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# “Because There Is Something About You, in the Way You Hold a Space”

Don DeLillo’s New York in *Cosmopolis* and *Falling Man*

## Abstract

*New York City space puts forward multifold arrays of reflection on the state of the contemporary human self, in particular, of human beings in their interaction with an avantgarde, pompous, profit-oriented, world-reaching, rapid, and ephemeral space. Two post 9/11 Don DeLillo novels: Cosmopolis (2003) and Falling Man (2007) meticulously exhibit the spatial and temporal impact on urban environment and its inhabitants. The present paper scans New York’s urban space in these two novels, categorizing it into exteriors that encompass Manhattan’s streets and squares, and interiors that encompass hair salons, a ruined private flat and the destroyed Twin Towers. These spaces are scrutinized through an interdisciplinary approach that combines fiction with urban and social theory using views of Marshal Berman, Kwame Appiah, Gaston Bachelard, Michel Foucault among others. Revealing cultural divides in public spaces and a dual reality in confined spaces, the close analysis outlines aspects of DeLillo’s early 21st-century New York in which space is not detached from time in shaping an estranged self. The analysis, further, suggests that the accepted break in the flow of creativity and everyday life in the world city before and after 9/11, is, on the contrary, a continuous stream of trauma and a repeated pattern of destruction and creation.*

**Keywords:** *American Studies, Don DeLillo, 9/11, cosmopolitanism, globalization, urban theory*

New York City space is far removed from a classical view that enables landing on a definition or capturing a fixed outline of city dwellers and their surroundings. Scholars can neither take the space/place dichotomy for granted, nor can they satisfactorily reuse generic conceptions such as those found in Raymond Williams’s study of the city and the country (Williams 1975). A binary opposition that associates space, being a “physical and philosophical category,” with emptiness that evokes awe or even danger, and associates place, being a “cultural and anthropological category,” with the personal, the family, and the community, may

help initiate discussion, but it is never a categorization where answers could be found (Michelucci 2002, 1). Likewise, Williams’s labelling of the country as an abode for virtuosity, innocence and defensiveness, and the city as a domain for progress, alienation and threat puts forward useful signposts, but certainly lags behind the technological revolution that characterized the end of the 20th century and continues booming until the present moment. Studying New York space, then, requires acknowledgement of the complexity of the urban forces that constitute space in addition to acknowledgment of space’s intrinsic relation to time. In his book on ecocriticism published in 2016, Eoin Flannery presents a fair assumption in respect to an intricate environmental web that arguably parallels New York urban space. Flannery emphasizes both the inseparability of history and geography and their impact on the human being. By mapping the space/time dynamics emerging in Antonio Gramsci’s designation of history as the root of the state—or for our purposes, the metropolis—Edward Said’s postmodern perspective according to which history can only take action through a certain residue, and finally Edward Soja’s statement of the political and ideological features of space, Flannery proposes a plurality of influences on the human self in a certain environment (2016, 1; 2). By following this perspective, the present study will address the notion of space conceived of as an amalgam of geographical, historical, cultural, socioeconomic, and political factors, with the aim to unravel New York urban crises in two of Don DeLillo’s New York post 9/11 texts, *Cosmopolis* (2003) and *Falling Man* (2007).

DeLillo studies, steadily proliferating as they are, still do not lend the aspect of space the attention it is worthy of. With the author’s major focus on political disputes before and during the “age of terror,” critics conventionally study the link between the “historical condition” and “narrative lucidity” in DeLillo’s books, and when space is tackled as a subject, it usually slips under broader topics such as market or art (Boxall 2013, 25). For instance, *Cosmopolis* evokes a reference to the peculiarity of the limousine space as a mobile office that expands to, and stands for the whole world, even when the primary point of discussion is finance gurus and artists, as shown by Henry Veggian’s analysis of *Cosmopolis* and *Falling Man* (Veggian 2015, 89). Furthermore, in his study of *Cosmopolis* in *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo* (2008), that mainly addresses the destruction caused by the 9/11 attacks, Joseph Conte sporadically hints at space and juxtaposes the real space of a traditional barbershop with the virtual space of simulated global finance (Duvall 2008, 189). Also, Catherine Morley unearths a sense of space that crosses national boundaries in DeLillo’s *Underworld* (1997) as she discerns elements of epic that nod to Joyce’s *Ulysses* (Morley 2009). Joycean considerations are likewise spotted in *Cosmopolis*, being set in one day and involving an expedition across town. Among few

direct addresses of spatial dimensions in Don DeLillo is Lilla Farmasi’s treatment of space as an abstract value that impacts narrative techniques, thus stripping space from cultural or geographical connotations. Farmasi, in a cognitive approach to DeLillo’s writings, suggests that spatiality equals a “lack of movement” that slows down narrative (Farmasi 2017, 55). Physical space as a manifestation of the social and cultural life in the city, in particular New York City, is acknowledged in *Don DeLillo in Context* (2022), a quite recent study that takes into account New York’s topography, sketching the gigantic urban mesh of monuments and people across DeLillo’s oeuvre (Kavaldo 2022, 9-14). All the views stated above show that space plays a vital yet underestimated role in the intersections between cartography, culture, history, fictional themes and characters, hence the need for a prolonged analysis of space in DeLillo’s New York. The interaction between characters and their surroundings forms the basis of the discussion which summons the field of urban studies right into the core of DeLillo’s texts and lays bare the correlated strands of space, time, and self,<sup>1</sup> as enveloped in DeLillo’s fictional cityscape. The locations of the narrative events determine the structure of the current study which is thus divided into exteriors, including Manhattan’s streets and squares, and interiors, including barbershops and ruined buildings. Identifying political and ideological forces in addition to temporal and socioeconomic currents at work in the selected settings is achieved through visual observation, as if looking through a rectilinear lens that zooms onto various scenes from each of *Cosmopolis* and *Falling Man*. A rectilinear lens depicts the scenes with the least distortion possible, being faithful to hotspot meeting points that exhibit human response to external environmental influences. Furthermore, its stillness and sharpness permit a clear survey and an accurate monitoring of a complex space in motion. My argument aims to reveal that DeLillo’s New York falls short of securing an abode for its denizens. Characters at best cohabit their surroundings, for inhabiting the city is no longer a possibility; that is, they passively adapt rather than actively participate. In this process, enough is exposed of the city’s character to suggest that the so called “rupture” of everyday life and creative production before and after 9/11 is, in essence, bound to a single moment of time, the extended borders of which draw a continuous circle of destruction and creation (Moynihan 2012, 270).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The complexity of the term “self” demands some clarification. The notion of self used in this study is not driven from philosophical views; it is rather concerned with psychological approaches that broadly agree upon seeing the self as the “human capacity for *reflexive thinking*—the ability to take oneself as the object of one’s attention and thought” (Leary 2012, 6).

<sup>2</sup> In “Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* and the Age of Terror” (2011), Joseph Conte delineates a “dialectic critique” of terrorism and capitalism in DeLillo’s work, suggesting that these two systems have an analogous impact on American civilization (2011, 559). He points out that

## 1. Exteriors

DeLillo's choice to set the majority of events in both *Cosmopolis* and *Falling Man* in Manhattan, the largest New York City borough by GDP, cannot be arbitrary; the county justifies and perhaps necessitates an economic approach based on a capitalist ethos that has for centuries shaped western urban history. His early 21st-century Manhattan is different from that of the 1970s portrayed in *Great Jones Street* (1973) that follows an artist's pursuit of solitude and inner peace. A street that is “a time of prayerful fatigue” in a city that is “a contaminated shrine” involves a sense of detachment ensuing a figurative division between the spatial environment and the population (DeLillo 1994, 19; 2). This division is sustained by the first-person narration of the rockstar's story which bars the fictional events from the real city in which DeLillo is writing. In the two new millennium novels, however, Manhattan is ubiquitous, intertwined with its own residents who become their own city: *Cosmopolis* tracks down the limousine journey across the Manhattan of Eric Packer, a billionaire who receives death threats and whose prime concern is to have a haircut, while *Falling Man* follows the shattered marriage of Lianne and Keith following the 9/11 terrorist attacks on Manhattan's World Trade Centre. While insomniac Eric feels that “nothing existed around him” and is vulnerable to the fact that his driver “called him nothing now” and that “[t]his omission left a space in nature large enough for a man to walk through” (DeLillo, 2011a, 6; 20), Keith diagnoses yet another omission when he emerges from the towers' rubble: “[t]here was something critically missing from the things around him. [...] Maybe this is what things look like when there is no one here to see them” (DeLillo 2011b, 5). All this void has prerequisites which a socioeconomic study of Manhattan's streets and squares will unveil.

Thinkers and urban critics have conceived conflicting views on the social role of the street in the 20th century suggesting a romanticized image on the one hand and a depleted one on the other. Describing the experience of streets in their hometowns, some of them depict a public space of connection that ties together diverse existing cultures and welds the local with the global. In

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*Cosmopolis*, which had nearly been finished before the 9/11 attacks, strips “the corrosively totalizing force of global capital” through Eric's destructive journey and contrasts this with the aesthetic dimension endowed to the towers in *Falling Man* (2011, 560). Whether in the famous picture by photographer Richard Drew or in the performance artist's enactment of the fall in various areas of New York, the falling victim is surrounded by magnificence and awe which invites viewers and readers to appreciate the values inherent in loss. Conte argues that *Falling Man* represents a twist in the course of DeLillo's treatment of globalization because of the fusion between crisis and artistic creation. His study is concerned with theoretical approaches to art and market economy whereas the current analysis prioritizes the human self in its interaction with space and time (Conte 2011).

her essay “A Global Sense of Place,” geographer Doreen Massey contends that progressiveness and specificity of place underlie the street milieu in a cosmopolitan city. Accommodating a range of objects such as Irish newspapers and Indian Saris, her local London high street is both progressive, by virtue of keeping stasis, boundaries and single identities at bay, and specific, by virtue of cherishing social relations that intersect geographically and historically (Massey 1994, 152-153). An analogous portrayal of the street, yet in an entirely different location, is proposed by philosopher Kwame Appiah who claims that the street manifests the notion of the cosmopolitan, taking as example the commercial thoroughfare in his Ghanaian hometown, Kumasi, that composes a mosaic of cultures with Indian and Iranian craftsmen, or Scottish and Hungarian artists and engineers (Appiah 2006, xix). The street becomes a testimony to what Appiah sees as an ideal, a cosmopolitanism in which “local particularities” are not at odds with “universal morality” (2006, xviii). In both Massey’s and Appiah’s views the street environment is capable of generating robust social interactions which encompass world-scale and miniature regions alike.

Parallel to Massey’s and Appiah’s attitudes is that of Jane Jacobs’ recounting of a typical working day on her local New-York street, where neighbours collectively open their shops alongside stranger passersby, also pursuing their daily engagements. This idealistic quotidian routine is scrutinized in *All That is Solid Melts into Air* (1982) by Marshall Berman who dubs Jacob’s account as an “urban romance,” admitting a deceptive surface to an underlying troubled reality (Berman 1999, 316). With his insight into New York’s urban condition, DeLillo acknowledges both, the idealistic and the realistic layers of the street. *Cosmopolis* presents cases in which DeLillo seems to appreciate the universal atmosphere of New York’s streets by showing the way in which it intersects with the local. Crowning these instances is the scene of the Sufi singer’s funeral, Brutha Fez. The death of the beloved celebrity who adds a mystic dimension to the city is received by a mass procession that becomes a spectacle combining a myriad of distinct cultures gathered for the sole purpose of mourning a world icon. Participants include “women [...] in headscarves and djellabas, hands stained with henna,” “breakdancers, in pressed jeans and sneakers,” “the mayor and police commissioner [...] and a dozen members of Congress, and the mothers of unarmed blacks shot by police, and fellow rappers in the middle phalanx [...] media executives, foreign dignitaries, faces from film and TV, and mingled throughout were figures of world religion in their robes, cowls, kimonos, sandals and soutanes,” “a line of elderly Catholic nuns in full habit,” and dervishes “in tunics and long flared skirts, with topaz caps,

brimless, cylindrical, tall” (DeLillo 2011a, 133-136).<sup>3</sup> Appiah’s cosmopolitan ideal is reflected in the funeral ritual where the “local particularities” of diverse cultures and preserved traditions do not conflict with the “universal morality” of the mourning of Fez (Appiah 2006, xviii).

Fez, the singer whose art enhances cultural fusions by mixing “languages, tempos and themes,” representing, thus, a spiritual and mystic element of New York is, nevertheless, dead (DeLillo 2011a, 134). Hence, this amiable cosmopolitan atmosphere conveyed by the funeral does not last for long and DeLillo transfers attention to other sides of urban public life. What actually remains is a capitalistic narrative subject to motion and speed. “People,” as Eric sees them through his car window, “hurried past, the others of the street, endless anonymous, twenty-one lives per second, race-walking in their faces and pigments, sprays of fleetest being” (DeLillo 2011a, 20). The first point to be raised here is that pedestrians transform, almost morph, into an unrecognizable state of colours composing with the street a duality of “self” and “other,” so they are identified by what the street is not. DeLillo presumably sees people as the obverse of the street that contains them. The street is the centre, the subject, the self. The street and the pedestrians hang upon two opposite ends, and the chance of a unified productive social interaction is no longer possible. Consequently, the social ideal referred to by the aforementioned critics, as well as the role that people play in making the street, is denied. The significance of street walkers diminishes, so it makes no difference whether they are observed or forgotten: “They were here to make the point that you did not have to look at them” (DeLillo 2011a, 21). Various other instances from both novels prove a similar contention, that the city has accomplished an autonomous system the human part of which is no more than yet another peg to keep the motion going; and any deeper human presence is diluted to the degree of vanishing.

The second point to be drawn from DeLillo’s description of street life is reminiscent of George Simmel’s view on speed in his classic essay on the modern city “The Metropolis and Mental Life” (1903). The rapid pace of life in New York surpasses people’s ability to cope, and therefore inhibits socialization among people who walk down the streets. New Yorkers’ deficient attempt to catch up with the speed of their city disables them from seeing or interacting with their surroundings. Pedestrians here are nothing like Massey’s, Appiah’s, or Jacobs’s, meticulously searching for social connections that the street may host, whether local or global; on the contrary, they become metaphorically blind to each other, only anxious to catch up with the capitalist race to gain more power and profit. Another scene further on in Eric’s limousine ride

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<sup>3</sup> See Suman Gupta’s account of this scene in *Globalisation and Literature* (Gupta 2009, 38-43).

describes people in their daily jobs or errands, diverse in form and function. “These were scenes that normally roused him, the great rapacious flow, where the physical will of the city, the ego fevers, the assertions of industry, commerce and crowds shape every anecdotal moment” (DeLillo 2011a, 41). Stories of greed for growth, inflated egos, pursuit of industrial and commercial profit devour personal stories of street walkers seen as “live prey” from Eric’s limousine (DeLillo 2011a, 41). They lose the chance of expressing singular unique accounts in favour of a normalized capitalistic context. The latter view of the street, in which its social trait is stamped with an image of depletion, is essentially rooted in New York’s urban planning. As Marshall Berman shows, the city’s modernization process that followed World War I was affected by two prominent architects of modernity, Le Corbusier and Robert Moses, the former with his “battle cry, ‘We must kill the street’” and the latter with his will to destroy the sidewalks amid the public’s enthusiasm for embracing “the highways of New York” (Berman 1999, 317). Other architectural investigations of the development of public space in the 20th century confirm the demise of the street which is ultimately “treated as a nostalgic artifact, to be restored to an ideal state or simulated according to an imaginary historic model” due to a “disengagement from the city” (Zeynep et al. 1994, 6) that is translated in DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis* into a “pact of untouchability” that pedestrians adopt as a safety valve in the network of immensely tangled cultures and selves (DeLillo 2011a, 66).

If the street in *Cosmopolis*, has an economic dimension that overshadows the social, then in *Falling Man* the street has no presence at all. The very first sentence of the novel announces the death of the street: “It was not a street anymore, but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night” (DeLillo 2011b, 3). This is the waste left by the collapse of the towers of the World Trade Centre following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. This opening rather extends beyond a concrete description of the demolished area, for it connotes that the street, with its social and cultural implications, has come to an end. If a city such as New York in which social life does not stand on safe grounds receives a massive blow, any remaining glimpse of the individuals’ ability to socialize is erased. Lianne, who tries to reassemble her conception of her selfhood, of terrorism, of America, is trapped within internal conflicts, not showing the slightest sign of intermingling with or tolerance of others, even if it is only acceptance of oriental music coming out of a neighbour’s flat.

Public life in DeLillo’s New York is not exhibited on streets alone, for it is in squares where the masses record their attitudes toward political updates. In other words, if the street demonstrates an average day in a pedestrian’s life, going to work or to collect daily needs, then squares show a planned action, a protest or procession, connected to a specific cause. Thus,

*Cosmopolis* draws on people’s dissatisfaction with the omniscience of late capitalism by showing anarchists taking to the street and crowding up in Times Square. Those protesters’ rage is depicted as they storm every capitalist landmark they come across along the way: rocking and banging Eric’s limousine, spray-painting it red and black, burning other cars, bombing a bank, and hacking screens of financial investment networks to display a variation of Marx’s maxim about a spectre of capitalism that’s haunting the world (DeLillo 2011a, 96).<sup>4</sup> “These people don’t exist outside the market,” Eric’s assistant boasts during a meeting with him in the limousine (2011a, 90). As Eric is about to be convinced of his assistant’s view, he feels obliged to pause and seriously consider the condition and capacity of people upon seeing an anarchist setting fire to himself in the manner of the Buddhist monk who burned himself to death in a resounding denunciation of the Vietnam War (2011a, 100). Witnessing the flames, Eric disagrees with his employee. He knows that the anarchist impact is transient, yet affirms that the power of the protesters’ actions imbues Times Square with their own ideas and shapes it according to their own attitudes.

The reference to anti-Vietnam War protests in *Cosmopolis* is continued through an extended description of anti-Iraq War protests that march to Union Square in *Falling Man*, three years after the Twin Towers attack, as Lianne takes her 10-year-old boy, Justin, to “allow him to walk in the midst of dissent, to see and feel the argument against war and misrule” while she herself felt “a separation, a distance” from the crowd that “didn’t return to her a sense of belonging” (DeLillo 2011b, 182). This detachment is partly due to the cultural tensions discerned in these processions. Protesters succeed in forming a group, but fail in forming collective understanding. Firstly, a black man reminds people that it is the birthday of jazz legend Charlie Parker and wonders how anybody could be speaking for any other matter (2011b, 182). Secondly, Justin recites the commandments of Islam listed in a flyer with a clear gap between spelling and understanding as he reads the transliteration like a robot (2011b, 183). The third instance involves Lianne remembering a holiday in Cairo when a crowd “large enough to make any part of it seem the middle” were celebrating the end of Ramadan. While walking her way through the mob, Lianne invokes the concept of stereotypes, which makes the situation particularly revealing:

[...] she was forced to see herself in the reflecting surface of the crowd. She became whatever they sent back to her. She became her face and features, her skin color, a white person [...]

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<sup>4</sup> In Marx and Engels’ *Communist Manifesto* (1848): “A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of communism.”



This is who she was, not really but at the same time yes, exactly, why not. She was privileged, detached, self-involved, white. It was in her face, educated, unknowing, scared. She felt all the bitter truth that stereotypes contain. (2011b, 184; 185)

Linguistically speaking, there is little tolerance in the term “stereotype” which is derived from two Greek words, *stereos* meaning rigid and *túpos* meaning trace (Leyens 1994, 9). Stereotypes, nonetheless, can be a plausible way of introducing different social, or even global, groups to each other. Like maps, they turn the immense and tangled real environment into an easy-to-follow guide (Leyens 1994, 10). In any case, stereotypes are more descriptive than analytical, which generates misunderstandings. People are usually “driven by a positive image of their group” which they obtain by “downgrading other groups as inferior or less privileged” (Leyens 1994, 73). Moreover, stereotypes trigger a serious problem when there is no sufficient knowledge of the groups at hand, or when there is anxiety of outgroup members (Leyens 1994, 47; 50). Being herself stereotyped by the crowd, Lianne’s thoughts echo the way in which stereotypes function: she sees the crowd in Cairo as no more than “a wave of bodies” and “a compressed mass” and she seems overwhelmed by what is conveyed as “a white person’s thoughts, the processing of white panic data” (DeLillo 2011b, 185). Considered against New York’s urban backdrop in *Falling Man*, the premise of stereotypes arguably adds to the shortcomings of the city’s global space in which adjacent ethnicities do not have the opportunity to navigate each other’s cultural contexts, thus letting fear dominate the social environment.

Because stereotypes so easily become erroneous, they are not a base for a healthy environment in an ethnically and racially, or indeed, culturally diverse society. The millennium’s terrorist attacks on the World City only exacerbate the issue. “In the wake of 9/11, there has been a lot of fretful discussion about the divide between ‘us’ and ‘them,’” remarks Appiah introducing his views on cosmopolitanism, and continues, “[w]hat’s often taken for granted is a picture of a world in which conflicts arise, ultimately, from conflicts between values” (2006, xx-xxi). These ethical discrepancies are touched upon by DeLillo himself in his post 9/11 essay “In the Ruins of the Future” (2001): “The sense of disarticulation we hear in the term ‘Us and Them’ has never been so striking” (DeLillo 2001). Whether DeLillo’s statement refers to the divide between the nation and terrorism, or the divide among cultures in the pluralistic city, it suggests a problematic cultural veil that constrains people’s desire for comprehending strangers.

That New York public space, whether streets or squares, does not nourish a cultural dialogue, in spite of being a locus of world cultures, is part and parcel of life in big cities, where the public domain has eventually diminished. In his intriguing account on public space, *The Fall of Public*

*Man* (1974), Richard Sennett confirms that people’s involvement in public life emerges from sheer duty and obligation, not will (1992, 3). He goes on to attribute to the cosmopolitan city a notion closer to Williams’s rather than Appiah’s, a notion of menace and apprehension: “The stranger himself is a threatening figure, and few people can take great pleasure in that world of strangers, the cosmopolitan city” (Sennett 1992, 3). Sennett asserts in his provoking analysis of urban space that engagement in public life recedes to either a state of silence “silence in public became the only way one could experience public life, especially street life, without feeling overwhelmed” or a state of voyeurism “public behaviour was a matter of observation, of passive participation, of a certain kind of voyeurism” (Sennett 1992, 27). This relates to the core of DeLillo’s treatment of New York for one justly thinks of Eric when reading Sennett’s words. Eric does not talk to any of the countless people he sees on the streets, even when he is briefly outside his car. Indeed, he is engaged in an act of voyeurism controlled by his limousine window frame and movement, and unlike early 20th-century street walkers who enjoy uninterrupted panoramic views and direct contact with the city space, Eric is trapped inside his car, and his confinement accentuates yet another urban crisis, alienation.

The phenomenon of the collapse of public space goes hand in hand with that of alienation, both of which are rooted in capitalism. James E. Twining displays different stages in the evolution of the term that was first defined by Marx as an outcome of the society’s economic infrastructure that sees the individual as a part of a production process the sheer purpose of which is growth (1980, 418). Alienation in its most severe degrees, Twining continues, turns to self-estrangement, which is a complex “interactional process” that involves a negative response to relations between objective and subjective factors in certain situations within a historical context (1980, 424). In other words, alienation is subordinate to natural environment, social organization, economy, technology and ideology, and particularly appears in “social situations which disallow participants control over their immediate activities” (1980, 422). It is fair to say that the market system in *Cosmopolis* has surpassed what man can personally do and that technology performs as a vital role as employees in Manhattan’s work settings. Varied forms of alienation pointed out by Marx exist in DeLillo’s New York including the worker’s alienation “from himself, and from others” (Twining 1980, 418). Passersby, as seen earlier, avoid looking at or touching each other. Furthermore, it looks as though a blockade separates the inside from the outside space. Once somebody is inside, whether a house or an office, s/he is totally indifferent to the rest of the city. In *Cosmopolis*, when Eric shoots his bodyguard on the street, he believes that even if people had heard the shot, they would not leave their home and check what had happened: “In the dense stir of the neighborhood [...] with noises all the time and the

dead-ass drift of your personal urban anomie, you can't be expected to react to an isolated bang" (DeLillo 2011a, 147). The epitome of alienation is portrayed through Keith's ventures in casinos for gambling in *Falling Man*: "He wondered if he was becoming a self-operating mechanism, like a humanoid robot [...] rigidly controllable" (DeLillo 2011b, 226). Keith continues his speculation during a car ride in the outskirts, pulling over on top of a hill and staring down at the city, "He wondered why he'd never thought of himself in the middle of such a thing, living there more or less. He lived in rooms, that's why. He lived and worked in this room and that. He moved only marginally, room to room. He took a taxi to and from the downtown street" (DeLillo 2011b, 226-227). Following a classical New York work scenario in which Keith used to be absorbed, he tries to make sense of himself by taking a step back "out away from it" and looking from afar, noting that the city's character led him to passively flow in its drifting materialist current, missing out a complementary experience of his presence and the presence of others around him, whether in public or private space, as though inhabiting the city has become an automated procedure of adaptation and cohabitation: doing what is necessary to keep the system going.

## 2. Interiors

Beside public space, the self-estranged New Yorkers of *Cosmopolis* and *Falling Man* experience smaller and more privately-defined spaces in which their personas respond to a human impulse searching for what Sennett views as "a reflection, that of what our psyches are, what is authentic in our feelings" and to recognize the "human condition" that private sphere implicates (1992, 4; 98). Accounts of at least two interiors, a barbershop and a ruined apartment, exhibit the way in which enclosures help characters focus attention on the inner self. The discussion will deal with each of them at a time.

*Cosmopolis* opens by exposing the anxiety that night-time means for Eric, lonely, insomniac and brooding. His forty-eight-room apartment is described as a ghost town of empty space and function rooms including a gymnasium, a card parlour, a lap pool among other rooms, and the only sign of life depicted is Eric's dogs to whom he briefly talks. The skyscraper in which the apartment is located acquires its features from the same source of spiritless wealth: "a commonplace oblong whose only statement was its size. It had the kind of banality that reveals itself over time as being truly brutal" (DeLillo 2011a, 7-8). By the time Eric was looking at his residential tower, he had already known the answer to his agony: "He didn't know what he wanted. Then he knew. He wanted to get a haircut;" it is indeed not the haircut that Eric wants, but its associations as he later tells one of his employees, "A haircut has what. Associations.

Calendar on the wall. Mirrors everywhere” (DeLillo 2011a, 7; 15). In order to reach these associations, he rides west across the city along Forty-Seventh Street from his apartment on First Avenue to the west of Tenth Avenue.

Before shifting focus to the barbershop interior, it is worthwhile to consider the road that led Eric there as this pursuit continues the debates exposed earlier with regard to streets. Part of the significance of his journey lies in the diametrical opposition between First Avenue and Tenth Avenue in the state of both the street and Eric. A number of landmarks which represent up-market Manhattan are highlighted all the way to Eighth Avenue, such as the UN Secretariat on First Avenue, the Diamond District between Fifth and Sixth Avenues, and the Theatre District between Sixth and Eighth. Further west, however, the same street has small grocery stores, cars parked on pavements and covered with torn cloth, aging garbage containers still made of metal instead of the more sophisticated rubber, and uncollected garbage piling around. Pedestrians here are, to the contrary of the overcrowded east side, missing. Parallel to this diagram comes Eric’s condition; consecutive Packer Capital—his business—losses and repeated death threats hit him hard leaving him broke and without security guards, similar to what he used to be as a child. It is as though both Eric and his surroundings are falling down, more or less, going in the same direction, slipping back into a previous state in time.

Arrival to the west side coincides with a shift not only in Eric’s state, but also in the position from which he views the street. Unlike Albert Bronzini in *Underworld* who refuses to have a car: “didn’t own a car, didn’t drive a car, didn’t want one, didn’t need one, wouldn’t take one if somebody gave it to him,” and who endows the habit of walking with existential grounds by identifying it with being alive: “Stop walking [...] and you die,” Eric is encapsulated in his car and bound to the numerous screens surrounding him (DeLillo 1998, 662). Eric at first is confined in his limousine; his engagement with the outside world is obstructed and the images do not last long enough to leave an obvious impression on him. In reference to Robert Pirsig’s juxtaposition between a motorcycle ride and a car ride, Eric inside the limousine becomes “a passive observer,” distantly looking at the street which appears to him as a series of changing images, “more TV” (Pirsig 1974, 12). A shift in the moving pictures is seen when at first the car stops, then Eric stands on the street, and the narrative does not neglect highlighting the solemn moment that descends on Eric as his driver pulls over outside the barbershop:

The barbershop was on the north side of the street and faced a row of old brick tenements. The car stopped and Eric sat there, thinking. He sat for five or six minutes. Then the door croaked open and the driver stood on the sidewalk, looking in. “We are here,” he said finally. (DeLillo 2011a, 159)

DeLillo clearly points to the other side of New York City, the old, ethnic quarters of poor immigrants in their strife for improving their living conditions. Immigrants resided in crudely-built tenements constructed to shelter the exponentially growing urban population, the living conditions of whom were most famously documented by Jacob Riis in *How the Other Half Lives* (1890). A few lines later it is revealed that this was the residence of Eric’s father. Eric is now outside, on the sidewalk between his car and the barbershop. His optic/haptic contact with the street evokes memories formed by Eric’s few brief visits, and takes him to a phase of geographical imagination, during which he imbues the location with his internal emotions, “[t]he building was grim. It was a grim street but people used to live here in loud close company, in railroad flats, and happy as anywhere, he thought, and still did, and still were” (DeLillo 2011a, 159). Happiness for Eric springs in this instance from a busy and intimate communal life; his feelings reverberate Ferdinand Tönnies’ distinction between work relationships based on material needs, which make Eric restless, and family relationships based on biological and natural elements, about which Eric is enthusiastic (Tönnies 1988). Eric’s view, however, is not necessarily reliable, as DeLillo later deliberately shows that Eric has never lived there to be able to verify his viewpoint; he is only desperately trying to experience the feelings his father would feel had the latter been standing in this point.

By depicting Eric’s reminiscence about his childhood, DeLillo postulates the point of time, as it relates to space. Forty-Seventh Street to the west of Tenth Avenue is detached from the east side that is defined by its future outlook; the west side is defined by hanging in the past. While Manhattan is the perfect embodiment of capitalism’s outlook towards future power and profit, the barbershop side is basking in a single moment of time, perhaps unwilling to leave what it has behind and move on. The tight, and carefully calculated, relationship between time and capitalism is explained in *Twentieth Century America* (1991) by Douglas Tallack who draws on Max Weber’s view that monetary value is what determines the importance of any element in the production process, even time, hence the need around the turn of the century to standardize the varying local times according to railroad time or risk being “out of time” (Tallack 1991, 11-14). In the same way in *Cosmopolis*, around a hundred years later, different parts of New York and the world are linked by an intricate wireless financial web that renounces nonconforming parts as out-casts, such as the barbershop’s neighbourhood; this neighbourhood could be considered as a victim of capitalism, or a survivor from it; in both cases, it rests in an earlier temporal phase than the rest of Manhattan district.

The impact of time on the barbershop is not evidently disclosed until Eric goes inside. This incident beckons a second time to DeLillo’s bulky book as it is reminiscent of the protagonist’s

brother in *Underworld*, Matt Shay, when he visits his childhood Bronx building, 611, in which his science and chess teacher, Albert Bronzini, still lives (Chapter 6). Albert is similar to Anthony in that the former “watches the ruin build around him on the actual planet where he was born” (DeLillo 1998, 211). Matt and Albert have a poignant conversation about the past that is continued, expanded and followed by tragic consequences in the dialogue between Eric and Anthony in *Cosmopolis*. The room’s objects and the barber’s words reiterate that the traditional hair salon belongs to a past era. One of the two chairs is missing leaving a hole in the floor; the paint is peeled off the walls and the cracked ceiling; the same calendar is still in the same place since Eric had his first haircut there; and a room-length mirror needs silvering (DeLillo 2011a, 160-161). The barber’s speech has not altered much over time either, for he retells the story of Eric’s father’s illness and death, hardly changing anything: “Eric had heard this a number of times and the man used the same words nearly every time, with topical variations. This was what he needed from Anthony. The same words. The oil company calendar on the wall. The mirror that needed silvering” (2011a, 161). The oil company calendar, presumably the same one since Eric’s childhood, challenges the aforementioned concept of capitalistic time. If the accepted purpose of the calendar is bringing attention to time and organizing it, the barbershop’s calendar marginalizes time and stops it. Even when Eric’s driver, Ibrahim Hamadou, is invited inside, he starts reminiscing with Anthony about how they both worked as New York taxi drivers. These signs of a past moment extending to the present are arguably an alternative self-identification for the barber, and that is because neither the street nor Anthony is normalized with the commercial and financial global context. Anthony is apparently convinced that preserving traits and stories of the past is a method for generating a sense of place.<sup>5</sup>

Having achieved his desire by making it to the barbershop, Eric is endowed with a sense of belonging and an aura of comfort that finally lull him to sleep, for in the place where Anthony believes “there isn’t time [to complain],” the words of Anthony and the drivers’ stories “became a single vowel” for Eric, and “a medium for his escape, a breathy passage out of the long pall of wakefulness” (2011a, 165). Time and its consequent worrying consciousness of the spoken word

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<sup>5</sup> In “The Untimely in Globalization’s Time: Don DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis*” (2015) Victor Li shows that the novel fosters several temporal projections in what he calls a “heterotemporality” that counters mainstream capitalistic time, aiming at cancelling time into a state of no time. In his analysis of the barber scene, Li views the shop and the two lower-class characters in it as a safe bubble, a nemesis of financial temporality, so Eric finds peace there and dozes off after agonizing insomnia (Li 2015, 7; 8). Taking Eric’s stare in the mirror into account reveals, however, the duality from which he suffers, downgrading the impact of the barbershop’s retro refuge.

disappear, allowing Eric to surrender to sleep and to the world of the imaginary and dreams instead of words. The barbershop represents a refuge from the heavy-loaded sophistications of work life for Eric, and, impacting Eric as such, reverberates with Gaston Bachelard's image of “the nest,” the residue to one's roaming self. The intimate history between Eric and Anthony, joined by the spontaneity of the third participant, the driver, endorse a sense of family; moreover, the rudimentary topics they chat about, such as the challenges of surviving and earning a living, relate to what Bachelard sees as “primal images” connected to the nest, “images that bring out the primitiveness in us” and are thought of as “generally childish” (Bachelard 1994, 91; 93). This perspective that links the shop to primal motifs asserts that the neighbourhood's lag behind the city is not an outcome of failure; it is rather a sign of clinging to original and emotional desires as opposed to material and sensual desires that control Manhattan. As any “image of rest and quiet” the nest “can only be in an atmosphere of *simplicity*,” Bachelard continues (1994, 98), hence Eric's inability to find solace in the setting of utmost development of west Manhattan. What is particularly interesting in Bachelard's account is his invocation of a global context in the nest image in his claim “when we examine a nest, we place ourselves at the origin of confidence in the world, we receive a beginning of confidence, an urge toward cosmic confidence” (1994, 103). This suggests that DeLillo's cosmopolis contains something even vaster than a city, a cosmic centre, which thrives inside an ancient barbershop in west-Manhattan. The world city is economically and politically driven, while the old room is intuitively driven creating an atmosphere that enables Eric's character to undergo a moment of self-scrutiny seeing himself in the blemished mirror:

Then he opened his eyes and saw himself in the mirror, the room massing around him. He lingered on the image. The eye was mousing up where the edge of the pie crust had struck him. The camera cut on his forehead was discharging a mulberry scab. [...] and he nodded at himself, taking it all in, full face, remembering who he was. (DeLillo 2011a, 165)

The image reflected in the mirror joins the two contrasting elements of the anti-capitalist room, and the capitalist scarred face of Eric hit during the anarchist protests by a pie of André Petrescu, the “pastry assassin” of celebrities (2011a, 142). This opposition alerts Eric again to the crisis of losing control over his self to capitalist snares, a condition that generates an unresolved duality in Eric's personality. The mirror is already foreshadowed and highlighted as DeLillo makes it the second haircut association after the “calendar on the wall” (2001a, 15), but the full scale of its significance is revealed only when Eric's barbershop scene is juxtaposed with

Hammad’s barbershop scene, the indoctrinated terrorist in *Falling Man* prior to his participation in the Twin Tower operation.

Now he sits in the barber chair, wearing the striped cape. The barber is a slight man with little to say. The radio plays news, weather, sports and traffic. Hammad does not listen. He is thinking again, looking past the face in the mirror, which is not his, and waiting for the day to come, clear skies, light winds, when there is nothing left to think about. (DeLillo 2011b, 178)

Exactly like Eric, Hammad feels a duality in his self throughout the time of his stare in the mirror: the face in the mirror is not his, implying that his original self has been modified. Hammad is suffering from an inner conflict as regards his role in the planned attack: “but does a man have to kill himself in order to accomplish something in the world?”; also, “what about the lives of the others he takes with him?” (2011b, 174; 176). The mirror shows this conflict, but Hammad’s new self overlooks it with the power of ostensible satisfaction.

The notion of the mirror presents a special vantage point on DeLillo’s treatment of self in urban and social space, a treatment that, I contend, emphasizes a rift for New Yorkers between aspiration and condition, and an inability to cope with the surroundings at the present moment, the here and now. According to Steve Pile’s investigation of Henri Lefebvre’s theories on the mirror, “the image and the mirror involve both repetition and difference” since “the mirror symmetrically duplicates the reflected world, but it also produces a different world in its virtual space” resulting in a “doubling (or mirage) effect” which Lefebvre sees as “constitutive of subjectivity” and “analogous to social space” (Pile 1996, 159; 160). While the real is contorted by being projected on the mirror surface, the viewer simultaneously exists both in the physical and reflected realms, which results in a confusing state in which the real is distorted by and not recognizable from the mirrored. Examined from this angle, the moments during which Eric and Hammad have prolonged looks in the mirror denote DeLillo’s comment on a deformed reality and a spatiality of images that are remote from the true subject’s drives and desires, only revealing a shredded psyche. Eric cannot compromise with his idealized childhood and his adult work life, and Hammad is obligated to believe in the fruitfulness of sacrifice though he is unable to answer why he should kill himself, or others. That DeLillo’s characters and spaces face a mirror which is “simultaneously a trap and a site of alienation” suggests that each of these barber scenes is a climactic point in character and plot development; and knowing the complex role of the mirror, we can anticipate that the conflict from which these two characters suffer will never be resolved, as the social space, identified by the doubling effect of the mirror, does not



provide a healthy ground for reconciling the clashing elements within the self (Pile 1996, 160). Each one of them, indeed, heads to his death after the static confrontation with the mirror. The defeat of DeLillo’s characters towards the conclusions of the novels, both facing a violent death due to their own destructive behaviour, is magnified by depicting the destruction of two constructions, the apartment of Eric’s murderer in *Cosmopolis* and, surely, the towers of the World Trade Centre in *Falling Man*. Exposing the correlation between the demolition of physical space and the annihilation of oneself highlights a crucial criterion in New York’s urban history, a cyclical pattern of rise and fall. That New York may have been immune to external forceful destruction for most of its history does not mean that destruction has not found a remarkable way to get into the city. While New York has been accepted as the idol of expansion and prosperity throughout the early 20th century, its affluence has been shadowed by a phenomenon of upheaval preceding each architectural or economic boom, hence the Jamesian description of it as the “provisional city” (Page 1999, 2). Drawing on the term “creative destruction” that, in all its ambiguity, defines capitalism’s propelling power, Max Page documents Manhattan’s advance through the early 20th century enlisting a series of events of urban demolition and construction which affected the “physical landscape of the city” and “the minds of city people” (Page 1999, 2). Craving for the future has completely eroded the sense of the past and demoted the weight of heritage impeding urban planners from finding any contentment in the present moment, thus, the once thriving quarters have been altered to artifacts and installations in museums, indeed, transforming memory into commodity (Page 1999, 151; 172).

Zooming on scenes of destruction in both novels then relating their causes and effects to historical and geographical conditions shows that cataclysm is rooted in the city’s dominant capitalist temporal force that alters cosmic time to clock time. Michel Foucault has alluded in one of his interviews to a commonly accepted view of space/time dichotomy in which “space is treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile” whereas time is “richness, fecundity, life, dialectic” (Foucault 1980, 70). DeLillo’s critique of the notion of time in his novels parallels Foucault’s in that he ascribes to time the power to elevate or annihilate, most obviously in the instance of Eric’s murder. Eric is shot dead by a previous employee who goes by the pseudonym of Benno Levin and who had been humiliated and fired from Packer businesses. Even though Benno Levin admits psychological turbulence, that is, spells of “cultural panic” when he tries to “supress [his] anger,” he later acknowledges that the true reason for his sufferance is his unique assessment of time, “I’ve suffered many reversals but I’m not one of those scanted men you see in the street, living and thinking in minutes. I live at the ends of the earth philosophically” (DeLillo 2011a, 56; 57). “I don’t own a watch or a clock. I think of time in

other totalities now. I think of my personal time-span set against the vast numerations, the time of the earth, the stars, incoherent light-years, the edge of the universe, etc.” (2011a, 59-60). This other consideration of time, the attempt to link it to nature rather than order, is Benno’s defence strategy against his dismissal from capitalist time. Talking to Eric before he shoots the bullet, Benno admits, “your system is so microtimed that I couldn’t keep up with it. I couldn’t find it. It’s so infinitesimal. I began to hate my work, and you, and all the numbers on my screen, and every minute of my life” (2011a, 191). It is a defiant task to catch up with capitalist time because it is based on units shown elsewhere in the novel to be as one “sextillionth” of a second during which currency values change and determine whether it is a win or lose situation (2011a, 106). For the second time in *Cosmopolis* alongside the barbershop account, time in the world city is accorded with a vital capitalist significance as it becomes the gate through which people are allowed entry to the system. Time’s impact is paradoxical, progressive only inside the capitalist system, and destructive outside it; it is also destructive to people, like Benno, inside the system, but unable to meet the discipline needed in keeping up with time.

Benno’s capitalist defeat, and his subsequent murder of Eric are engulfed within a wider frame of ruin as Benno intentionally knocks down the interior walls of his apartment because he doesn’t “want to live in a set of little quads where other people lived” (2011a, 58). This deformed physical space relates to Foucault’s aforementioned claim of space’s paralysis in contrast to time’s agility. Benno’s apartment has its windows shut by the council, all its rooms open to each other and its floor covered with debris, a miniature of the massive ruin the city witnessed when targeted by terrorism and described in these terms in *Falling Man*: “the only light was vestigial now, the light of what comes after, carried in the residue of smashed matter, in the ash ruins of what was various and human, hovering in the air above” (DeLillo 2011b, 246). As simple as it may be, Benno’s flat and the Twin Towers are destroyed because their end time has come. While devastation can only be visible in space, it is, as a matter of fact, initiated in time. The subsequent examination of DeLillo’s critical treatment of actual destruction and human trauma in *Falling Man* reveals how the upending of New York order is attributed to the factor of time. In the wake of the terrorist attacks, for example, Lianne and Keith’s plight to regroup the remnants of their fragmented selves, owing to living in a city of mirrored images, draws attention to a special engagement with time; Lianne sees the necessity to abide by numbers in city stores as a coercive routine “she realized how much she hated to stand in line with a number in her fist. She hated this regimen of assigned numbers, strictly enforced, in a confined space, with nothing at the end of the process but a small white bow-tied box of pastry” (2011b, 38).

Waiting in queue bears similarity to organized time, clock capitalist time, in which everybody is assigned a definite task and turn, and this is found repulsive by Lianne. Then her ex-husband, Keith, who was at work in the tower when the planes crashed finds relief in seeking consolation with time that has been blown asunder along with the towers, “It was not the MRI and not the surgery that brought him closer to well-being. It was this modest home program, the counting of seconds, the counting of repetitions, the times of day he reserved for the exercises” (2011b, 40). Healing in this instance may come from creating a benign formula that weaves the self with time again assuming that counting the seconds is a peaceful way to settle with this cosmic force. Besides being a repulsive force for Lianne and a healing aid for Keith, time’s value in *Falling Man* is not fully estimated without fixing the lens to look onto the extended gambling scenes that recur through the novel. Keith, who works in the World Trade Centre, elevated, fortified and distant from the rest of the city is violently thrust to the bottom to get lost in an abyss of rubble and nothingness.<sup>6</sup> The symbol of the capitalist system has dramatically reached its end, ending with it the weekly poker games Keith and his friends used to play, as other players were either killed or injured in the terrorist attacks. Investigation of DeLillo’s gambling sessions alongside the value of time reveals that both the players and the game reflect Frank Kermode’s renowned “sense of an ending” (Kermode 2000) by taking a teleological direction in which the players move towards their own end and the game towards its own termination. More specifically, DeLillo depicts the card game and the market as analogous systems, and it is indeed possible to go a step further suggesting that poker is a simulation of the city and its order; market and its fluctuations; capitalism and its self-destruction; and time and its threat. During the game, the players “used intuition and cold-war risk analysis. They used cunning and blind luck. They waited for the prescient moment, the time to make the bet based on the card they knew was coming. *Felt the queen and there it was*” (DeLillo 2011b, 97). The players miss out experiencing the present moment while being hung in the future following in that a similar pattern exposed earlier in *Cosmopolis* where investors observe calculations for the future of currencies. The notion of time implied here reverberates a long-standing agony of human’s incapability of living the present moment, memorably expressed by Jorge Luis Borges: “To me, hope and fear seem no less vain, for they always refer to future events: that is, to events that will not happen to us, who are the minutely detailed present” (Borges 1964, 223). The players, either cunningly or naively, tighten the present by creating order which starts by banning the dealer from distributing seven cards, allowing only five. This is followed by a number of rules

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<sup>6</sup> On the authority given by a high panoramic view of the city, see Michel de Certeau’s account of mounting the World Trade Centre (Certeau 1984).

such as banning food, and limiting drinks, “there were always things to ban and rules to make” (DeLillo 2011b, 99). The order they have set intensifies to an extent they cannot tolerate. Their rules morph into a Frankensteinian beast, so “one night it all fell apart” turning their game into “a wild-man poker,” a sheer chaos that anticipates their death and burial in the same order of their poker table, “tombstone to tombstone” (2011b, 100). What these players have started has no return point as again Borges would affirm: “Our destiny [...] is not frightful by being unreal; it is frightful because it is irreversible and iron-clad. Time is the substance I am made of. Time is a river which sweeps me along, but I am the river; it is a tiger which destroys me, but I am the tiger; it is a fire which consumes me, but I am the fire” (Borges 1964, 233; 234). By comparison, the players have imposed rules that shape the outcome of their game and prove the destructiveness of order, in the same way the capitalist market has characterized New York City’s creative destruction.

As the present discussion has also reached its end, I conclude by acknowledging that it does not aim at delivering a comprehensive examination of DeLillo’s New York in the selected novels; while the camera lens has zoomed closely at certain scenes, it has not scanned each nook or lane, nor has it considered non-physical space, for the latter requires a separate and special treatment. Nevertheless, the novelty of the approach has helped enable an inference of a number of features of DeLillo’s New York. Prioritizing locations over characters, themes, or events has revealed hidden urban codes. Also, looking at trauma from the outside by maintaining a distance from the crisis and liberating the topic from the historical moment of the terrorist attacks has enabled a more durable evaluation and a higher clarity of detail. Hence, as the interdisciplinary study of space in fiction has proven its efficacy, it is worthwhile to finish by briefly stating aspects of the city the analysis has shown. DeLillo’s New York destabilizes the self in that it disables characters from proper reflexive thinking. The automated grid of Manhattan’s streets and avenues does not only hinder Eric from reaching self-realization, but also put him on a destructive track pushing him to his end. Furthermore, squares, hubs of an ethnically diversified freedom of expression, potentially provide an environment for an aesthetically woven cosmopolitan canopy. However, global market has the final say in the power race leaving the signs and adages of protestors, including Lianne and her son, evaporate in chaos. In probing the link between space and time the analysis has shown the reason behind the public’s impotency, which is a sweeping capitalist time system that exceeds the natural human pace and steals the entire city from the present moment to become subject to the future. The self does not find a better alternative in DeLillo’s New York interiors. Even if the relative quiet in enclosed spaces such as hair salons secures a stationary refuge from the capitalist

temporal current, it, nevertheless, uncovers a chasm between one and one’s reflection ensuing from a mirrored and dual reality. In demolished interiors, the study attributes further significance to time, for inside Benno Levin’s flat and during Keith’s gambling meetings, time is considered as a route to death, shifting the core of DeLillo’s New York crisis to the characters’ incapability of moderating time in order to impede threats. Given the conditions of New York space shaped by DeLillo and addressed in the current reading, it is not possible to reverse the teleological temporal flow, and any following rise or amendment demands a repetition of the full cycle of destruction and creation.

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