

***Everything Now is Measured by After: Memory and Spatialized  
Psychological Time in Don DeLillo's Falling Man***

**Soumaya Bouacida, PH.D student of English Literature**

Department of English, Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Jordan (Amman, Jordan)

Email: [soumayabouacida@gmail.com](mailto:soumayabouacida@gmail.com)

**Samira khawaldeh, Associate professor of English Literature**

Department of English, Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Jordan (Amman, Jordan)

Email: [s.khawaldeh@gmail.com](mailto:s.khawaldeh@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

This paper aims to investigate the power of memory to spatialize the psychological time in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*. Since postmodernism turns to be the age of space, time proceeds towards spatialization, basing its structure on simultaneity and instantaneity that are to be the main attributes of the postmodern space. Therefore, Time shifts from being chronological and sequential to be simultaneous and instantaneous. It is worth mentioning that Don DeLillo is one of the prominent postmodernist writers whose works are predicated on the spatialization of time. As such, his *Falling Man* (2007) revolves around the psychological struggle the characters experience in the post 9/11 attack. The attack moment that still haunts the characters' consciousness makes them live in a spatialized psychological time where their traumatic past coexists simultaneously with their present. Thereupon, one may notice that memory, as an intermediate between past and present, contributes to create simultaneity and spatialization in the characters' minds. Indeed, spatialization becomes no longer confined to the characters' consciousness only but moves on to define their actions too.

**Key Words:** The spatialization of Time, spatialized psychological time, traumatic memory, simultaneity, 9/11 attack.

### **Introduction**

The quotation that is mentioned in the title, "[e]verything now is measured by after" (DeLillo, 2007, p.138), shows to what extent the *Falling Man*'s characters are unable to connect with their currently nightmarish reality and become trapped in a spatialized time where their present life is measured by the aftermath of the attack. Although both Keith and Lianne's present lives are overwhelmed by memories of the past related to 9/11, each one handles his/her post traumatic symptoms in a particular way. Demonstrably, any trauma requires two typical reactions: Either melancholia or mourning. The former refers to a repression of traumatic memory while the second refers to "an endeavour to remember the event and fit it into a coherent whole" (Uytterschout & Versluys 2008, p.216). While Keith remains stuck in a state of melancholia,

Lianne becomes able to reach the state of mourning. It is melancholia that causes Keith who represents the survivors of 9/11 attack to recreate the past events in his present so that he is constantly reminded of his traumatic experience. Likewise, Lianne who represents vicarious victims struggles with her traumatic past, but by the end of the novel, she succeeds to work through it and follow the flow of time. Thereupon, one may suggest that both melancholia and mourning that apply to memory contribute to create a spatialized psychological time where the past coexists with the present in the character's conscious life. The spatialization of time for those who are in mourning points to the way the past does exist in the characters' present lives but with moderation and aspiration for positive future. By contrast, spatialisation of time for those who are in melancholia demonstrates how the characters' present lives keep fidelity to the traumatic past without any attempt to work through it. Consequently, this paper aims to discuss the spatialized psychological time in DeLillo's *Falling Man* in relation to the aspects of memory: melancholia and mourning. But, we need to know what is meant by the spatialization of time, and how can the psychological time be spatialized?

### **Spatialization of Time**

The spatialization of time has firstly flourished in the writings of Joseph Frank who attributes its roots to the modernist literature. Interestingly, Joseph Frank (1991) argues that spatialization of time has its roots in modernist literature. He maintains that writers like T.S.Eliot, Ezra Pound, Marcel Proust, and James Joyce "are moving in the direction of spatial form" (p.10). According to him, modernist literature opposes the sequential organization of conventional plots. Instead, the reader must apprehend the work "spatially, in a moment of time, rather than as a sequence" (p.11). He mentions further that modernism aims to juxtapose different times and different moments simultaneously rather than sequentially. This act of juxtaposition eliminates any sense of sequence and transforms time into a continuum "in which distinctions between past and present are wiped out" (p.63).

It seems important to recognize that Frank's idea of spatial form originates from Pound's Imagist movement in which Pound (1934) asserts that an image "is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" (p.336). This means that the image, as a pictorial space, encapsulates different ideas and sometimes refers to different times simultaneously. From Frank's view, one may deduce that the spatialization of time is mainly predicated on two main criteria that are: simultaneity and instantaneity. For example, Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) tells the story of the fall of the Compson family to emblemize the devastation of the American south in the post-civil war era. In Benjy's section, the reader encounters a narrative that alternates between the past and the present simultaneously following the narrator's stream of consciousness. It seems that Faulkner deliberately creates the mentally retarded character Benjy in order to portray an uncontrolled intrusion of past memories into the present time. Faulkner (1929) actually states that "to that idiot, time was not a continuation, it was an instant, there was no yesterday and no tomorrow, it all is this moment, it all is [now] to

him. He cannot distinguish between what was last year and what will be tomorrow” (p.5). Here, Faulkner departs from traditional chronology by focusing on the simultaneous events occurring in his character’s present instant, and therefore eliminating any barriers between the present, past and future.

However, the spatialization of time persists to be one of the milestones of postmodernism. Frederick Jameson argues that spatialization replaces temporalization because postmodernism has witnessed a new experience of space (Jameson & Stephanson, 1989, p.6). For Gross and Jameson, the spatialization of time “mean[s] the tendency to condense time relations — which are an essential ingredient for personal and social meaning — into space relations . . . Hence, vertical relations are made to collapse into horizontal ones. . . obliterating the differences between moments in time and replacing them with similarities between points in space”( Gross, 1981, p. 59- 71). That is, the spatialization of time reveals the way time is perceived and studied in space- like manners. Like space that is “a simultaneity of multiple trajectories” ( Massey, 2005, p.61), different moments are juxtaposed to each other horizontally or simultaneously instead of flowing vertically or chronologically. Accordingly, Doreen Massey (1994) explains that what makes social relations “specifically spatial is their simultaneity” (p.265) Henceforth, one may argue that time has become as simultaneous as space, and thus, it is spatial. In fact, spatialization juxtaposes simultaneously different moments (past, present and future) together in the present moment, which makes time freeze in the present moment and thus becomes a perpetual present. In line with this, Jameson argues that “[t]ime has become a perpetual present and thus spatial. Our relationship to the past is now-a spatial one” ( Jameson & Stephanson, 1989, p. 5). Since our relation to the past becomes now spatial, we should investigate which type of time that may succeed to maintain such relation. We suggest that the psychological time is one example wherein the reader notices the spatial or simultaneous relation between present and past.

### **Memory and Spatialized Psychological Time**

Smethurst’s concept of psychological time refers to the lived time of experience, the time of memory and the time of dreams and imagination (2000, p.176). Bergson also discusses the psychological time but under a different label: the lived time of duration. According to Bergson (1910), the latter refers to the qualitative succession of conscious states and pure heterogeneity of feelings, lived experiences, memories, thoughts, and other conscious states that cannot measured quantitatively like a series of numbers (p.100). the lived time or psychological time merges simultaneously different complexes in the character’s consciousness,. In line with this, Massey (1994) argues that “[i]t is consciousness which introduces a notion of 'now'” (p.4). This means that simultaneity which is the core of spatialization occurs in the characters’ consciousness. It is worth mentioning that “duration is not determined by a sequence of events but by their simultaneity and co-existence” (Parker et al., 2006, p.148).

In both definitions, Bergson and Smethurst make reference to memory which simultaneously makes the present pass and preserves the past inside it. It henceforth plays a vivid role in transcribing the past into a mode haunting the present. On this occasion, one may say that memory is analogous to cinematographic montage in the way it produces an image of time that is not based on succession but rather on non-chronological relations. This ultimately induces a spatialization of time on the level of narrative because the text turns, through memory, into a battlefield where selective narratives of the past simultaneously clash with narratives of the present.

Memory provides individuals and collectives with a cognitive map, helping them to evolve a stable identity in the face of instability, uncertainty and fragmentation of the postmodern age. Memory's spatializing tendency appears vividly in narratives of psychological trauma where the disturbing voices of the past are juxtaposed with sights of the present. Trauma refers to the "collapse of timeliness, when remembering prior experiences or events intrude on a present-day being-ness" (Parker et al., 2006, p.229). Here, we notice that traumatized characters are also trapped in a world of simultaneities because the shadows of their past keep haunting their present time.

Most often trauma is conceptualized on the individual and cultural levels. In contrast to the individual trauma which "involves a wound and the experience of great emotional anguish by an individual", cultural trauma points to "to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people" Cultural trauma takes place when to a choking event leaves unforgettable effects upon their group consciousness, marking their memories and changing their identities (Olick, 2011, p.305).

### **Don DeLillo's *Falling Man***

Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) chronicles the cultural trauma American society in the light of 9/11 attack. One may argue that the assault on the World Trade Center was an assault on the American society as a collective since it is one of the iconic milestones of Americans' way of life. The motives behind this attack are many, but presumably, the main one lies in the fact that the assault is directed towards the values of global capitalism that uphold Western culture in general and USA in particular (Crimson, 2005, p.181). This novel does not only represent collective paranoia but also echoes the process of healing for the traumatized characters. Keith Neudecker, a lawyer who escapes from the North Tower, wanders injured and confused to the apartment of his estranged wife, Lianne. Accordingly, DeLillo outlines the effects of trauma through this couple's attempted reconciliation.

LaCapra(2001) discusses Freudian perspectives on trauma, mainly that of melancholia and mourning. She explains that mourning is a form of working through that involves a recognizing difference between the past and the present. Although those who are mourning may still suffer from post-traumatic symptoms, they attempt to make sense of their present world

through positive changes. She equally emphasizes that those who are suffering from melancholia may have a connection to a dead intimate, which keeps them away from recovery and makes them relive their painful trauma ( p.32). Although both mourning and melancholia show how the past lives in the present of the traumatized person, the difference between them lies in the willingness of the victim to overcome his trauma and look for a prosperous future.

Keith could not work through his trauma since his mind is convoluted by the trauma of the past. The death of his close friend makes his post-9/11 world haunted by the feeling that “they would all be dead one day” (DeLillo, 2007, p.228). To Keith “[t]he dead were everywhere, in the air, in the rubble, on the rooftops nearby, in the breezes that carried from the river. They were settled in ash and drizzled on windows all along the streets, in his hair and on his clothes” (DeLillo, 2007, p.25). Since Keith is preoccupied by death, he cannot thwart his traumatic past from intruding on his present. Furthermore, the connection between his present life and 9/11 memories is solidified when Keith starts to feel paranoid and skeptical towards his present world. DeLillo (2007) notes that “every time he boarded a flight he glanced at faces on both sides of the aisle, trying to spot the man or men who might be a danger to them all” (p.198).

Herman (1992) postulates that traumatic events shatter the construction of the self that is formed in relation to others, and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis (p.51). In a similar case, the 9/11 attack shatters Keith’ identity. He could not see the connection between his new self and the person who lived there pre-9/11. He feels himself in a stranger’s home. DeLillo (2007) writes: “He looked in the refrigerator. Maybe he was thinking of the man who used to live here and he checked the bottles and cartons for clues” (p.27). In the aftermath of the attack, Keith tries to re-establish a new life with Lianne and his son, Justin. Yet, he thinks that: “[n]othing seemed familiar, being here, in a family again, and he felt strange to himself” (DeLillo, 2007, p. 5). Here, Keith feels disconnected from his family and regards himself as a new person. Therefore, his passiveness and detachment from his family shows to what extent Keith’s time is spatialized , that is , his present moment is overwhelmed by his past.

The novel encapsulates other signs that indicate Keith’s melancholia and his attempt to recreate the past like his meeting with a fellow 9/11 survivor and his poker playing. While he is escaping from the north tower, Keith ends up with a briefcase of a black woman called Florence. When meeting her , they immediately begin to discuss the moment of the attack. Caruth argues that trauma victims look for those who undergo the same traumatic experience in order to hear their stories as a way of healing. She opines: “[T]rauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another’s wound” (1996, p.8). Keith henceforth needs to listen to Florence’s psychological wound:

She talked about the tower, going over it again, claustrophobically, the smoke, the fold of the bodies, and he understood that they could talk about these things only with each other, in minute and dullest detail, but it would never be dull or too detailed because it was inside of them

now and because he needed to hear what he'd lost in the tracings of memory. This was their pitch of delirium, the dazed reality they'd shared in the stairwells, the deep shafts of spiraling men and women. (DeLillo, 2007, p. 91)

It is worth adding that 9/11 events shifts the focus of the nation from internal to external conflicts because "the external threat transcended all internalized factions to bring a nation together". (Crimson, 2005, p.180). This is manifested throughout the relationship between Florence and Keith. Despite their racial difference, both of them meet to repeat and lament the 9/ 11 events that are caused by external enemies.

Keith attempts to change his career so that his memories of the past become simultaneously juxtaposed with his present. Keith resorts to poker playing in order to find the comfort and psychological stability that he had lost. The reflections he obtains from poker playing makes him relive and recreate the past in the present. For instance, Rumsey was just one of several poker buddies Keith lost on 9/11, and poker playing reminds him of what he lost. Their reflection becomes more apparent with the emergence of Terry Cheng, the only other player from Keith's pre-9/11 poker games. When Keith first sees Terry Cheng at one of his poker tournaments, the reader may notice the immediate connection Keith makes between the new and the former poker games. Relatively, DeLillo (2007) states that "[i]t had to be Terry Cheng, easing back into his chair now, dropping out of Keith's line of vision, and of course this is who it was because how could any of this be happening, the poker circuit, the thunderous runs of money, the camped hotel rooms and high competition, without the presence of Terry Cheng" (p.198). Here, Keith would not be engaging in this lifestyle if the "presence" of Terry Cheng, the presence of his previous life, and his lost friends, were not always being conjured up. In this way, Keith is able to continuously repeat the past, repeat the trauma, in order to pay homage to all his poker mates that died in the attacks.

It is worth mentioning that Keith is not the only victim whose present becomes possessed by the past. Lianne's present life is equally fixated on 9/11 events. Though she has not witnessed 9/11 attack immediately, it keeps defining her own present life. She is constantly anxious and agitated, and she feels like she is not herself. Like Keith, Lianne does not recognize herself or the way she feels and thinks. She tells Keith that she does not identify her thoughts, nor does she consider them as hers all. She states that they are "[t]houghts I can't identify, thoughts I can't claim as mine" (DeLillo, 2007, p.125). Her inability to make sense of the world, and to identify her thoughts and feelings as her own, attests to Lianne's affliction.

Evidently, Lianne's identity crisis is clearly revealed when she gazes at herself in the mirror: "She stood in the bathroom looking in the mirror. The moment seemed false to her, a scene in a movie when a character tries understanding what is going on in her life by looking in the mirror". (DeLillo, 2007, p.47) Here, Lianne's appalling moment takes place when she discovers that the subject standing in the mirror is not the usual person she used to be. The mirror

scene reflects the transformation her inner self undergoes in the aftermath of the attack. This brings into context Jack Lacan who thinks that “it suffices to understand the mirror stage . . . as an identification . . . namely the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image” (Fink, 2006, p.76).

Kaplan explores the different positions and contexts of encounters with trauma. At one point there is the direct trauma victim while at the other hand there is a vicarious victim who encounter trauma by being “a bystander, by living near to where the catastrophe happened, or by hearing about a crisis from a friend. But most people encounter trauma through the media, which is why focusing on so-called mediatized trauma is important” (2).

Kaplan(2005) contends that most of people encounter trauma vicariously rather than immediately through media (p.87). As such, Lianne is a vicarious trauma victim because she has experienced 9/11 events through media. When Keith first arrives at Lianne’s apartment after he escapes from the World Trade Center, “[s]he turn[s] off the TV set...protecting him from the news” (DeLillo, 2007, p.87). This means that she is witnessing the attack on T.V. While Keith is living the moment of the attack, Lianne is watching it on TV. Media creates an entire group of global witnesses privy to the same scene, the same chaos, as those who were actually experiencing the events first-hand. Importantly, Ursula k.heise (1997) argues that telecommunications have created a global space where all events from physically-remote places take place simultaneously and instantaneously. She further states that the contemporary television juxtaposes “disjunct times and spaces in visual simultaneity” (P.23-24). Here, we deduce two main temporal values that constitute the kernel of the spatialization of time: simultaneity and instantaneity. In line with this, the 9/11 attack is globally witnessed through digital technologies at the same instant of its happening. It reaches different TV viewers from different physically remote places simultaneously. Thereby, one may suggest that the catastrophic event of 9/11 contributes to spatialize the concept of time since it is simultaneously and instantaneously perceived from different viewers.

Every time Lianne watches the event in horror, she relives that painful experience. DeLillo states that:

Every time she saw a videotape of the planes she moved a finger toward the power button on the remote. Then she kept on watching. The second plane coming out of that ice blue sky, this was the footage that entered the body, that seemed to run beneath her skin, the fleeting spirit that carried lives and histories, theirs and hers, everyone’s, into some other distance, out beyond the towers (p.134)

Here, Lianne feels compelled to re-witness and repeat the 9/11 trauma “out of some need she did not try to interpret” ( DeLillo, 2007, p.106) and because it runs “beneath her skin”. In fact, the repetitive nature of 9/11 footage in the US media can be understood as a compulsive repetition that is defined by Freud as a means of controlling trauma. This is evident in Freud’s

famous example of the *fort-da* game where a child seeks to overcome the anxiety of being abandoned by his mother. He repeats the process of departure and return by throwing away and retrieving a spool attached to a piece of string. Such repetition that comes out of psychological repression can lead to a normalization and familiarisation (cited in Boothby, 1991, p.2-3).

It is worth adding that the trauma of 9/11 resurrects Lianne's previous trauma of her father's suicide. Her father "did not want to submit to the long course of senile dementia. He made a couple of phone calls from his cabin in northern New Hampshire and then used an old sporting rifle to kill himself" (DeLillo, 2007, p. 40). Kaplan (2005) states that new traumatic events contribute to revive prior ones (2). Even though the suicide of her father was not a collective, historical trauma like 9/11, the attack triggers her original trauma. Accordingly, Herman (1992) explains the awakening of original traumas by providing the example of a traumatized therapist: "Hearing the patient's trauma story is bound to revive any personal traumatic experiences that the therapist may have suffered in the past. She may also notice imagery associated with the patient's story intruding into her own waking fantasies or dreams" (p.140). Here, Herman argues that the traumatized therapist awakens his own personal trauma once he encounters his patients' traumatic experiences though they are irrelevant to his. Lianne is a similar case. Her father's suicide trauma comes again into existence after living the 9/11 trauma. As such, while reading about 9/11 from the opinions of Alzheimer's Patients, she subconsciously reflects on the unexpected suicide of her father: "She read everything they wrote about the attacks. She thought of her father. She saw him coming down an escalator, in an airport maybe" (DeLillo, 2007, p. 67). For Lianne, 9/11 and her father's unexpected suicide are dovetailed.

The performance artist "Falling Man" plays a prominent role in recreating Lianne's traumatic past. His falls from various structures in New York brings to mind the people who fell to their deaths from the towers. DeLillo writes:

She'd [Lianne] heard of him, a performance artist known as Falling Man. He'd appeared several times in the last week, unannounced, in various parts of the city, suspended from one or another structure, always upside down, wearing a suit, a tie and dress shoes. He brought it back, of course, those stark moments in the burning towers when people fell or were forced to jump. He'd been seen dangling from a balcony in a hotel atrium and police had escorted him out of a concert hall and two or three apartment buildings with terraces or accessible rooftops. ( DeLillo, 2007, p.33)

By introducing this Falling Man, DeLillo insists on the necessity of remembering in order to be able to reconstruct healthy identities. This figure forces Lianne to relive the trauma she has endured when she has captured people jumping from the World Trade Center

Unlike Keith who lives in a state of melancholia, Lianne experiences a state of mourning. Although her life is choreographed by grief and loss, she starts to work through her own trauma.

Kali Tal(1996) states that one of the forms of recovery for traumatized victims is the decision to give up anger and accept the world as it is (145). That is, instead of dwelling on the traumatic past, the victim should take control of his own present life and move on. In a similar case, Lianne decides to control her own trauma and accept her world as it is. To meet this end, she accepts her boss's offer to edit a book that will uncover the facts and circumstances behind 9/11 attack. Throughout this project , Lianne does not plan to recreate or repeat her trauma but to control it and to develop a psychic defense against it. This book is to be:

[A] detailing a series of interlocking global forces that appeared to converge at an explosive point in time and space that might be said to represent the locus of Boston, New York and Washington on a late-summer morning early in the twenty-first century. . . it contains a long sort of treatise on plane hijacking. It contains many documents concerning the vulnerability of certain airports. It names Dulles and Logan. It names many things that actually happened or are happening now. Wall Street, Afghanistan, this thing, that thing. Afghanistan is happening” (DeLillo, 2007, p. 139).

Lianne immediately approves on conducting this project in order to make a positive change in her life, without taking into consideration “how dense, raveled and intimidating the material might be or how finally unprophetic” (DeLillo, 2007,p.139). Moreover, She contemplates on what Martin had told her: “Stand apart. See things clinically, unemotionally. . . [m]easure the elements. Work the elements together. Learn something from the event. Make yourself equal to it” (DeLillo, 2007, p.140). Thereupon, she can use this book as a way to learn lessons from such catastrophic event and to look forward. By telling her to “make [herself] equal to the event”, Martin recommends Lianne to be as great as this global event in order to go through it.

Lianne shows her willingness to go through her own trauma and to look for positive change when she tells one of her son's friends that: “Maybe just maybe. This is what I think. Maybe it's time for him to disappear. The man whose name we all know...Maybe just maybe it's time to stop searching the skies, time to stop talking about the man I'm talking about. What do you think? Yes or no?” (DeLillo,2007, p. 153). By wondering whether Americans should go through their trauma or not, Lianne is moving towards recovery. She becomes aware of the necessity to conduct a new-born life free of paranoia, anxiety and skepticism. By the end of the novel, Lianne succeeds to piece her fragmented identity together. She becomes “ready to be alone, in reliable calm, she and the kid, the way they were before the planes appeared that day, silver crossing blue”. (p.236) Moreover, she becomes also ready to be “[c]ut free from rage and foreboding. Cut free from nights that sprawl through endless waking chains of self-hell” (DeLillo,2007, p. 182).

Importantly, DeLillo juxtaposes the past with the present in order to demonstrate to what extent the present is always shaped by the trauma of the past. He sheds light on two major

characters Keith and Lianne whose lives are now measured by the aftermath of the attack. Although each one of them wields his/her trauma in a different way, both of them still live in a spatialized time where their past coexists with their present. However, spatialization of time is not maintained through Keith and Lianne only, but it is embodied in the way DeLillo connects terrorism of the past and terrorism of the present. He calls the reader's attention to the painting Ridnour keeps in his apartment: a poster of nineteen German terrorists wanted for various crimes in the seventies. Nina informs her daughter Lianne that Ridnour has shown her a poster when she has met him in Berlin: "He keeps an apartment there. A wanted poster. German terrorists of the early seventies. Nineteen names and faces . . . [w]anted for murder, bombings, bank robberies. He keeps it—I don't know why he keeps it". ( DeLillo, 2007, p.147) Purposefully, DeLillo relates this poster to the poster of nineteen terrorists responsible for 9/11, released by the FBI in order to draw a similarity between past and present terrorism (Kauffman, 2008, p.361). The link between the two posters is explicit in Nina's words when she explains to her daughter that: "He thinks these people, these jihadists, he thinks they have something in common with the radicals of the sixties and seventies. He thinks they're all part of the same classical system. They have their theorists. They have their visions of world brotherhood". (DeLillo, 2007, p.147)

## Conclusion

Finally, one cannot deny the fact that the spatialization of time does invade the horizon of the postmodern novel. Time becomes no more chronological but rather spatial in the sense that all times are juxtaposed together in a moment like objects in space. Postmodern writers like DeLillo attempts to freeze time and thus focus on one moment in his characters' conscious lives, at which other moments intersect. For instance, in *Falling Man*, DeLillo draws the reader's attention to Keith's and Lianne's traumatic moment that is haunted by the trauma of the past or the moment of the attack. Thereupon, the reader may notice that simultaneity occupies a major space in the consciousness of those characters. However, the reaction of each character towards his/her trauma differs from one to another. On the one hand, Lianne whose present conscious life becomes imprisoned to her past memories succeeds to get out of her frozen and static life and proceeds towards a prosperous future. On the contrary, Keith remains in a state of melancholia where his present life becomes consumed by the trauma of the past

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