, it intensified them. I became more tired, too, after the walks began, an exhaustion unlike any I had known since the first months of internship, three years earlier. One night, I simply went on and on, walking all the way down to Houston Street, a distance of some seven miles, and found myself in a state of disorienting fatigue [...]” (p. 6).

Julius’s experiences of city-walking are a lot different from the tranquility of his days he spends in the hospital. The jarring sounds of the city (“an incessant loudness,” p. 6) stands in contrast to the calmness of the “silent private chapel” of his time at work; he lays eye on thousands of people in the street, as opposed to the few during daytime. He describes this experience as a shattering of the silent chapel with the blare of a TV set. Benjamin (1999) in his essay “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” puts the “shock experience” (p. 319) of the urban life, among the crowds at the center of Baudelaire’s art. Moving from the original flaneur to our immigrant-flaneur, we can say the same thing: treading the city streets is a shocking and tiresome experience for the narrator. “I wove my way through crowds of shoppers and workers, through road constructions and the horns of taxicabs.” Hence, he finds himself in a state of “disorienting fatigue” (p. 6), having a hard time even standing on his feet. Encountering thousands of people (“the impress of these countless faces”) paradoxically heightens his sense of isolation further, proximity to people does not yield a fulfillment which is a common realization for the protagonists of both *Falling Man* and *my Year of Rest and Relaxation* as well. Even the fatigue of walking does not result in a good night’s sleep, as the narrator, the obsessive ever-analysand that he is, tries to make sense of his excursions, cataloguing and evaluating them even at home:

“[...] I rehearsed in the dark the numerous incidents and sights I had encountered while roaming, sorting each encounter like a child playing with wooden blocks, trying to figure out which belonged where, which responded to which. Each neighborhood of the city appeared to be made of a different substance, each seemed to have a different air pressure, a different psychic weight: the bright lights and shuttered shops, the housing projects and luxury hotels, the fire escapes and city parks. My futile task of sorting went on until the forms began to morph into each other and assume abstract shapes unrelated to the real city, and only then did my hectic mind finally show some pity and still itself, only then did dreamless sleep arrive” (pp. 6-7).

The task of “sorting” is an impulse for the narrator who is much aware of the many different configurations of different parts of the city with their numerous variations. He tries to make clear separations; he wants each part to reside fittingly in their abstracted categories (geographic shapes and blocks of a child’s toy). Indeed, through his “futile task of sorting” differences melt into a mash of abstract forms that cannot sustain their former unities. The particularities of neighborhoods, specific mental states and sensitivities dominating them, even the very structural formations of the city’s architecture lose their distinctions in this process. As they are superimposed on each other, the lines separating them become blur until they resemble nothing like their initial states. Admittedly, his self-appointed task of sorting is simultaneously self-effaced as it is deemed futile. Particularities cannot hold, as parts of the city morph into each other, collapsing on themselves. Constant witnessing of difference is a burden for the city-walker narrator, and he welcomes sleep.

“The streets served as a welcome opposite to all that. Every decision—where to turn left, how long to remain lost in thought in front of an abandoned building, whether to watch the sun set over New Jersey, or to lope in the shadows on the East Side looking across to Queens—was inconsequential and was for that reason a

reminder of freedom,” (OC, p. 7) is the way Julius describes the affirmative and creative nature of city-walking. According to Julius, these walks meet a need. He finds walking a “therapy,” a release from the tightly “regulated mental environment” of work. Unlike city-walking, his work is a “regimen” of “perfection and competence” where there is no space for creativity or spontaneity. Opposite to the institutional and structural limitations of the hospital, is the freedom of city-walker. As every decision the walker makes is “inconsequential,” treading the streets is a “reminder of freedom.” Despite his midnight reveries and his self-appointed task of sorting out, the narrator deems his strides as “aimless progress:” no matter how he proceeds in the streets (turn left or right), there is no need for method or aspirations for the act of walking is creative, productive, and rewarding; it always yields progress.

Yet, there are ways to move in the city apart from walking or taking a taxi. Using the subway is a peculiar experience that one would not be able to even imagine before the advent of modern city. Julius describes riding the subway in a macabre fashion.

“The sight of large masses of people hurrying down into underground chambers was perpetually strange to me, and I felt that all of the human race was rushing, pushed by a counter instinctive death drive, into movable catacombs. Above-ground I was with thousands of others in their solitude, but in the subway, standing close to strangers, jostling them and being jostled by them for space and breathing room, all of us reenacting unacknowledged traumas, the solitude intensified.” (OC, p. 7).

Again, being closer to people means feeling more isolated. For the psychiatrist, the subterranean journey with strangers, in machines that resemble catacombs, arrays an unacknowledged death drive in the commuters. Walking in the city is a more civilized urban experience, jostling with others in a claustrophobic environment

exposes the dark underbelly of city-commuting. Reenactment of unacknowledged traumas, in the form of jostling, pushing, shoving other people for space: frustrations, repressions and suppressions of the above city of light resurfaced in the dark alleys of the subway. After all, what is the subway, but the city structure laid bare in the dark without the deceptive light of the surface. Julius's experiences in the subway as the dark underbelly of urban life can be linked to an illicit, displaced desire which is, as Boulter (2011) puts, "a foundational element in the formation of the subject and of the city: these subterranean currents of darkness and desire help to "create a rhythm of the earth" (p. 91).

Subject to the fluctuations of the market, business models, political and cultural modulations, New NYC is a city in perpetual flux. In "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," Lyotard (1988) says that "There is something of the sublime in capitalist economy. It is not academic, it is not physiocratic, it admits of no nature. It is, in a sense, an economy regulated by an idea – infinite wealth or power. It does not manage to present any example from reality to verify this idea. In making science subordinate to itself through technologies, especially those of language, it only succeeds, on the contrary, in making reality increasingly ungraspable, subject to doubt, unsteady" (p. 39). Julius presents a case for this understanding of the sublime in capitalist economy when he is shopping for CDs of classical music. Seeking refuge from the overenthusiastic masses of New York Marathon, Julius visits one of his sanctuaries in the city, Tower Records, where he buys his records of classical music that are so fundamental to his identity as a cultivated person. Upon arriving, he learns that the store is closing due to bankruptcy, much like the Blockbuster he visits later that day. These giant corporations that dominate the cultural industry going out

of business means changes in their neighborhoods, moreover, it also hints at the future arrival of financial crisis of 2008.

“It wasn’t that I felt sorry for these faceless national corporations; far from it. They had made their profits and their names by destroying smaller, earlier local businesses. But I was touched not only at the passage of these fixtures in my mental landscape, but also at the swiftness and dispassion with which the market swallowed even the most resilient enterprises,” (*OC*, p. 19) Julius marks. He understands how those stores came to dominate the market through devouring of local small businesses; he does not anticipate being nostalgic about them in the future. But he is “touched” by the passage of these “fixtures” in his mental landscape; meaning, he will be affected by their disappearance because it will change the image of the city in his mind.

Critical of such conglomerates or not, their stores are a part of the cityscape and their presence occupy a reference point for the city-dwellers. He is touched, too, by the quickness and detachment of the market in demolishing such resilient businesses. Transience of market domination means no powerful establishment will remain the victor forever; they will abduct their throne to a newcomer. Important to note here is the fact that these are not just any businesses; they are a part of culture industry. They are a venue for people to buy music, books and films, and their disintegration is absolutely connected with the state of the arts in the neoliberal city. The grand “unforeseen changes” that continuously spawn and eradicate new venues have an all-encompassing effect on the conception of the city; on the production, distribution and reception of arts; and, ultimately, on the perception of reality at large.

2.3.1 The city, neighbors, and other people

Zizek (2006) in “The Limits of Neighborhood” says:

“One of the things alienation means is that distance is woven into the very social texture of everyday life: even if I live side by side with others, in my normal state I ignore them. I am allowed not to get too close to others. I move in a social space where I interact with others obeying certain external “mechanical” rules, without sharing their inner world. Perhaps the lesson to be learned is that, sometimes, a dose of alienation is indispensable for the peaceful coexistence of ways of life” (p. 236).

Afterall, your neighbor can always turn out to be a dislikeable person, or a racist.

In our three novels, proximity does not lead to connection. Oftentimes, closeness means annoyance. The noise from Julius’s speakers sometimes disturbs his neighbor, Seth. Living in such closeness though, does not mean much. When he learns that Seth’s wife has had a heart attack and died a few years back and he did not know about it. It is with tremendous confusion Julius thinks, “a woman had died in the room next to mine, she had died on the other side of the wall I was leaning against, and I had known nothing of it” (OC, p. 21). Although he is taken back by his disconnection with his neighbor, he knows that he still cannot go next door to comfort the bereaved husband as that would be a show of “false intimacy” (p. 21).

The most interesting part of this scene of realization occurs when Julius tries to remember whether Seth came to his place to complain about the music before or after his wife’s passing. He feels a certain satisfaction and relief from concluding that it was before her death. He says, “I felt a certain sense of relief at this, which was taken over almost immediately by shame. But even that feeling subsided; much too quickly, now that I think of it” (OC, p. 21). The quick city encounters and pathos arising from spontaneous realizations follow one another and lose their power all too quickly in his world. He is cynical of those edifying moments.

Similarly, Julius does not have much sympathy to those who come into his vicinity to make themselves heard. The scene where he watches one of feminist Reclaim the Night marches is a great example of her disconnected attitude towards groups showing a form of solidarity. Ever suspicious of the masses and causes, Julius never once specifies the features of the gathering or uses the word feminist. He repeatedly refers to the group as “the crowd,” only occasionally noting down their chanting (“We have the power, we have the might / The streets are ours, take back the night.”) without commentary. “The voice leading the crowd became even louder, but the words did not resolve into meaning, and most of the crowd, marching toward us, remained obscured by darkness. Then, as the crowd, all of them young women, passed under the streetlamps, their chanting became clearer,” (pp. 22-23) is the way Julius describes the scene from his window. Although the crowd is getting closer and their sound louder, this does not transpire any meaning to the outsiders. Symptomatic of his own fear of being melted into a crowd, Julius carefully notes how most of the crowd remain obscured by darkness. Even when they pass under the streetlamps, in this game of chiaroscuro of political reclamation, the visibility of these women can only contribute to a *clearer* transmission of their chanting, a full conveyance of their cause remains not within reach.

Surely a comical, almost bathic, ending to the scene, Julius shuts the window on the protesting mass: “The crowd, several dozen strong but tightly packed, passed under my window. From several floors above, I watched them, as their faces came in and out of the spotlights of the streetlamps. *Women’s bodies, women’s lives, we will not be terrorized.* I shut the window.” (p. 23) Moreover, in the next paragraph he talks about Badio and Serres, all figures of May ’68. Of course, we do not even have to go there to detect his complacency. For the simple fact that goes ignored by him:

not everybody gets to roam the streets in a care-free fashion to enact and celebrate human freedom.

2.3.2 Places of events, disasters, and hope

In his edited volume, Crinson (2005) associates urban memory with “the city as a physical landscape and collection of objects and practices that enable recollections of the past and that embody the past through traces of the city’s sequential building and rebuilding” (p. xii). In *La Mémoire Collective*, Maurice Halbwachs (1950) explains the relationship between people and space in terms of transformation and enclosure by saying “when a group is introduced into a part of space, it transforms it to its image, but at the same time, it yields and adapts itself to certain material things which resist it. It encloses itself in the framework that it has constructed. The image of the exterior environment and the stable relationships that it maintains with it pass into the realm of the idea that it has of itself” (p. 4). In other words, whereas human agents indeed shape their urban environment, the very structures of the transformed space in turn encircle and affect people’s sense of their selves. Following Freud’s (1910) approach to monuments as mnemonic symbols that were originally “built to mark particular traumatic experiences like the death of a queen” (p. xvii), resembling hysterical symptoms, Crinson (2005) offers the figure of the tourist as a hysteric by arguing that “we might say that the true urban hysteric is the tourist (or perhaps the architectural historian) who seeks out these monuments and their forgotten meanings” (p. xvii).

Benjamin (1992), in *Illuminations* studies how buildings are appropriated by people in a twofold fashion: “by use and by perception – or rather, by touch and sight. Such appropriation cannot be understood in terms of the attentive

concentration of a tourist before a famous building. [...] Tactile appropriation is accomplished not so much by attention as by habit. As regards architecture, habit determines to a large extent even optical reception. The latter, too, occurs much less through rapt attention than by noticing the object in incidental fashion [...] They are mastered gradually by habit, under the guidance of tactile appropriation” (p. 233).

As Neil Leach (Crinson, 2005) argues, the attacks on the towers can hardly undetermined the power of global capitalism, saying “better to think the logic of a viral network [...] Capitalism exerts its power, as Deleuze and Guattari observe, not through the burrows of the molehill, but through the coils of the serpent. Insidious, invisible, capitalism is everywhere and nowhere. The attack on the World Trade Center can therefore be seen as an attack not on capitalism, but on the symbols of capitalism” (p. 187).

In the introduction to his book *Presents Past*, Andreas Huyssen (2003) describes how historical memory today differs from what it used to be. He says, in the past historical memory marked “the relation of a community or a nation to its past” (p. 1). But as the boundary between the past and present gradually became more blurred with the new technologies of recording (film, photography, etc.), the past has become more visible in the present. The change in our perspective of the relation between the past and present is not only a temporal phenomenon, but it also pertains to our understanding of the space as well as it is evident how “urban space-replete with monuments and museums, palaces, public spaces, and government buildings-represented the material traces of the historical past in the present” (p. 1). Moreover, globalization too is a process in which the reorganization of the historical past into the present weakens the coherency and legitimacy of past forms of

organizations, such as family, nation, community, as they were grounded on their traditional geographic and political contexts.

The “modernist fantasies about *creatio ex nihilo* and of the desire for the purity of new beginnings” (Huyssen, 2003, p. 7) ebbing away, we have a new inclination to read cities and buildings as “palimpsests of space, monuments as transformable and transitory, and sculpture as subject to the vicissitudes of time” (p. 7). Huyssen thinks the earlier American paradigm of modernization was characterized by “present futures,” whereas the shift brought by with the disillusionment of neoliberal globalism is now energized by “present pasts” (p. 11). From the 1970s, Europe and the United States have undergone an “historicizing” restoration of old urban centers (p. 14); various national heritage enterprises and waves of new museum architecture are in full bloom. Moreover, Huyssen finds the mass-marketing of nostalgia, the obsessive self-musealization per video recorder, memoir writing, and confessional literature, the rise of autobiography and of the postmodern historical novel among the symptomatic outcomes of the current dominion of presents pasts.

This turn toward memory, which Huyssen (2003) calls “memory epidemic” (p. 27), has many facilitators in the cultural, historical, and political sphere; Huyssen counts new technologies of transformation and communication, mass media, new patterns of consumption and global mobility (p. 21) among them. On a psychological level, however, the desire to “anchor” oneself in a world characterized by an increasing instability of time and the fracturing of lived space” (p. 18) which is perhaps more amenable to our study of these three contemporary novels when we consider the different forms of archival obsession they portray is directly linked to the catastrophe of 9/11 and its traumatic effects on the characters.

Reminding us of Walter Benjamin's flaneur who reads "urban objects in commemorative meditation" (p. 50), Huyssen argues that approaching the city as a book or text is nothing new in literature. He claims in fact that the notion of the city as a sign is as pertinent as before, although it is now more imagistic rather than a textual sense (p. 50). If we can return to the connection of 9/11 and the city, we see indeed an imagistic approach to the disaster. For example, "Fredric Jameson denounced the media for orchestrating a "dissociation of sensibility" through countless "unrealistic visuals" (p. 297) and Jean Baudrillard accused the media of taking the events of 9/11 "hostage" through an exploitation of images" (Gleich, 2014, p. 161). Similarly, characters in these three novels too often invoke the visual aspect of the disaster on the city. In DeLillo's novel, it is the Falling Man as the performance artist and Lianne who understands 9/11 as "an image event" in Baudrillardian (p.163) sense. Or, in Moshfegh's novel, the protagonist's only reaction to 9/11 in the physical sense is to record and re-watch the footage of the falling woman again and again. However, I would like to argue here that imagistic approaches to 9/11 and NYC was indeed very prominent in the days following the attack, but novelistic treatments of the city is the main focus on this thesis, which inevitably foregrounds the textual over imagistic. Moreover, I would like to suggest here that image-based media was heavily impacted by the attacks, some films/TV series removing the images of the Towers from their movies (such as *The Sopranos*), others adding the images of the Towers to their films in post-production. Most pertinently however, majority of films that can be categorized as 9/11 movies tend to allegorize the event, not dealing directly with the violent images of the disaster. For example, Matt Reeves's 2008 science fiction movie, *Cloverfield*, narrates the events of an alien invasion of Manhattan as an allegory of 9/11, but not as a visual

representation of the events directly. Similarly, Kenneth Lonergan's (2011) *Margaret* tells the story of a teenager who feels responsible for the death of an elderly woman in a traffic accident, evidently pointing towards a reading of the narrative a 9/11 allegory. In short, as much as there is an imagistic tendency towards NYC after the disaster, there is also a strong wave of strategies towards indirect imagistic representations or textual approaches as well.

Huyssen's account is relevant because it shows how there was already a memory epidemic before 9/11. As he says about "the wholesale transformation of Manhattan into a museum" (Huyssen, 2003, p. 51) before 9/11, after the attacks, "how to commemorate the Twin Towers began to stir soon after the traumatic shock" (p. 158). Perhaps it is useful here to remind ourselves of James Wood's question about how the effect of 9/11 will play on the novel was addressed merely after 3 weeks of the events as well. Before and after the event, the compulsion towards speedy memorialization is strong among the city planners, literary writers and critics alike. "How does one imagine a monument to what was already a monument in the first place—a monument to corporate modernism?" (p. 159), is Huyssen's question in the concluding chapter of his book. As he puts, it was only an "infantile symbolism" (p. 160) that the terrorist thought they could attack global capitalism by attacking the towers. "No single and not even a twin corporate tower could ever represent the nature of global capital, nor could its destruction equal the collapse of capital" (p. 160), Huyssen says, hinting at the failure of any monumental representation to have the power to fully represent the event or the concept. All monuments work towards the erasure of the events, putting too much faith in their might is an immature trust in our commemorative efforts, as well as an ungrounded reliance towards representation of history in designated spaces.

In one of his reveries, Julius walks from Wall Street to Broadway, on the conjunction of which stands Trinity Church. Much like Lianne in *Falling Man*, he is under the influence of an “unpremeditated idea” that he might go inside and pray for M., who is one of his patients that suffer under an episode of delirium. This is a strange, uncharacteristic move for the narrator who is not a spiritual person and whose religious beliefs we never get to learn about. But again, much like Lianne, he falls under the spell of the aura of the space which connotes faith and obedience in times of suffering. His patient is a man who feels the burden of the world on his shoulders. Despite not thinking that he is God; he feels responsible for the world, which is a god-like suffering that people either find amusing or fail to understand. In short, he is quite the opposite of Julius who refuses to take responsibility on himself, not for the state of the world, for the climate change, or for his past. Hence, Julius’s finding himself at the gates of the church with a need to pray for M. is an interesting occasion for showing how, albeit unconsciously, he takes ethical steps, quite literally, to show sympathy to a sufferer without a hint of cynicism or dismissal.

Although he cannot find the entrance to the church and pray there, the narrator delivers a Sebaldian probe in this space that is full of graves, headstones, and monuments. From the monument of Alexander Hamilton’s resting place to the large number of women and children’s graves who ventured the journey from Europe to Hudson; this place symbolizes death and new beginnings. Foucault (1984) counts the cemetery as an example of a heterotopia, saying that it is “capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (*OC*, p. 25). Keeping with the theme of Sebaldian juxtapositions of history and space, the narrator connects Trinity Church with its seventeenth century

past, when the seafarers and whalers would pray for a safe journey at sea or would give thanks for a successful return home in the church.

The story of the whale of Berckhey, which was beached in 1598, is crucial. This whale, The Hague, at the time, was memorialized in engravings, sold and displayed as a commodity and scientific object of curiosity. Of course, symbolic readings of this death were circulated as well, as “a link between this dying monster and the atrocities committed by the hated Spanish troops” (*OC*, p. 51) was established in the popular imagination. Two hundred years later, Herman Melville, who underhandedly introduced by Julius here as “the author, a sometime parishioner of the Trinity Church” (p. 51), takes inspiration from this dead Leviathan to write his magnum opus. Curiously, though, Julius points out to the book’s original title, which was *The Whale*, to which after the first publication, was added the subtitle, *Moby-Dick*. Assuredly, this rendition of the title, too, is different from the now-canonized, more familiar title *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* (1851); and the narrative employed here urges the reader to consider the implications. As Julius takes a meandering history of the church, his discourse starts from the monument of a Founding Father (which reads, with great fervor: “THE PATRIOT OF INCORRUPTIBLE INTEGRITY, THE SOLDIER OF APPROVED VALOR, THE STATESMAN OF CONSUMMATE WISDOM, WHOSE TALENTS AND VIRTUES WILL BE ADMIRABLE” p. 49), culminates into the story of a great creature whose symbolic importance was so great for the people that, two hundred years later, it was an inspiration for arguably *the* great American novel. The violent history of colonialization of North America, from the Dutch to the Spanish settlers, holds many atrocities and personal tragedies, and it finds its resting place in literature, as a space

to symbolically commemorate the past, much like graveyards, monuments, and churches.

Although Julius is inclined to expose past atrocities, disasters, and suffering; he is also selective in his tangents with regard to space. When he is walking in the area, he sees a great empty space. He does not proceed to naming the history of that particular emptiness, saying, “I immediately thought of the obvious but, quickly, put the idea out of my mind” (*OC*, p. 52). Why he opts out of naming the empty space as where The Twin Towers stood before 9/11 is most suspect. Perhaps he is reluctant to acknowledge the recent catastrophe because he finds it too “obvious”; but then again, his compulsion to quickly put the idea out of his mind implies he is drawn to the event unconsciously, however much he tries to disregard it. It is only after he passes across the highway that he can re-view the obvious directly, in a literal sense. Putting some space between himself and the empty space, he now “see[s] and admit[s]” (p. 52) that the empty space is indeed the obvious: the ruins of the World Trade Center. National September 11 Memorial Museum has not yet been opened in the narrative, nor in the publishing, time of the novel. Nevertheless, Julius’ description of the empty space of the Ground Zero can still apply to the Memorial’s current design as it involves a theme of reflecting absence. Goodall and Lee (2015) argue that the memorial with its design to “capture the unutterability of loss in [Arad’s, the architect] designation of the memorials as ‘voids,’ 9/11 Memorial “mimics” the “void of melancholia on a national scale” (p. 132).

Julius continues:

“The place had become a metonym of its disaster: I remembered a tourist who once asked me how he could get to 9/11: not the site of the events of 9/11 but to 9/11 itself, the date petrified into broken stones. I moved closer. It was walled in with wood and chain link, but otherwise nothing announced its significance.” (p. 52)

The impact of the disaster disturbs the signification flow: instead of part referring to whole, and vice versa, the destruction of the whole becomes the main signifier of the place in the literal absence of the former. What should be the associative or the signifier turns into the signified itself. The terrorist attack not only destroys the towers and transforms the space, but it also undermines the traces of what once stood there, by fixing it at a precise time in history, as history. In other words, the event totally subsumes the place and reality, or the physicality of space, at least in the eyes of the tourist who, unlike the natives, do not have much time to practice the space and appreciate its palimpsestic forms.²

However, it should also be noted that metonymy, as Julius describes the first relation of the part (disaster as part of the space's history, merely giving it a different configuration) to the whole, is a different *trópos* than the latter example of the date turning into broken stones which, there being not a contiguous relationship between the two, is a metaphor. The date metaphorically petrifies into broken stones, but the synecdochical relation between the broken stones and the demolished buildings goes unnoticed. In a Jakobsonian sense (Jakobson, 1956), Julius describes the site as a realistic prose writer would, with metonymy, whereas the tourist's attitude, much to Julius's chagrin, ingratiatory of a poet who has a taste for metaphorical selections.

The different sensibilities regarding selective and combinatory choices can further be tied to the speaker's adherence to reality and their search for larger-than-reality experiences. In *What is Philosophy*, Deleuze and Guattari (1991) argue that the monument does not "actualize the virtual event but it incorporates or embodies it" by giving it "a body, a life, a universe" (p. 177). Following Proust who defines art-monument by "that life higher than the 'lived,'" they approach the monument by

² Then again, for the New Yorkers, trauma too is a force that makes reality unintelligible and secondary, which is a point that I will return to later in the paper

its “universes” which are neither virtual nor actual but are possibles (p. 178).

Borrowing this quote on art-monument, I do not necessarily aim to pursue a reading of the 9/11 monument as art, nor certainly 9/11 as “the greatest work of art that is possible in the whole cosmos” (Stockhausen ‘documentation’), but instead, I would like to recall aesthetics as a category that refers to perception. Although Julius does not show signs of a similar desire, the tourist of the above quote certainly yearns for a Proustian aesthetic experience through the site of 9/11; he truly wishes, or even expects the space to give him an access to a universe of possibilities whereby he can experience not the event but a good approximation of it, virtually. “There is no there, there” (Stein, 2004) at the site of 9/11, but there is a possible then to be experienced.

CHAPTER 3

THE FUGUE CITY

I would like to draw from the psychological literature to approach a particular kind of memory-failing in the novels. Dissociative state or fugue state is defined by Howell and Itzkowitz (2016) as “processes function to prevent the person from knowing the past, i.e., to obstruct knowledge of the past and to prevent it from breaking into consciousness and threatening to overwhelm the damaged, fragmented self and its tenuous hold on reality” (p. 16). The staggering effect of trauma leads the individual to a dissociative episode where they do not have access to either present or past stimuli. Disassociation “arrests the unutterable horrible feeling of going insane, the feeling that the world makes no sense and that one’s mind has no continuity or expectable form” (p. 20).

According to David Spiegel (1990), “trauma can be understood as the experience of being made into an object; the victim of someone else’s rage, of nature’s indifference, or of one’s own physical and psychological limitations” (p. 251), which may lead to a fragmented sense of self. Dissociation is the result of trauma, which refers to unassimilable events (Howell, 2005, p. vii). There are similarities between disassociation and repression as the latter “enables a person to live with less interference from unacceptable impulses and desires as well as from extremely upsetting and unpleasant memories” (Bromberg, 2006, p. 112). Similarly, dissociation refers to those gaps in memory, knowledge, and emotions that we don’t know that we don’t know—experience that was too overwhelming to be assimilated” (Howell and Itzkowitz, 2016, p. 38).

3.1 Memory: Calamitous and fugitive

“One does not write with one’s neuroses. Neuroses or psychoses are not passage of life but states into which we fall when the process is interrupted, blocked, or plugged up. Illness is not a process but a stopping of the process, as in the ‘Nietzsche case.’”
— Deleuze, *“Literature and Life,”* p. 228

Falling Man is the one book that deals with 9/11 directly, taking place in the immediate aftermath of the events. As such, its handling of trauma and its effect on the subject is the core of the narrative. Keith, the husband, is the survivor of the falling towers; throughout the novel, he wrestles against bodily and emotional trauma brought by his witnessing of the event. Lianne, the wife, on the other hand, is the carrier of an indirect trauma; she is the one who tries to not only overcome the event, but also understand it as well. Reunited with her husband under the dire circumstances of 9/11, she is the one who undertakes the work of making sense and rehabilitation. Lianne, more than anything, is a reader and an editor. The parts involving her, and the Alzheimer group, are central to understand how the novel deals with memory and its utter vulnerability against the passing of time, outside traumatic events, and basic human languish.

Memory and language are deeply interlinked in the novel, and they are connected to the subjectivity on a fundamental level. Correspondingly, how one performs their personhood in speech or in writing is a great indicator of the state they are in. Of course, there is a space for an allegorical reading of all these kinds of memory-failing in the novel, due to trauma, illness, or pharmaceutical suppressants. In one way, we can read the Alzheimer group as Americans after 9/11, shattered to the core, not knowing their space in the world or how they are to continue with their

lives. After all, Alzheimer is a disease that first characterizes itself in the patients as a failure to register new memories, repeating and reminiscent of the past experiences. It is also a condition that makes the subject disoriented as to their surroundings. New Yorkers being alienated from their city and its physical geography; and American citizens not being able to let go of their status as the world leader before 9/11, or as land of freedom after the much controversial invasion of Iraq, play well with this framework. We can indeed approach illness as a metaphor, pace Susan Sontag (1978), that “onerous citizenship” (p. 3), which is often connected to “stereotypes of national character.” Or, we can be more generous and resist the allegorizing impulse, realizing that whereas Lianne becomes more engaged with her Alzheimer patients after 9/11, her interest does not start with the event but much before, when she and Keith slowly become estranged from each other.

After their separation, Keith dedicates his free time to poker, while Lianne begins to attend weekly storyline sessions with a group of early-stage Alzheimer patients. As her father before his death by suicide himself was diagnosed with Alzheimer, Lianne is personally afflicted by the disease which, statistically speaking, could be in her future as well. In her volunteer work with the patients, she and the group discuss everyday events and their lives which often involve writing about their past experiences, as well as their on-going struggle against their deteriorating cognitive fitness. Due to her personal history with the disease, she is very attentive to how the patients show the “first signs of hating response” (*FM*, p. 30), their failings to express themselves is a sign for her to see “a mind beginning to slide away from the adhesive friction that makes an individual possible.” Of course, what makes an individual possible is the language, “the lost word at the end of a struggling

sentence,” or the inverted letters on a piece of paper are the measure of an individual command of a self that is slipping away from themselves.

In a seemingly Derridean move, Lianne and the novel see a more intimate connection between the self and writing than speech as they put writing at the center of this particular crisis of memory. In Plato’s (1952) *Phaedrus*, Socrates gives an account of the great king of Egypt, Thamus, who opposes writing by saying, “If men learn [writing], it will implant forgetfulness in their souls; they will cease to exercise memory because they rely on that which is written, calling things to remembrance no longer from within themselves, but by means of external marks” (274c-275b).

However, the Alzheimer patients of the novel resort to writing precisely to preserve what is still in their memory. Opposite to writing inducing forgetfulness, the novel presents memory loss as an impetus to writing itself. Writing enables them to show what is within themselves and the very process of writing is a means to counter forgetfulness. Performing oneself in writing is a more direct sign of a person behind, because “the act of writing allows” to “encounter the crossing points of insight and memory.” As the patients “work into themselves,” they find narratives “that rolled and tumbled,” seemingly free falling from their mind. As writing is depicted as an act of “working into” oneself, the laborious nature of writing is acknowledged, along with the ease in which the narratives fall free from this work of probing into oneself. However, written narratives are often more assertive than spoken ones, as the labor of writing inherently including some degree of composure. Thus, Lianne’s interest in writing is understandable, but her optimism towards the writer-subject is often superfluous.

Memory resides in language. Lianne associates his father’s death by suicide with the words “muzzle blast” (*FM*, p. 41) throughout the years. To her, the news of

her father's death seems to "ride on the arc of those two words" (p. 41). The arc of these two words combined connotes an electrical bridge where two poles of a plate create a spark when they come in proximity, much similar to a muzzle blast or a lightning. Or, if take "arc" as an astronomical term, we find ourselves in a constellation of words that follow curved or circular lines where their meaning follows a rather discernible path, but as they are in motion, their current is not stable and unwavering. Writing on memory, and of memories, invites a consideration of style as well.

Rosellen describes the episode of her forgetting in "a run-on convergence," where the connection between "clean physical detail and dreamy reminiscence" (FM, p. 30) does not follow an apparent path. The elliptical, meandering nature of her narration resembles the narrator of *Open City* as well which is an important trace to keep in mind. As the people in the Alzheimer group function both as authors and readers, Lianne has a literary approach to their session. She suggests that people sign their written assignments with their first name and first letter of last name. Lianne admits that this choice "maybe a little affected" (p. 30) because as the reader of these accounts, she is not oblivious to the fact that this style of reference causes the patients to resemble characters in European novels. Moreover, as the group has people from diverse backgrounds in terms of ethnicity, their writing in lingua franca is embellished by words of their mother tongue. These polyglot writers produce cosmopolitan texts that borrow from different cultures and histories on the brink of losing their linguistic abilities. Majority of them being from the same neighborhood, the multilinguistic and cultural diversity of NYC is foregrounded in these sessions, their impending memory loss hinting at a mournful future to come.

Derrida (1995) in *Archive Fever* says that “the archive takes place at the place of originality and structural breakdown of the said memory” (p. 11). As Jonathan Boulter (2011) puts, according to Derrida, the archive marks “a space for anxiety, an anxiety about the possibility of loss” (Jonathan Boulter, 2011, p. 4). As such, archive is always in anticipation of a future where the loss is to come into being. Lianne seems to have caught the Derridean archive fever where she struggles to catalogue the fading memories of her support group in writing in anticipation of their impending loss. However, Lianne’s undertakings as a reader and archivist are most feeble. Pierre Nora (1989) points to the futility of archival impulse in his *Between Memory and History* by saying “Archivez, archivez, il en restera toujours quelque chose!” (p. 14), which Paul Ricoeur (2004) translates as “Archive as much as you like: something will always be left out” (p. 403). Lianne’s efforts to put the memories of Alzheimer patients in record is a losing game as somethings will always remain left out and their significance or triviality will not be determined by the archivist’s astute editorial gaze.

Although approaching the prominent place the Alzheimer patients occupy in the novel as a full allegory is not a sustainable strategy, DeLillo nevertheless often fiddles with the similarities to entertain the possible allegorical readings. Analogy between the Alzheimer patients and the state of the public is introduced when Lianne is warned by Doctor Apter to keep her expectations low regarding the recollective abilities of her group: “From this point on, you understand, it’s all about loss. We’re dealing inevitably here with diminishing returns. Their situation will grow increasingly delicate” (*FM*, p. 60). Similarly, there is a connection between Lianne as the reader and DeLillo as the writer:

“You don’t want them to feel there’s an urgency to write everything, say everything before it’s too late. You want them to look forward to this, not feel pressed or threatened. The writing is sweet music up to a point. Then other things will take over [...] What I’m saying is simple. This is for them. Don’t make it yours” (p. 60).

This is the last cautionary statement by the doctor which works both for the patients and American citizens. From now on, their memory of the event will be less than what it was before. Also, a warning for the novelists and artists who take the catastrophe as their topic in their art. Attending to the survivors of a catastrophe in life or in writing should not be a claim on the catastrophic experience, if writing or communicating the traumatic experience is to be therapeutic, the survivor must decide the direction and duration of the exchange.

“It happened to Rosellen S., an elemental fear out of deepest childhood. She could not remember where she lived. [...] The world was receding, the simplest recognitions. She began to lose her sense of clarity, of distinctness. She was not lost so much as falling, growing fainter. Nothing lay around her but silence and distance” (*FM*, pp. 93-4), is the introduction of the rapidly worsening condition of Rosellen, one of the Alzheimer patients of Lianne’s writing group. “It happened to her” is an intriguing lede for a sentence. Not only is the beginning phrase an unusual structure for the novel which usually does not employ inverted sentences; the form of the beginning segment stops the reader dead in their reading tracks in suspense of the content to be disclosed. Moreover, the “it” of happening repeatedly always refers to 9/11 in the novel; “where were you when it happened?” (p. 126) is a question that is recast again and again as the characters try to connect with others by contextualizing them in the instance when the towers were hit (“I walked to Brooklyn when it happened.” (p. 25); “They wrote about the planes. They wrote about where they were when it happened.” (p. 60); “People said where you were when it happened” (p. 78).

Hence, the reader thwarted when they find out that “it happened to Rosellen” refers not to what they conditioned to expect. Assuredly, however, the similar form of phrasing invites the reader to think what happens to Rosellen in analogous terms of what happens to the New Yorkers with the event. As she loses the ability to locate herself in her environment and forgets about where she lives, she undergoes the same dissociative episode Keith endures while he is making his way out of the North Tower. “It happened everywhere around him” (p. 3) was on the first pages of the novel where we were thrown into the chaos of the catastrophe. “Things were distant and still, where he was supposed to be.” (p. 3) is the way Keith feels on the street.

Similarly, Rosellen too feels “separated from everything.” Both at the moment of the traumatic event and the instance where the disease takes hold of the subject, all of a sudden, reality becomes something different and distant. Both Keith and Rosellen try to look at their surroundings to make sense of the reality around, but the usual sights of a city street, with its storefronts and street signs, do not help to reorient themselves. Keith finds himself in the uncanny world of “otherworldly things” (*FM*, p. 3), whereas for Rosellen, the world seems to be “receding” away from her, along with recognitive abilities that enable one separate herself from the outside reality. Unable to reenforce her distinctness, she both loses clarity qua her environment, as well as the world with its sounds (“nothing lay around her but silence and distance” on p. 94) and accessibility to her cognition.

3.2 Memory: Suppressed, oppressing, and imagined

*[...] To die, to sleep —
To sleep, perchance to dream. Ay, there's the rub,
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause.
— Shakespeare, Hamlet, III.i.72-76*

“I can’t point to any one event that resulted in my decision to go into hibernation. Initially, I just wanted some downers to drown out my thoughts and judgments, since the constant barrage made it hard not to hate everyone and everything,” (p. 11) is the justification the unnamed protagonist gives for her decision to sleep through several months. As she finds the source of her misery and suffering in her brain that constantly condemns the world around her, she seeks an escape from the prison of her mind and body (*MYRR*, p.11). Despite her scorn and undervaluing of the traumatic nature of the past few years, her clinging to sleep as a refuge come across also as the result of her unacknowledged grieving, as she mentions losing her already-estranged parents in the span of a few months in passing.

Decidedly against displaying any pathos towards her orphaned and lonely existence, she takes on the role of the “somniac” or a “somniafile” (*MYRR*, p. 30) who chooses to sleep just because she likes it. “Nothing else could ever bring me such pleasure, such freedom, the power to feel and move and think and imagine, safe from the miseries of my waking consciousness,” (p. 30) the narrator says as she trades waking life in for a creative and eventful escape to sleep. If *Falling Man* and *Open City* have expert and conscientious city-walkers as protagonists, *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* has a connoisseur of sleep who sleeps her way into a more fulfilling life.

During this time of hibernation, the protagonist almost achieves a Tabula rasa stage. Deprived of any other reading material in her empty apartment, the protagonist is drawn towards reading shampoo labels, fixating, and sticking on the words such as “sodium lauryl sulfate” (*MYRR*, p. 173). Reading each word brings up other words by association: from “Lauryl” she goes onto Shakespeare, Ophelia, Millais, pain,

stained glass, rectory, butt plug, feelings; the word “sulfate” is followed by satan, acid, lyme, dunes. In this game of association, words point to other words which may or may not eventually lead to autobiographical significations. However, in this episode, words do not bring up any memories; they only intimate other words. Association is the driving engine of the game, but words do not get associated with recollection. In this game, words have their own constellation whose paths may be more heavily treaded on and therefore more easily recognized by the subject due to her real-life experiences. But the associative force of the words stays on the plane of language, not leading the protagonist onto painful memories of the past.

Much like Julius in *Open City*, who thinks that his city-walks enable him a creative freedom and contribute to an “aimless progress,” (*MYRR*, p. 7) Moshfegh’s protagonist too thinks she gains access to freedom through her wandering sleep. She thinks that sleep feels “productive” and that “[s]omething [is] getting sorted out” (p. 33) in her sleeps. Leaving the task of sorting out or disentanglement to her unconscious state, the narrator hopes for a rejuvenation where she can start her life anew after her hibernation period. She aims to jumpstart a process of willful forgetting of her past life, accumulating bliss and serenity during her break (p. 33).

However, sleep does not bring much refuge from painful memories and persistent thoughts. As she cannot bring herself to acknowledge the effect of losing her parents has on her, traumatic impact of loss and grief resurfaces in her sleep in the form of not only wakeful realizations, but also in dreams. She admits to herself saying, “Sleep had not yet resolved my crankiness, my impatience, my memory” (p. 64). “The tragedy” of her past revisits her in sleep and in waking hours with great force, the unacknowledged trauma resurfacing at each turn. Her hibernation is aim at

gaining immunity against the painful memories of her past, but it has a strange effect of making her confront the past in her most vulnerable state.

The paradoxical effect of sleep is that it connects her not only to her undervalued trauma; it also makes her react in ways that lean towards ethical engagement and sympathy. In her fugue state when she is under the influence of pharmaceuticals, the protagonist uncharacteristically sidles near Reva. “I was in the fog by then, eyes open just a crack. [...] I felt myself float up and away, higher and higher into the ether until my body was just an anecdote, a symbol, a portrait hanging in another world. I love you Reva. I heard myself say from far away. I am really sorry about your mom. Then I was gone” (p. 114), she says. The protagonist’s planning away from her bodily consciousness is a fugue episode. She flies away from being in control of her motions and emotions under the fog of suppressants; her body becoming an anecdote (a short narrative of little significance), a symbol (presentation of something and representation of something else at once), or a portrait (an anesthetized stillness, that can be appropriated and interpreted in different contexts). Her declaration of love to Reva, her only friend whom she often despises of, is an uncharacteristically pathetic episode as it displays a pathos of human compassion and sympathetic companionship of a fellow person’s suffering.

At this point, turning back to Freud and Lacan’s burning child and his father may prove helpful. Much like Freud’s (1900), and Lacan’s (1973, Seminar XI) analysis of the burning child and the father, it is sleeping and dreaming itself that facilitates the narrator’s awakening. As Caruth (1991) puts, Lacan in “The Unconscious and Repetition” seems to argue that dreaming is “a paradoxical attempt to respond, in awakening, to a call that can only be heard within sleep” (p. 99). According to Lacan, “the dream itself is the site of a trauma, the trauma of the

necessity and impossibility of responding to another's death" (p. 100). As such, the story of the father and the burning child displays the impossibility of relation and responsibility "of consciousness in its own originating relation to others, and specifically to the deaths of others" (p. 104). Then, retelling of the story itself is another responsibility of the father, who having failed to save his son must tell the story of his burning in order to survive the event.

In the interpretation of the dream of the father who sees his child burning in his sleep only to find out he in fact is burnt to his death is treated by the psychoanalysts as a case where an ethical call can only be heard in sleep, but cannot be reacted in life, paradoxically. It is the dream itself that awakens the sleeper, becoming a function of awakening (Caruth, p. 99). As Caruth puts, "Lacan seems to suggest, a paradoxical attempt to respond, in awakening, to a call that can only be heard within sleep" (p. 99). In the protagonist's case, it is only when she is under and not fully conscious can she make an effort to engage with the others. As in the case of her finding herself having visited thrift shops after her awakening, here too she can only show compassion to Reva after she takes psychiatric suppressants. In her weakening state or in her dreams of the death parents, going under in her hibernation period is truly an awakening to an outside reality where there are people with sorrowful existences that deserve recognition and sympathy. When the ending of the novel and its culmination in the death of Reva in the Towers is considered, her long period of sleeping and avoiding reality prepares her to work through past and future trauma, things does indeed get sorted out in her dreams. As with the story of the father of the burning child, the responsibility that falls on the protagonist is to survive the event and narrate the story of the dead whose dying cannot be prevented but can only be retold by the survivor. The death of the other (Reva or her parents) is

impossible to relate to, no one can experience death and tell of their experience; but their dying, as much as it is a traumatic blow on the individual's psyche, is also a call for their to realize their own survival, no matter how cryptic it is.

As the protagonist has an ungrounded belief in the indirect treatment of a traumatic past with its painful memories, she is also very skeptical towards other people's memories and their truth-value. When she and Reva is driving back from the funeral, Reva is gripped by a fear of earthquakes as they are crossing the Manhattan Bridge. The protagonist is quick to discard Reva's anxiety by saying that they do not get earthquakes in New York. However, Reva remembers the bridge collapse in San Francisco in 1989, when Loma Pieta earthquake hit. She says she "totally remembers it," "thousands of people died" (*MYRR*, p. 110). The protagonist disparages this account of thousands' dying in the event, reckoning it was maybe "a few hundreds, max." In reality, Loma Prieta earthquake killed 63 people in total, only 42 of them was due to the collapse of the bridge. Both Reva and the protagonist fail to estimate the numerical outcome of the disaster, even the cynical protagonist overestimates the casualties. Of course, the catastrophic events do not arrest the imagination due to their magnitude or the number of people affected by them. Their influence is not on a quantifiable basis, their awful impact is precisely what cannot be contained in a numerical analysis. 9/11 as a destructive event has this dimension as well, the number of people who died in the attacks does not render it a catastrophe. For example, one of the journalistic tropes of the recent pandemic has been reports indicating how many 9/11s take place each day as lives are lost to COVID-19. 9/11 and the San Francisco bridge collapse are catastrophes because they present impossible, unimaginable new experiences of witnessing and death.

The dramatic irony and foreshadowing of September 11 in this scene continues when Reva assures the protagonist that she remembers the earthquake very vividly as she was watching it on TV with her father. With the advent of new technologies of broadcasting and mass-circulation of news-worthy events, catastrophes become a part of a memory yardstick for the individuals, the ease with which people can point out where they were at the time of the event being a common phenomenon. As it has been pointed out before, “where were you when the Towers were hit” is a common parlance, a conversation starter for the people after 9/11. As years pass, having or lacking the memories of the event become a tool to identify the age of people, as ignorance of the event is unthinkable when the experiencing of the catastrophe indirectly through the media is one of the formative experience of individuals.

Reva too is very sure of her memory of the event and her abilities to veraciously register and preserve the details of it. Most importantly she puts a great trust on the news outlets and their cover of the events, not thinking sensationalism and macabre accounts are preferable to dry retellings of the events and their objective outcomes. She says that she remembers an interview with a survivor who says “when I got out of my car, there was a brain jiggling on the ground. A whole brain, jiggling like a Jell-O mold” (p. 111). Reva says, “isn’t it horrific?” to which the protagonist dismissively responds that brain juggling like Jell-O sounds made up. According to her, people die all the time and that particularly cadaverous account of the disaster is not plausible. Although Reva does not say that that (popping brains, etc.) could happen “here,” she says that things always could get worse, another hint at the impending catastrophe. Majority of Moshfegh’s narrative, save from the very last page, does not deal with 9/11 and its specific gruesome details, but, as can be seen

here, the horrific is always evoked despite the protestations of the protagonist who thinks such things do not take place in NYC, or in anywhere. TV presented as the catalyzer of such memories of catastrophe, the link between the visual event and its graft in the memory is established. Although the detail of remembering is contested, as they are deemed false, the forbidding nature of the awful event is acknowledged and portrayed as transcending the falsifiable or verifiable trivia.

3.3 Memory: Discarded and repressed

“[...] as he has been on the point of forgetting everything, he remembers and passionately wants to remember everything.”
—Baudelaire, *Painter of the Modern Life*

The protagonist of *Open City*, Julius is a curious case of unreliable narrator. As a psychiatrist and a flaneur, he is capable of making piercing analysis into the minds of his patients and the city-dwellers he encounters in all walks of life. However, he also displays magnificent failures of memory due to the repression of a sexually violent incident in his youth (rape, to be exact), as well as due to dissociative episodes brought by the unassimilable nature of the repressed event, leaking into his everyday life. “We experience life as a continuity, and only after it falls away, after it becomes the past, do we see its discontinuities. The past, if there is such a thing, is mostly empty space, great expanses of nothing, in which significant persons and events float” (*OC*, p. 155), is the way Julius admits the past is opaque to the individual. This insight, however, does not quite make him less prone to manipulate the past to his liking.

Freud (1989) in his *The Ego and the Id* introduces ego-instincts which “combine the functions of repression with those of self-preservation” (p. xxxiv).

“The repressed is the prototype of the unconscious for us. We see, however, that we have two kinds of unconscious—the one which is latent but capable of becoming conscious, and the one which is repressed, and which is not, in itself and without more ado, capable of becoming conscious” (p. 5). In this understanding, repression and oppression are two different coping mechanisms the individuals resort to as they navigate their ego-ideals, actual egos and self-preservational instincts. Whereas oppression is a conscious effort to survive an undesirable episode, like in *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*, repression is an unconscious mechanism where the survivor does not know what he represses. “Repression enables a person to live with less interference from unacceptable impulses and desires as well as from extremely upsetting and unpleasant memories,” Bromberg (2006) argues. Just as memories, inadmissible desires too can be repressed as the subject tries to continue living. Julius encounters a past figure from his time in Nigeria when he is in the States. Moji Kasali whose brother Julius was friends with, reenters Julius’s life to make him confront what he has forgotten. Although she remembers him very clearly, Julius denies any knowledge of the woman for a while, her name seemingly does not bring any memories. Being a collector of narratives of the past, the narrative of his own in the revelation of rape is hard to accept for Julius who says:

“And so, what does it mean when, in someone else’s version, I am the villain? I am only too familiar with bad stories—badly imagined, or badly told—because I hear them frequently from patients. I know the tells of those who blame others, those who are unable to see that they themselves, and not the others, are the common thread in all their bad relationships. There are characteristic tics that reveal the essential falsehood of such narratives. But what Moji had said to me that morning, before I left John’s place, and gone up on the George Washington Bridge, and walked the few miles back home, had nothing in common with such stories. She had said it as if, with all of her being, she was certain of its accuracy.”
(pp. 243-4)

Julius has a literary approach to the revelation. Analyzing personal accounts as narratives, he is a skeptical of people's retelling of their past. Thinking in terms of heroes and villains, Julius displays a simplistic approach to stories. He is most keen to judge the stories based on their narrative (badly imagined) and narration (badly told); as if they are relevant to the truth claims the stories convey. Unlike his patients, though, Julius cannot pick up on characteristic tics that Moji's narration betrays.

Much to his surprise, and possibly displeasure, Moji does not resort to highly emotionalized rhetoric of Julius's lying patients who are out to put the blame on others. Muji narrates the event in a dry fashion, not seeking to validate her story through pathos. Again, Muji's rhetorical style should not matter when the gravity of her accusation is considered, but it does to Julius who would feel vindicated if the rape accusation betrayed a distasteful and untrustable sentimentality. Still, he is not quiet convince of the veracity of the accusation as he points out Muji narrates the event of the night "as if" she is certain of its accuracy. If anything, Julius is impressed by the immaculate performance of her narration, which does indeed seem like a genuine one. After Muji stops talking, Julius actually fear that she might start crying; to his "relief" (p. 246), however, she does not.

Julius is forced to go through a symbolic death after the revelation of the rape. The accusation threatens to destroy his sense of himself. He is offered "an image of a subject who becomes his own lost object, a subject who is made to become his unconscious, to inhabit his unconscious (to be inhabited by his unconscious)" (Boulter, 2011, p. 68). Believing the story would mean a symbolic death for the narrator. But Julius refuses to acknowledge the event; not once referring to it after his night with Muji. His only connection to the story is an indirect one. After leaving Muji, he immediately is reminded of Camus's retelling of a Nietzsche

anecdote in his journals. In Camus's retelling, Nietzsche gets enraged when his schoolmates do not believe in the story of a Roman hero, Gaius Mucius Cordus Scaevola, who puts his hand in fire rather than giving up the name of his co-assassins. When his friends do not believe in the story of the courageous Gaius, Nietzsche himself puts his hand in the fire, and he carries the scar for the rest of his life. After he checks to validate the story, Julius finds out that Nietzsche did not indeed put his hand in fire, he only lit several matchsticks at the center of his palm.

Moreover, a school prefect intervened the event and knocked Nietzsche down before he could really hurt himself. The time this story is brought to Julius's mind is strange. Why does he look for literary accounts (Camus) of alleged accounts (Nietzsche) of the stories of antiquity (Gaius) when he is accused of rape? Why does he make sure to validate the story of retelling of a retelling? One way to understand the Nietzsche story is to see how believing in such stories of enormous emotional toil is to symbolically burn yourself and carrying the scar for it (absolute sympathy and identification with the other). Or, if we are to pay more attention to the revised story, the receiver of such accounts must be cognizant of the many polishing efforts of the narrators as they seek to raise our emotional engagement with the story. The details may vary, but the fact remains that Nietzsche was indeed ready to burn himself to make his interlocutors believe in Gaius' story. What is the position Julius in bringing up these accounts on top of Muji's? I think Julius turns to the literary as an escape from acknowledging the accuracy of the accusation. Throwing reference, after reference; he undermines the significance of unique stories in a sea of competing narratives. Returning to Derrida's treatment of Baudelaire's "The Counterfeit Money" that foregrounds the radical openness of the literary, Julius too resorts to the literary secret which does not yield definitive answers. Surely, it is better to approach

Muji's story as any other story that implies but does not prove a certain meaning or truth-claim.

Apart from his repressive episodes, Julius enters a fugue state upon waking in Belgium. Not remembering who he is and where he is, the narrator is suddenly gripped by a deep terror. In this episode, he tries to come up with a narrative that would explain why he is alone in bed; he entertains the idea that his partner might be someplace else. The real narrative of his life slowly comes back to him; he remembers that he has no partner and that he is now in Belgium on a trip. The novel's inclusion of this terrifying incident of what Blanchot calls subjectivity without the subject is most terrifying. Following the thoughts of one man throughout the many pages of the book, accepting him to be our guide as we make way into the city; the narrative suddenly pulls the rug from our feet when the narrator's flimsy grip on his own reality is laid bare. Of course, Blanchot's peculiar subject is because he has endured the impossible temporality of the disaster. Traumatized by the events that he cannot register, the subject without subjectivity "forever remains at the limits of thought" (Boulter, 2011, p. 11). What is Julius's disaster, or why he is traumatized is not immediately foreclosed to the reader, but his fugue state is a beacon for the reader to suspect some event that causes this condition.

A similar case of fugue state occurs when he forgets his ATM code for his credit card. He has a pathological tendency to forget as when he calls his accountant just before leaving his house to ask what should bring to their meeting, he stills manages to forget his checkbook despite calling the accountant merely seconds ago. To pay him, Julius makes a stop at the cash machine, but he fails to remember his four-digit code for his card, despite using it frequently. He tries five times and fails at each time. He says:

“I wasn’t alarmed—which I would have been if I had thought the card was compromised—but rather, sad: I had simply forgotten the number. A thought fitted through my mind: how terrible it would be to blank out like this while seeing a patient. This was the ATM card I had used for more than six years, and it had always had the same code” (p. 161).

He does not put importance to this alarming incident of forgetting, he only fears how he would be humiliated if his patents were to witness that. The forgotten pin code is not just a trivial everyday failing. When he stands in front of the ATM, his mind is “empty, subject to a nervous condition” (*OC*, p. 161). Strangely, he compares himself to a minor character in a Jane Austen novel as his sudden mental weakness has a dramatic quality that resembles a humoristic literary text. Again, the literary is a refuge from the dire reality of his life which would require much conscious investigation of the reason why he is prone to having dissociative episodes.

Continuing, Julius says “I was awed by this unsuspected area of fragility within myself. It was an insignificant portent of age, the kind I tended to smile at in others, the kind I took as a mark of vanity” (*OC*, p. 162). He deems this episode as a scene of frailty, referring to basic human weakness as the reason for his condition. However, he is only 31 years old at the time of the event, and hence, rather too young to forget such easy information. After leaving the pharmacy that houses the cash machine, he immediately forgets about his forgetting of the code. His is an unbothered meta-forgetting, much opposite to Moshfegh’s narrator who fails to forget even though she tries too hard to not remember. Comedically, in this very scene, he goes on another Sebaldian tangent, describing the ties the City Bank of New York has to profiting from slavery (p. 163). Personally, he forgets and is willing to forget much about his life; on an impersonal level, however, he is an astute chronicler of any and all histories that is not directly linked to his own existence.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have aimed to offer a comparative of three contemporary novels that deal with the catastrophe of September 11. Taking place before, during, and after the event, Moshfegh's *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*, DeLillo's *Falling Man*, and Cole's *Open City* offer different approaches to the theme of the city as it is affected by the catastrophe. Drawing from a rich literature on trauma, memory and space studies; I have reviewed how the city novel reacts to the changes in the city of New York after 9/11. I have tried to connect the spatial approaches to the event with the theme of memory, memory-failing, and commemorative endeavors.

I argued that the novelistic representations of 9/11 show us at least two things. First, the novel form, with its omniscient, over-arching narrative, cultivates an approach to the catastrophe, where there is no strong proximity to the event and the catastrophe itself becomes the object of investigation. Thus, this cultivation implies that there are ethical and socio-political positions, above and beyond the literary domain. Thus, this thesis calls for an engagement of how novel displays, and more importantly, cultivates a sense of ethical and political position-making. This, in turn, pushes us to ask how novelistic treatments of 9/11 might contest the standard mediums of different socio-political positions.

Second, I argued that the novels make us understand the colliding forms in narrative. Per Levine (2015), who argues that "narrative form affords is a careful attention to the ways in which forms come together, and to what happens when and after they meet" (p. 19), I also proposed that the networked imagery of the city as a

collection of memories, ruins, and catastrophic traces help us see how different ways of understanding the city, and the heterogeneous ways in which this understanding figures in contemporary novels, can come together in the novelistic form. The 9/11 novels harbor this multi-perspective heterogeneity to the extent that different political and ethical questions come together, and merge or clash. The novelistic form helped us understand these over-arching collisions.

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