

Models of Consciousness in the Novels of Don DeLillo

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The Candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others

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Abstract

This thesis argues that an appreciation of Don DeLillo's engagement with the problems of post-war philosophy of mind is essential to a full understanding of his work. It suggests that he examines various forms of scepticism that prevail in the postmodern treatment of consciousness and traces the disorientation to which they lead, especially the obstacles they present to the formation and development of subjectivity. Much previous criticism has tended to assume that DeLillo regards consciousness as effectively powerless, entrapped and determined by the action of all-powerful systems, whether technological, linguistic, or economic. By contrast, this thesis acknowledges the partial autonomy that DeLillo grants consciousness and notes his exploration of the various epistemologies open to it in contemporary culture. I argue that DeLillo's first six novels survey crucial questions in contemporary debates about consciousness, particularly those raised by the materialism and, paradoxically, the extreme intellectual abstraction characteristic of postmodern Western culture. Notable among these early themes are the reality and reliability of consciousness; the relationship between mind and body; the analogy between mind and computer; the properties of the right and left hemispheres of the brain, and the rational and intuitive modes of thought that they are said to govern. I suggest that DeLillo's subsequent novels are increasingly preoccupied by intuitive models of consciousness that allow mind a considerably greater ontological status than that accorded to it in postmodern culture. These range from the implication, in The Names (1982) and White Noise (1984), that mind may be more powerful than language, or the prospect of death, to the communal model of consciousness that prevails in Libra (1988), Mao II (1991), and Underworld (1997), which, I argue, is close to the model outlined in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's work on schizophrenia. DeLillo's most recent novels, The Body Artist (2001) and Cosmopolis (2003), explore the possibility of a search for 'root identity', or consciousness as such, which, although seemingly driven by a desire to escape culture, remains quintessentially postmodern in its emulation of contemporary science's desire to account for the enigmatic relation between mind and body.

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Introduction: Models of Consciousness

The twentieth century witnessed a revolution in our attitude to consciousness. Psychoanalysis and much of modernist literature challenged radically the notion of mind and subjectivity as autonomous and self-present. Since World War Two, parallel developments in technology, neuroscience, and philosophy have shattered any semblance of consensus around the issue and fractured the debate into warring groups that often do not share even the same vocabulary or basic assumptions, let alone comparable views. Philosophers have even come to disagree on whether our experience of the mind is sufficiently similar that there really is a single entity we can refer to as consciousness. Daniel C. Dennett, for example, uses the differences between phenomenologists' accounts of mental experience to justify dismissing the 'long-standing scientific tradition' that 'we all agree on what we find when we "look inside"'.¹ Why have scientific advances served to intensify the debate and render it more complex in a way that they have not with, say, the analysis of air or water? Is consciousness, for some reason, uniquely resistant to scientific explanation, or does objective analysis of the mind simply threaten our naive sense that there is something private, or even sacred, about our thought process? John R. Searle argues that the blend of mental and physical characteristics possessed by consciousness does present a unique problem.² Where science would normally reduce an object to its constituent parts, for example, analysing water as molecules of hydrogen and oxygen, the analysis of consciousness, according to Searle, demands recognition of its mental and physical aspects. A simple 'appearance-reality distinction', in which the 'appearance' of thought is explained as the 'reality' of fibres and neurons in the brain, is inadequate

¹ Daniel C. Dennett, Consciousness Explained (London: Penguin, 1992), pp.66-72.

because, Searle contends, 'the appearance is the reality': the existence of consciousness is irreducible (p.122). The philosophical problem is not new: what Searle refers to as reductionism, G.W.F. Hegel called scientific 'formalism'.³ Hegel complains of science's readiness to believe that 'understanding is electricity' and 'animals are nitrogen' and dismisses such methodology as a 'forceful procedure', a mere connection of 'sense-ideas', which 'brings and holds together elements to all appearances far removed from one another' (p.109). But, in postmodernity, science's augmented ability to analyse the structure of the brain and build machines capable of reproducing elements of human thought has made consideration of the nature of consciousness particularly urgent and highly controversial. What ontological status should be attributed to consciousness? Does it work on the same principles as a computer? Of what precisely is it capable? What grounds do we have for trusting our perceptions? Perhaps surprisingly, comparatively little attention has been devoted to the response of literary artists to these challenging questions.

It is in this troubled area, where philosophy and science meet uneasily, that this thesis on Don DeLillo begins. Rather than the post-structuralist theories of the subject or the varieties of linguistic and systems theory previously employed to explicate DeLillo's work, my early chapters emphasise his engagement with the problems of post-war philosophy of mind. In particular, I argue he examines various forms of scepticism that prevail in the postmodern treatment of consciousness and traces the disorientation to which they lead, especially the obstacles they present to the formation and development of subjectivity. DeLillo's novels have long since become a major area of interest for academic critics. Five book length studies of

² John. R. Searle, The Rediscovery of the Mind (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992)

³ G.W.F. Hegel, The Phenomenology of Mind, trans. by J.B. Baillie (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1931), p.109.

DeLillo have been published, as well as numerous journal articles and book chapters, and the flow of critical work shows no immediate sign of abating. David Cowart has suggested that the quantity and high quality of the full-length studies published so far means that few more are now required.⁴ Yet, the amount of criticism produced obscures the fact that many published articles concentrate on a handful of major novels, like White Noise (1984), Libra (1988), and Underworld (1997), and that less commercially successful earlier texts, such as Ratner's Star (1976), The Names (1982), and Americana (1971) receive comparatively little attention.⁵ Moreover, although critics provide what DeLillo has called 'a broad analysis of the social issues' in his work, often concentrating on technological systems or consumer culture and their numbing effect on the postmodern subject, they have left unexamined the relevance of DeLillo's work to contemporary debates about consciousness.⁶

Accordingly, I suggest DeLillo's first six novels survey crucial questions in these debates, particularly those raised by the materialism and, paradoxically, the extreme intellectual abstraction characteristic of postmodern Western culture. Notable among these early themes are the reality and reliability of consciousness; the relationship between mind and body; the analogy between mind and computer; the properties of the right and left hemispheres of the brain, and the rational and intuitive modes of thought that they are said to govern. These novels often present contemporary culture as an unremittingly terrifying force, forging a world in which little value is attributed to consciousness and use of the mind is limited to highly abstract thought that

⁴ David Cowart, The Physics of Language (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2002), p.x.

⁵ Don DeLillo, White Noise (London: Picador, 1989), Don DeLillo, Underworld (London: Picador, 1997) Don DeLillo, Libra (London: Penguin, 1989), Don DeLillo, Ratner's Star (London: Vintage, 1991), The Names (London: Picador, 1989) and Don DeLillo, Americana (London: Penguin, 1990)

excludes emotion and the body. In this hostile environment, subjectivity is either abortive or degenerates into the kind of schizophrenic 'false-self system', described by R.D. Laing.⁷ In varying ways, therefore, Americana, End Zone (1972), Great Jones Street (1973), and Ratner's Star present quests for rapprochement with the body and belief in the trustworthiness and ontological status of mind.⁸ DeLillo's fifth and sixth novels, Players (1977) and Running Dog (1978), continue to present postmodern culture as nightmarish in its hostility to humane thought and behaviour, but portray characters that embrace the more nihilistic elements of postmodernity that destroy mind, emotion, and subjectivity.⁹ In this respect, they double back on the trajectory of DeLillo's fiction thus far, but also prefigure his later interest in the seductive power of postmodern models of consciousness.

In discussing the seven novels that follow, I argue that they take a generally more optimistic attitude to the opportunities available within postmodernity. The Names and White Noise explore the possibility of employing the characteristics of postmodern culture, particularly its concern with the notion of excess, to produce a model of consciousness that values mind above either language or death, which are often held to be significantly more powerful. Libra, Mao II (1991), and Underworld examine a more communal model of consciousness that prevails in postmodernity, which, though it limits the autonomy of the individual, may elevate the status of mind

⁶ David Remnick, 'Exile on Main Street: Don DeLillo's Undisclosed Underworld', in The New Yorker, 15th September 1997, pp.42-48 (p.47).

⁷ R.D. Laing, The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness (London: Penguin, 1990), p.69, p.75.

⁸ Don DeLillo, End Zone (New York: Penguin, 1986) and Don DeLillo, Great Jones Street, (London: Picador, 1998)

⁹ Don DeLillo, Players (London: Vintage, 1991) and Running Dog (London: Vintage, 1992)

as such.¹⁰ I argue that these three texts portray a less pathological form of schizophrenia afflicting the American subject, which is related to the influence of capitalism and is close to the model outlined in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's work on schizophrenia, particularly Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia.¹¹ In spite of this growing interest in psychological unity, however, in the five novels from The Names to Underworld, DeLillo portrays a fierce battle between modernist and postmodernist forms of subjectivity. A number of major characters cling tenaciously to discrete modernist forms of self, which equip them poorly for contemporary life, with its electronic mediation and unifying psychological forces. DeLillo suggests such characters must accommodate such emergent forces or die, sometimes literally. At times, DeLillo associates modernist subjectivity with paranoia, which he presents as an isolating frame of mind that resists the unifying forces of postmodernity and dismisses non-whites as mere waste. DeLillo's most recent novels, The Body Artist (2001) and Cosmopolis (2003), represent another apparent turn in the trajectory of his work, exploring the possibility of a search for 'root identity', or consciousness as such.¹² Paradoxically, this quest, which seems driven by a desire to escape culture, remains quintessentially postmodern in its emulation of contemporary science's desire to account for the enigmatic relation between mind and body and its implications for the nature of consciousness.

Many critics have felt confident in categorising DeLillo as exemplary of postmodernism. Paul Civello, for example, argues boldly that DeLillo's work is a

¹⁰ Don DeLillo, Mao II (London: Vintage, 1992)

¹¹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seers, and Helen R. Lane (London: Athlone Press, 1984)

¹² Don DeLillo, The Body Artist (London: Picador, 2002) and Cosmopolis (London: Picador, 2003)

postmodernist revision of Hemingwayesque naturalism.¹³ He suggests that, while Hemingway presents consciousness ‘as an ordering principle’, opposed to destructive natural force’ (p.3), DeLillo’s ‘postmodern transformation of the naturalistic form’ (p.112) presents ‘the self with a new dilemma: how to locate the subjective self in and reconcile it to a world in which there is no distinction between subject and object’ (p.123). More recently, criticism has begun to explore the manifold tensions and overlaps in DeLillo’s work between modernism and postmodernism, both in his aesthetic and his presentation of subjectivity. Certainly, I suggest that DeLillo’s relationship to modernism and postmodernism is more complex and ambivalent than Civello would acknowledge. DeLillo demonstrates no commitment to any particular aesthetic, but adopts the literary modes and techniques that assist him in exploring particular forms of consciousness. Indeed, form is often employed allegorically in DeLillo’s work, that is, primarily as a metaphor to convey the mind-set of the character being represented. The result is an oeuvre that employs a complex mixture of modernist and postmodernist techniques and defies the boundary between modernism and postmodernism. Although the contemporary subject matter of the early novels --Rock music, Terrorism, Television etc.-- might lead one to expect quintessentially postmodernist texts, they often employ traditional or generic narrative modes and parody mainstream discourses, in a characteristically modernist fashion. Moreover, their protagonists sometimes aspire to discrete, modernist forms of selfhood, whose stability seems highly appealing, after the disorientation of postmodern culture. Yet, simultaneously, a contemporary cinematic aesthetic is often at work in these novels. This is manifest in the use of rapid ‘cuts’ between scenes,

¹³ Paul Civello, American Literary Naturalism and its Twentieth-Century Transformations (Athens, GA, University of Georgia Press, 1994)

which mimics the style of avant-garde cinema, especially that of Jean-Luc Godard, as in End Zone, Players, and Running Dog, as well intense interest in the relationship between film and subjectivity, which is especially important in Americana. It is also sometimes apparent in a detached, cinematic mode of narration, which seems mimetic of the numbed, affectless mode of subjectivity that DeLillo often finds in postmodern America. I sometimes call this 'camera-eye' narration, after John Dos Passos' use of the term in his novel USA.¹⁴

DeLillo's later fiction contains the same idiosyncratic blend of literary modes. In The Names, a quasi-realist aesthetic resembling modernist naturalism is employed to indicate the anachronistic colonialist subjectivity of the novel's American expatriates. References to this aesthetic recur in subsequent novels, notably Libra and Mao II, usually in the form of allusions to Hemingway, who, justly or not, repeatedly serves DeLillo as the emblem of a naturalistic simplicity, which entails a one-to-one correspondence between signifier and referent. In Libra, Lee Harvey Oswald's belief that Soviet Russia will inspire him to write in Hemingway's style associates the country's stark material conditions with a naturalism that contrasts with the disorientating unreality of American culture (p.160). These intermittent returns to naturalism may be partly inspired by Hemingway's considerable influence on the young DeLillo. In a recent interview, DeLillo admitted having once written a 'short story that was supposed to be like one of Hemingway's', before revealing that 'Hemingway was the greatest for me at that time. And, to be honest, my fascination with him has never entirely faded'.¹⁵ On the other hand, the later novels often engage

¹⁴ John Dos Passos, USA (New York: Library of America, 1996)

¹⁵ Peter Henning, 'An Interview with Don DeLillo', in Frankfurter Rundschau, 20th November 2003, 271, pp.28-29, trans, by Julie Apitzsch at <http://www.perival.com/delillo/ddinterview_henning.html>, last accessed 3rd April 2005.

with visual culture in a typically postmodernist way. Mao II contains a number of photographs representing the contemporary events it references, while Underworld contains extended analyses of video footage and employs a more expansive form of camera-eye narration than that of the early fiction, which makes rapid connections between seemingly disparate groups. Paradoxically, though, Underworld also makes use of techniques like montage, which derive from modernist cinema, and is modernist in its proliferation of internal connections, which construct the text in the form of a closed, autotelic system. This is to be partly explained by Underworld's status as historical novel, which depicts the waning of modernist thought and the emergence of its postmodernist successor, but it also makes plain that DeLillo is not to be easily categorised, either aesthetically or thematically.

DeLillo's novels range widely, and idiosyncratically, in their approach to consciousness and a study like this one therefore requires a considerable variety of theoretical ideas to do them justice. In the first half of the thesis, when I introduce the central issues of postmodern philosophy of mind, my references include neuroscientists, like Antonio Damasio, the mathematician Sir Roger Penrose, and the philosopher and AI specialist Daniel C. Dennett. Later, when I emphasise a more positive engagement with postmodern culture, I use the work of post-structuralist theoreticians like Jacques Derrida, François Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze, and Felix Guattari. DeLillo often writes in opposition to the objectivist, quasi-scientific approaches to the mind that prevail in postmodernity and accentuates what John R. Searle calls the irreducibly 'first-person ontology' of consciousness (p.17). It proves necessary for DeLillo's characters to recognise the fundamentally subjective nature of consciousness, both in order to appreciate the mind's full potential and to construct a

mode of subjectivity capable of adapting to postmodernity, without suffering psychological breakdown. Consequently, I also make use of phenomenologists such as Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who are both examples of what David Porush calls 'holistic viewpoints which suggest that human beings can only know themselves as consciousness', and therefore particularly appropriate reference points for DeLillo's fiction.¹⁶ My discussions of such philosophers are interspersed with citations of thinkers on topics such as linguistics and systems theory and quotations from scholars too numerous to list, which elaborate upon the eclectic list of subjects that DeLillo's novels address, such as religion, politics, historiography, sport, and warfare. By ranging widely, I aim to demonstrate the centrality of consciousness to DeLillo's fiction. I argue that his treatment of all these subjects is readily interpretable in the context of his concern with consciousness, indeed, that he often presents them, and his characters' reactions to them, primarily as manifestations of a particular model of mind, body, and selfhood.

I implicitly include this concatenation of mind, body, and subjectivity under the title 'Models of Consciousness'. How far is this justified? Part of the usefulness of the term consciousness is that, to an informed readership, it connotes the intense, relatively recent debates surrounding Artificial Intelligence and the discoveries of neuroscience and the extent to which these have explained the 'mystery' of consciousness. It is also useful as a catch all term, which helps one overcome the extent and complexity of the disagreements on fundamental issues within philosophy of mind. Under its aegis, so to speak, the critic can construct a view of the relation between mind, body, and subjectivity that seems justified by the work of the author(s) whose oeuvre they are examining; in this case, that of Don DeLillo. There still exists,

¹⁶ David Porush, The Soft Machine: Cybernetic Fiction (New York: Methuen, 1985), p.68.

for example, little agreement on the relationship between body and mind, or whether unconscious thoughts are part of what we call consciousness. On the latter question, DeLillo often leaves considerable ambiguity as to whether conscious or unconscious thoughts motivate the actions of characters. Rather than pursuing this frequently intractable question, I treat the unconscious as part of consciousness, adopting, as a working assumption, John R. Searle's view that 'The notion of an unconscious mental state implies accessibility to consciousness' (p.152). On the mind-body relation, DeLillo lays frequent emphasis on the body's importance in promoting vigorous emotional and intellectual response. I therefore use thinkers such as neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, who argues that emotion is realised and expressed through the body and that such manifestations are essential to coherent thought.¹⁷

The enigmatic relationship between mind and subjectivity is at the heart of my approach to DeLillo. Though Descartes' axiom 'I think, therefore I am' implies that thought gives rise directly to the sense of self, epistemology leads straightforwardly to ontology, a complex debate continues to rage about the nature of this relation.¹⁸ Some theorists regard a sense of self as necessary to consciousness: others believe consciousness to be the sine qua non of subjectivity. Damasio proposes the former view: in evolutionary terms, 'something like a sense of self was needed to make the signals that constitute the feeling of emotion known to the organism having the emotion' (p.8). Therefore, for a state to qualify as consciousness, it must not only provide awareness of worldly phenomena, but also of the self as perceiver: consciousness of the self as conscious. DeLillo not infrequently treats these issues

¹⁷ Antonio Damasio, The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness (London: Heinemann, 1999), p.287, p.41.

¹⁸ Rene Descartes, Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy, trans. by Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1980), p.17.

with wry levity, but always demonstrates an acute awareness of their complexity. In End Zone, the football player Bing Jackmin informs the novel's protagonist Gary Harkness that 'I sensed knowledge in the football', 'It was aware of its own footballness', only to be countered by Gary's knowing rejoinder 'But was it aware of its own awareness? That's the ultimate test, you know' (p.23). DeLillo never endorses Cartesian dualism, but often presents the relationship between knowing and being with the directness that is implied by Descartes' 'cogito ergo sum'. Yet, for DeLillo, this is a causal relationship, never a logical one. He examines the numerous epistemologies available to the postmodern subject and, without moral judgement, studies the consequences for his characters' ontology, particularly with respect to the forms of subjectivity they produce. In using the term 'epistemology', I adapt it slightly from its classical sense of 'the theory of knowledge', to refer to any mode in which the mind may apprehend the world.¹⁹ I therefore apply it to the modes of thought adopted by characters and the theories of consciousness articulated or implied in the novels, categories that, because of DeLillo's habit of having characters take on certain theories of the mind as their personal epistemology, are sometimes identical. 'Ontology' refers to the study of the nature of being. I employ the term throughout the thesis to refer to the forms of being, particularly the modes of selfhood, produced by the various epistemologies DeLillo examines.

The dispassionate, even clinical, portrayal of characters' mental and emotional response, under the influence of various approaches to mental activity, constitutes the main content of DeLillo's novels and accounts for much of their mesmeric power. Their compelling force also emerges from DeLillo's distinctive prose style, which is often marked by a free, paratactic linking of clauses that suspends and defers

¹⁹ Gregory McCulloch, The Mind and Its World (London: Routledge, 1995), p.9.

meaning, in a way that verges on the hypnotic. In Great Jones Street, for instance, Bucky writes of the ‘chance to remake himself, lean man of mystery, returning with the fabled tapes for all to hear, luring his crowds to near silence, their fear in baby bottles under their seats’ (p.149). The suspension of syntactic and narrative logic implicit in this style, which DeLillo adopts frequently, allows the reader to focus on the motions of his or her own consciousness and imagination and therefore to consider what I argue is the primary subject of DeLillo’s novels. Moreover, its elliptical quality, which is achieved by the omission of certain conjunctions and prepositions, deliberately gestures away from language to emphasise mind and subjectivity as entities that exist independently of signification.

I attribute considerable agency and autonomy to the human subject in DeLillo’s work. My argument that DeLillo posits a causal link between epistemology and ontology implies that, in his work, epistemological shifts produce concomitant changes in ontology. Indeed, I argue that DeLillo depicts numerous characters that deliberately alter their epistemology, either in response to historical change or physical and mental dysfunction. Their success in this enterprise varies widely. But from the numerous variations on catastrophe and relief that attend their efforts, I suggest that it is possible, tentatively, to deduce DeLillo’s view of which epistemologies may help to construct a self, capable of at least a measure of psychological stability. This will surprise some. Critics often suggest that DeLillo portrays postmodernity as having radically reduced the importance of the self. In particular, my view runs counter to an early, influential strain of thought in DeLillo studies, initiated by Robert Nadeau, which employed systems theory and the ‘New Physics’ to explicate the novels and often treated consciousness as wholly impotent,

trapped within the operation of impersonal mechanisms that utterly determine its fate.

²⁰ Nadeau had a particular influence on Civello and Tom LeClair, who both use forms of systems theory derived from scientific analysis. ²¹ Their work has exerted tacit influence on the many subsequent critics who believe that DeLillo's fiction merely represents the Baudrillardian 'simulacrum' that prevails in postmodern capitalism. ²² The restrictive, hermetic closure of this simulacrum bears close resemblance to the systems LeClair and Nadeau see in DeLillo's novels. The difference of the Baudrillardian view is that characters are not imprisoned by the determining action of linguistic or technological systems, but by radical alienation from reality. Yet, DeLillo often emphasises the dangers of losing a coherent sense of subjectivity and presents those characters that do so as enfeebled and neurotic, in desperate need of an epistemology that will provide them with a sustainable sense of self. As Damasio argues, 'the tendency towards one single self and its advantage to the healthy mind are undeniable' (p.226). In 'The Power of History', DeLillo stresses the resilience of the self in the face of multiple contemporary attacks on its integrity. ²³ He admits that postmodernity has left the self 'mazed, mercurial, scared half-crazy', but insists it remains 'free and undivided, the only thing that can match the enormous dimensions of social reality' (p.62).

Over recent years, some criticism has acknowledged the importance of DeLillo's concern with selfhood and the degree of autonomy his characters exercise

²⁰ Robert Nadeau, Readings from the New Book on Nature: Physics and Metaphysics in the Modern Novel (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981), p.162.

²¹ Tom LeClair, In the Loop: Don DeLillo and the Systems Novel (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1987)

²² Jean Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p.1.

²³ Don DeLillo, 'The Power of History' in The New York Times, 7th September 1997, pp.60-63.

in the construction of subjectivity. Curtis Yehnert writes of the 'strategies of self-creation' practised by many of DeLillo's characters and suggests that his work limns a 'postexistential' notion of self, in which the creation of subjectivity is based on a 'dialectic between form and formlessness'.²⁴ But, in spite of such useful contributions to the debate on DeLillo's treatment of ontology, the critical importance of epistemology and its dynamic relationship to ontology in DeLillo's work remains largely unrecognised. By overlooking these concerns, critics underestimate the complexity of DeLillo's analysis of the human subject and the American citizen's relationship with institutions like the corporation and the state. Rather than presenting individual behaviour as determined by vast institutions or technological networks, DeLillo portrays an intricate relationship between the prevailing models of consciousness in American culture and Americans' collective response to, sometimes, pernicious cultural forces. DeLillo repeatedly focuses on the relative psychological vulnerability of characters that accept theories emphasising the weakness of mind and the unreality of their perceptions. He distinguishes fastidiously between epistemologies, like these, that foster fragility and uncertainty and others that promote significant autonomy and independence. In interview, DeLillo has warned of 'a mechanism' in American 'culture' that 'tries to reduce any threat to consumer consciousness'.²⁵ He has also stated repeatedly his hope that his novels 'point out an opposition to the state, the industry consensus, and the runaway consumerism'.²⁶

²⁴ Curtis Yehnert, "'Like Some Endless Sky Waking Inside': Subjectivity in Don DeLillo", Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction, 42 (2001), 357-66 (p.361).

²⁵ Jonathan Bing, 'The Ascendance of Don DeLillo', in Publishers Weekly, 11th August 1997, pp.261-3, at <<http://www.publishersweekly.com/article/OA164963html?text=ascendance+of+don+delillo>>, last accessed 2nd April 2005.

²⁶ Bo Green Jensen, 'The Triumph of Death', in Weekend Avisen, trans. by Jakob Schelander, 13th November 1998, at <http://www.perival.com/delillo/ddinterview_jensen.html>, last accessed 2nd April 2005.

Since the largest threat to 'consumer consciousness' is likely to be a population convinced of the accuracy of its own perceptions and its ability to make reliable, independent judgements, DeLillo's interest in American attitudes to mind is central to the dissident spirit of his work.

Death plays a pivotal role in DeLillo's concern with consciousness. The distaste for the body that he finds in American culture is generally metonymic of endemic death-anxiety, which DeLillo often relates to terror of the unforgiving Puritan God. In the early work, this fear of mortality forestalls recognition of Searle's 'first-person ontology' and locks characters into what Americana's David Bell calls 'the third person' (p.58). Rather than accept mortality, DeLillo's characters often adopt a third person view of their mind, which faithfully replicates the methodologies of the objectivist philosophies of consciousness, like behaviourism and Artificial Intelligence, which have been so influential in the post-war period. Evasion of first-person epistemology contributes to a loss of faith in the reliability of perception, which further hinders acceptance of 'first-person ontology' and creates a self-perpetuating cycle. DeLillo again seems notably Hegelian in the importance he attributes to overcoming death-anxiety, for the mind to flourish. Hegel argues it is a sign of the mind's power that it 'endures death and in death maintains its being' and asserts that 'mind is this power only by looking the negative in the face and dwelling with it. This dwelling beside it is the magic power that converts the negative into being' (Phenomenology, p.93). DeLillo's characters often see a necessity for confronting and overcoming death. They do so by risking death, reading about it, embracing the functions of the body, or, on occasion, by engaging in a process of

psychic merger with mortality that seems Buddhist in its quest for a union of subject and object.

DeLillo's acknowledgement of a debt to Ernest Becker's The Denial of Death has often been noted.²⁷ He discussed the influence in a letter to Tom LeClair, from which LeClair quotes (Loop, p.213). Yet, surprisingly, the fact that the book is a work of Rankian analysis has rarely been mentioned and DeLillo's affinities with Otto Rank have not been considered. The Denial of Death follows Otto Rank in regarding death-anxiety as the ultimate motivating factor in human behaviour. While DeLillo never adopts such a totalising perspective on mortality, his work is highly susceptible to a Rankian reading, most notably in his examination of the seductive power of American image-culture. DeLillo treats his characters' passionate relationship with the iconic images of cinema and television as the displacement of a powerful wish to escape death. The characters treat the stars of visual culture as alter egos blessed with eternal life, with whom they wish to identify and merge. In Rankian terms, these unreal figures exemplify the immortal 'double', which Rank believes recurs throughout art history and functions as a 'symbol of eternal life'.²⁸ DeLillo's later novels never abandon this concern with death-anxiety, but after its explicit treatment in White Noise it fades somewhat as a factor in the characters' pathologies. Indeed, in DeLillo's subsequent three novels, Libra, Mao II, and Underworld, there is a notable association of death-anxiety with modernist paranoia, with the implication that postmodernity presents the American subject with the opportunity of escaping the terror that haunted its Puritan past. Accordingly, The Body Artist and Cosmopolis provide DeLillo's most explicit and detailed portrayals thus far of protagonists who

²⁷ Ernest Becker, The Denial of Death (New York: Macmillan Free Press, 1973)

²⁸ Otto Rank, Beyond Psychology (New York: Dover Publications, 1958), p.76.

achieve highly productive rapprochement with death. Both novels feature protagonists that encounter death at close quarters and so greatly enlarge their understanding of mind, body, and time. As in Heidegger and Hegel, it is only by courageous and patient 'dwelling beside' mortality that mind discovers its inherent 'power' and more is revealed of the complex ontology of the human subject.

In Chapter 1, I begin with a reading of Americana, DeLillo's first novel and, thematically, the Ur-text of his oeuvre. It contains, in embryo, many of the ideas that persist throughout DeLillo's work, including the inability of the protagonist to live in the 'first person' and the complicity of the American Corporation in undermining regard for consciousness. The novel is also particularly notable for its exploration of the ingrained asceticism that it presents as fundamental to American capitalism and masculinity. The television executive David Bell struggles to choose between this destructive mainstream asceticism and a more traditional, perhaps more authentic, kind, which entails solitude, self-denial, and a realist appreciation of mind and world.

Chapter 2 contains readings of End Zone and Great Jones Street, in which I argue against the view that their concerns are primarily metaphysical and propose that they portray a struggle to achieve an anti-Wittgensteinian, realist view of consciousness as ineffable but concrete and irreducible. The texts enact a paradoxical engagement with popular culture, treating it as both poison and possible cure. In Great Jones Street, underground drugs produce aphasia but allow the protagonist to save his fragmented consciousness from the disorientating image-culture of rock music. In End Zone, football is an apparent obstacle to cerebral activity, but also a source of order that facilitates mental discipline and private examination of consciousness.

Chapter 3 examines Ratner's Star, which takes as its conceit the 'unification' of the brain's right and left hemispheres and explores the uses of the intuitive and rational modes of thought with which these are associated. A group of elite academics seek the source of a radio message, which turns out to have emerged from a more advanced civilization of pre-history. Their neglect of body and emotion, which they associate with irrationality and death, robs them of the intuitive ability necessary to discover this truth. The novel suggests that exclusively abstract thought and the conflation of the self with intellect results in the creation of what R.D. Laing calls a psychotic 'false-self system', which alienates the scientists from themselves, others, and their collective history.

Chapter 4 focuses on Players and Running Dog and continues this concern with the Laingian 'false-self system', investigating the fragile and artificial forms of subjectivity forged through human identification with technology, which DeLillo clearly considers a central pathology of postmodernity. I use Marxist theory and work on Artificial Intelligence to draw parallels between the abstraction of exchange value from labour and commodities in New York's finance markets, where the novel is set, and the desire to abstract a disembodied form of mind from the complex concatenation of mind, body, and self, which forms the human subject.

Chapter 5 approaches The Names and White Noise, novels of DeLillo's middle period, which mark both an increase in his dedication to his work and a breakthrough in his career, when he won the National Book Award for White Noise. They also signal the beginning, in earnest, of his consideration of the models of mind and subjectivity required for successful adaptation to a postmodern world that is post-

colonial, globalised, and saturated by technology. I argue that he proposes a notion of mind as possessing unsuspected power and resilience and that its native force may be considered as in excess of signification and death, adversaries that have often been held to dominate it.

Chapter 6 is the largest chapter of the thesis and deals with three of DeLillo's later and better known novels, Libra, Mao II, and Underworld. I read them as offering an epic account of the centripetal psychological forces that have emerged in postmodernity and which encounter fierce resistance from adherents of modernism and its more discrete forms of subjectivity, who fear and resent a unified model of consciousness. The novels trace a dramatic evolution in DeLillo's thinking on the subject, in which the yearning for psychological unity comes to appear ever less pathological. This process begins with the unexpectedly creative destructive acts of Lee Harvey Oswald and concludes with the vast panorama of Underworld, in which the healing effects of what I call postmodern schizophrenia are apparent in the redemption and recuperation of races and individuals hitherto banished or ghettoised.

Chapter 7 studies DeLillo's most recent novels, The Body Artist and Cosmopolis, in which he examines the possibility of the quest for what he calls 'root identity', which I read as meaning the fundamental nature of consciousness, or consciousness as such. Although the project appears to verge on the essentialising or primitivistic, paradoxically, it is characteristically postmodern, in its emulation of the efforts of contemporary science to account for the relationship between mind and body and its implications for the nature of consciousness. Nevertheless, the novels eschew the objectivism of scientific methodology and examine 'root identity' largely from the

internal, subjective perspective of the novels' protagonists. The result is two texts that interrogate the extent to which it is possible for the 'true' nature of consciousness to provide a pragmatic model for postmodern life.

Chapter 1

Americana: From Third to First Person Consciousness

Critics of Americana (1971), DeLillo's first novel, have generally proceeded from the assumption that, in this text, DeLillo evinces a marked scepticism towards unified, modernist conceptions of the self and suggests that, in a postmodern environment, subjectivity is necessarily unknowable and indeterminate.¹ David Cowart, for instance, has remarked that in Americana 'DeLillo seems fully to recognise the tenuousness of all "subject-positions"'.² Robert Nadeau asserts that Americana demonstrates the way in which the electronic mass communications of the postmodern world have 'trivialized out of existence' the notion of an 'authentic or unique self'.³ Similarly, critical writers argue that the protagonist and first-person narrator, the television executive David Bell, is disorientated by the instability of contemporary selfhood, which he blames on the influence of media technologies, and that he feels nostalgic for the relative coherence of modernist subjectivity. Cowart describes David as in search of a 'knowable, stable identity' and tormented by the 'subject's inability to know a definitive version of itself' (pp.132-33). Tom LeClair, meanwhile, sees Bell engaged in a related but explicitly metaphysical quest to grasp an 'unsplit truth'.⁴

In spite of subtle differences in their positions, these critics agree that David is unsuccessful in the quests that they attribute to him. However, I suggest that their

¹ Don DeLillo, Americana (London: Penguin, 1990)

² David Cowart, The Physics of Language (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2002), p.131.

³ Robert Nadeau, Readings from the New Book on Nature: Physics and Metaphysics in the Modern Novel (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981), p.162.

⁴ Tom LeClair, In The Loop: Don DeLillo and the Systems Novel (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1987), p.39.

view that of David's 'failure' arises from a misunderstanding of the difficulty he confronts and the objective he pursues. Far from choosing between stable and indeterminate models of identity, David's conviction that his consciousness does not offer him reliable access to the world annuls any possibility of creating a recognisable form of selfhood. Seeking to evade what he believes is the illusory nature of his mental experience, he adopts the severe cognitive restrictions of an objectivist epistemology, which he calls 'third person' consciousness and which resembles the reductive analysis of behaviourist psychology. By objectivism, I do not mean objectivity as such, but scientific and philosophical methodologies that exclude subjective experience altogether. David is acutely aware of his objectivist approach to life. As he confesses, 'The only problem I had was that my whole life was a lesson in the effect of echoes, that I was living in the third person' (p.58). DeLillo draws frequent parallels between David's arid mindset and that of American culture in general and suggests that both lead to destructive and inhumane behaviour. Indeed, David's self-destructive rejection of 'first-person' experience is treated as a characteristic, even archetypal, American pathology. Notably, David's doubts about the veracity of his perceptions are often the displacement of a pathological death-anxiety, which DeLillo presents as endemic to U.S. culture, and which causes David to fear all subjective experience. David demonstrates an inability to confront any situation involving death and eventually reveals that his phobia stems from extreme grief at his mother's death (p.237). He refers repeatedly to his irrational fear of 'disappearance' (p.41), which renders him dependent upon his mirror image, the apparent immortality of which serves as apotropaic against death-anxiety. As David

puts it tellingly, with reference to his narcissism, 'I was blue-eyed David Bell.

Obviously my life depended on this fact' (p.11).

His scepticism of mental experience causes severe paranoia. David's belief that first-person mental experience is illusory and valueless convinces him that media technologies are capable of distorting perception and memory, or even emptying the mind of valuable content. His displacement of personal anxieties onto technology is consonant with Curtis Yehnert's view that DeLillo's characters use 'the media to escape responsibility for their own lives'.⁵ Above all, Yehnert argues, they use their 'mediated environment to flee their own inwardness' (p.359). In the course of Americana, David seeks to overcome his self-imposed mental limitations and confront the 'inwardness' to which Yehnert refers.

His problem is closely comparable to the one that John R. Searle diagnoses as the central theoretical difficulty of postmodern cognitive science and philosophy of mind. Searle argues that a purely materialist conception of the human subject has caused anxiety among theorists about acknowledging 'the irreducibility of consciousness and other mental phenomena' because they believe such an admission might commit them 'to some form of Cartesianism'.⁶ Consequently, like David, they 'redefine the notion of consciousness so that it no longer refers to actual conscious states, that is inner, subjective, qualitative, first-person mental states, but rather to publicly observable mental phenomena' (p.7). They therefore study the mind by adopting 'the objective or third-person point of view' (p.10). Searle argues that this third-person epistemology often masks an unexpressed belief that 'consciousness does

⁵ Curtis Yehnert, "'Like Some Endless Sky Waking Inside': Subjectivity in Don DeLillo', Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction, 42 (2001), 357-66 (p.358).

not really exist'. Like the theorists Searle describes, David's materialist understanding of mind and body persuades him that consciousness has little substance or value. He therefore regards it as logical to adopt a third-person epistemology that is confined to phenomena that Searle calls 'publicly observable' (p.7). In David's case, materialism results in the death-anxiety that causes him to avoid first-person experience. David shares with Searle's opponents the belief that if subjective human consciousness is not part of an immortal Cartesian 'soul', it has little ontological value and may, as Searle suggests his opponents believe, 'not really exist' (p.7). Consequently, David believes his perceptions can be easily dismissed. Ironically, by rejecting the Cartesian view, David's position repeats Descartes' supposition that without the guarantee of perceptual accuracy, provided by God's existence, consciousness might be only a vision or dream.⁷ If Searle is to be believed, this inadvertent recapitulation of Cartesianism is no coincidence. In his opinion, materialism's refusal to recognise what he calls 'irreducible intrinsic mental phenomena' means that it treats physical and mental as opposed categories and becomes 'the finest flower of dualism' (p.26). In David, therefore, DeLillo depicts a protagonist whose anxieties about the ontological status of mind are representative of those that have preoccupied post-war philosophy. Consequently, rather than employing theories of the postmodern subject, which critics have hitherto used to explicate Americana, it may be appropriate to place the novel, and much else in DeLillo's oeuvre, in the intellectual context of contemporary debates about the ontological nature and status of consciousness.

After arduous struggle, David eventually makes progress in his effort to confront his first-person consciousness and develop a model of self that is

⁶ John R. Searle, The Rediscovery of the Mind (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), p.2.

⁷ Rene Descartes, Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy, trans. by Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1980), pp.94-100.

recognisable as a 'subjectivity'. This psychological journey is accomplished in the course of a more literal one, during which he drives to parts of the Southern and Mid-Western United States, of which, as an insular New Yorker, he is completely ignorant, and then travels to North Africa. In describing this journey, the novel contains important elements of the Picaresque. It portrays an itinerant and increasingly poverty stricken protagonist, whose travels reveal the pathologies of his American social milieu, and who, in his role as television producer, is also what Carroll B. Johnson, in defining the 'pícaro', calls 'the bearer of modern bourgeois values'.⁸ DeLillo's most obvious American precursor in the postmodern Picaresque is Jack Kerouac's On the Road, whose main character, like David, flees middle-class life in pursuit of a more authentic American experience.⁹ But, DeLillo's adaptation of this type of Picaresque 'road novel' may also owe much to Jean-Luc Godard's À Bout De Souffle, which records the travels of a similarly desperate, albeit criminal, protagonist.¹⁰ DeLillo has acknowledged, in interview, that 'Godard had a more immediate effect on my early work than anything I'd ever read' and even has David refer directly to the French filmmaker's avant-garde aesthetic, in calling 'a grainy day' the 'child of Godard and Coca-Cola' (p.269).¹¹ Given that the Picaresque has been called 'a literature dealing with social nobodies', David's search for subjectivity makes DeLillo's use of the

⁸ Carroll B. Johnson, 'Defining the Picaresque: Authority and the Subject in *Gazmán de Alfarache*', in The Picaresque: Tradition and Displacement, ed. by Giancarlo Maiorino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp.159-82 (p.159).

⁹ Jack Kerouac, On the Road (New York: Viking Press, 1957)

¹⁰ À Bout De Souffle. Dir. Jean-Luc Godard. SNC. 1998.

¹¹ Tom LeClair and Larry McCaffery, eds. Anything Can Happen: Interviews with Contemporary American Novelists (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1983), p.84.

genre highly apposite.¹² Where the Spanish pícaro sought social status in order to 'be somebody', DeLillo's postmodern protagonist strives to value his mental experience and selfhood, in a culture increasingly inimical to subjective thought or individual identity.

Once David embraces his 'first-person consciousness', he discovers considerable unsuspected capacities within the mind, including the potential for spiritual experience. Like many of DeLillo's novels, therefore, Americana examines the capacity of the mind, both for self-limitation and profound self-transformation. In exploring these possibilities, DeLillo depicts David employing two radically different perceptual frameworks, each of which produces a corresponding ontology or mode of being. If Brian McHale is right that postmodernist fiction takes ontology as its 'dominant', while modernist work tends to pursue questions of epistemology, then DeLillo's exploration of the relationship between them would suggest that his work does not fit easily into either category.¹³ However, Linda Hutcheon has suggested that postmodernism denies the validity of oppositions like the one between knowing and being, in light of which DeLillo's treatment of the two categories as close and overlapping makes his oeuvre appear characteristically postmodern.¹⁴ Paradoxically, though, he continues to treat the distinction between knowing and being as valid and useful, consistently examining the ontological consequences of various epistemologies. In Americana, for example, a fundamental distrust of consciousness retards the development of a full subjectivity. Clearly, therefore, DeLillo does not

¹² Francisco J Sánchez and Nicholas Spadaccini, 'Revisiting the Picaresque in Postmodern Times', in The Picaresque: Tradition and Displacement, ed. by Giancarlo Maiorino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp.292-307 (p.293).

¹³ Brian McHale, Postmodernist Fiction (London: Routledge, 1989), p.10.

¹⁴ Linda Hutcheon, A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory and Fiction (New York, Routledge, 1988), p.50.

depict characters whose sense of self can be diminished or 'trivialized' by electric communication networks. Rather, by suggesting that the human subject has the potential to choose between competing epistemologies and their ontological correlatives, DeLillo hints at a model of mind capable of resisting technological or systemic restriction and playing a role in creating its own perceptual framework.

In view of his role as first-person narrator, it is ironic that David's younger self made concerted efforts to avoid subjective mental experience. Because his narration offers the reader privileged access to his thought processes, it is apparent that, in the course of the novel, David begins to attach greater value to his experience of consciousness. After the conclusion of the diegetic narrative, when he has aged considerably, he gains the necessary maturity to make significant progress towards the first-person epistemology he has sought. It is worth dwelling on the irony of a first-person narrator who admits to suffering the pathology of a 'third person consciousness'. After all, if David were still living in the 'third person', it would be unfeasible for him to narrate the book at all, or to analyse his mental experience with the perspicacity he brings to bear upon it. Therefore, in pursuing and embracing subjective experience, he becomes competent to perform the self-reflexive role that enables his production of the narrative and makes possible the book's existence. This fact alone demonstrates David's progress towards first-person epistemology.

However, early in the novel, David shares with the behaviourist psychologists of the 1950s an objectivist tendency to exclude interior mental experience from consideration. Of behaviourism, as it was practised by its most celebrated exponent, B.F. Skinner, Laurence D. Smith remarks that the technique 'rejects as superfluous, even harmful, anything that interferes with the activities of observing or describing'.

¹⁵ Likewise, David's relationship with his mind is based on an epistemology that focuses exclusively on external appearance and response in isolation from any internal experience with which it might be said to correlate.

By means of a flashback to David's adolescence, DeLillo demonstrates that this behaviourist objectivism has been habitual to David since his teenage years. David feigns laughter at an inaudible joke and remarks that 'I kept nodding and laughing. When he was satisfied he went away' (p.189). Since, as David Cowart has shown, Americana is set in approximately 1970 and David is twenty eight years old at the beginning of the novel, David's puberty would coincide with the pre-eminence of behaviourism in American psychology (p.133). The fact that David's adoption of objectivism coincides with this period suggests that the text includes a subtle critique of the pernicious influence exerted by this now discredited epistemology. As we have seen, this dismissal of mental experience has its corollary in excessive emphasis on his physical appearance. As so often in DeLillo's oeuvre, it is possible to observe a close correlation between epistemology and ontology. David's objectivism, which excludes the experienced interiority of the mind, has unfortunate ontological consequences; his self-esteem and general sense of wellbeing become extremely fragile. David recounts that his distrust of first-person experience disorientated him sufficiently that he had 'almost the same kind of relationship with my mirror that many of my contemporaries had with their analysts' (p.11). In asking for his autograph, a 'teenage girl' exposes the vacuity of the glamorous persona he creates in this way, informing him naively that 'I'm not sure who you are', 'but I'm sure you must be somebody' (p.13).

¹⁵ Laurence D. Smith, Behaviorism and Logical Positivism: A Reassessment of the Alliance (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986), p.270.

In Americana's early chapters, DeLillo shows David believes his mind to be both insubstantial and easily corrupted, indeed, that he comes close to the position, which Searle criticises fiercely, that 'consciousness does not really exist' (p.7). He often implies that subjective experience possesses no intrinsic reality and that his mind is susceptible to fundamental corruption by media technologies. He reveals to his former girlfriend Wendy his belief that memory and perception deserve to be attributed no ontological status, replying to her request that they 'talk over old times' with the brusque 'There are no old times Wendy, the tapes have been accidentally destroyed' (p.25). Moments like these, in which DeLillo's characters lament the inauthentic and unreliable nature of their perceptions, have sometimes convinced critics that DeLillo takes a view of postmodern reality that is very similar to that of Jean Baudrillard. In Simulation and Simulacra, Baudrillard argues that the postmodern world has been emptied of real content and can be experienced only as a series of simulacra.¹⁶ He refers to the 'precession of simulacra' in postmodern life, which, he claims, generates a 'real without origin or reality'. But, this Baudrillardian notion of contemporary reality as simulacra is not the difficulty that plagues characters like David Bell. Rather, David is unable to accept that the phenomena of consciousness are irreducibly subjective. What he lacks, therefore, is what Thomas Nagel has called a 'realist' position on consciousness, the understanding that mental experience is entirely real, even though subjective. A proleptic episode early in the novel, one of four in the text, reveals to the reader that David eventually retires to a 'remote' island. In doing so, as we will see, he moves much closer to this realist position (p.14). Nagel's work is therefore of particular relevance to David's arid objectivist epistemology. Indeed, Nagel points out that he undertook his realist work

¹⁶ Jean Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p.1.

on consciousness in response to third-person epistemologies such as behaviourism, or what he refers to as the 'recently devised reductive analyses of the mental'.¹⁷ Like DeLillo's protagonist in Americana, Nagel believes that in the postmodern world it is painfully necessary to demonstrate and assert the reality and value of subjective mental experience. He begins by pointing out that conscious experience is irreducibly subjective, declaring that 'the fact that an organism has conscious experience at all means, basically, that there is something it is like to be that organism'. He goes on to argue that this is what we may call the 'subjective character of experience'. Indeed, in Nagel's view, all third-person epistemologies fail in their effort to analyse subjective 'experience' because, crucially, 'all of them are logically compatible with its absence' (p.166).

At the close of the diegetic narrative, David returns to New York from a lengthy trip to the western United States, undertaken in the hope of forging a more satisfying first-person epistemology. David Cowart has argued that the return to his geographical starting point implies a claustrophobic 'circularity' of structure in the novel, which functions as a formal indication of David's 'failure' (pp.134-38). There is some persuasive evidence to substantiate this pessimistic view. DeLillo appears to suggest that, while in New York, David cannot escape the vacuity of his former persona. In particular, David informs us that on the return flight 'Ten minutes after we were airborne a woman asked for my autograph' (p.377), a request that recalls the almost identical previous incident and suggests that life in New York will continue to direct David's attention towards his third-person mirror image. However, the view of Americana as ouroboric in structure fails to take sufficient account of the text's four proleptic passages, which establish a spatial and temporal trajectory beyond New

¹⁷ Thomas Nagel, Mortal Questions (New York: Oxford, 1986), p.166.

York. In light of these, it is possible to read David's problematic return to urban life as providing the catalyst for him to sever ties completely with American life. It is noticeable that critics have sometimes dismissed these episodes with impatience, perhaps because they recognise that they subvert the notion that David's project ends in unalloyed failure. LeClair, for example, in the course of arguing that the structure of the novel is analogous to a loop, calls them 'present-tense interruptions' (p.50). Since the judgements LeClair and Cowart pass on David's supposed 'failure' refer to the state of his subjectivity at the end of the text, it is vital to recognise that David's experience of mind and subjectivity ends, not in New York, but on an island near the 'equatorial loin' of Africa, many years after this homecoming (p.347). One must therefore base any judgement on David's final success upon the evidence of these passages. David's eventual flight from New York indicates that he finds the cultural environment there unpropitious for his purposes, and the prolepses strongly suggest that David recognises his former suspicion of consciousness to be, in part, the consequence of immersion in the American 'dream'. He declares explicitly that his sceptical view of mental experience as insubstantial, or 'an image made in the image and likeness of images', was the result of belief in this 'dream'. In making this admission, David also confesses that part of the dream's attraction was the third-person viewpoint it offered, which helps obscure the degree of exploitation and destruction that underlies American culture and allows him to ignore his considerable death-anxiety. He explains that 'The dream made no allowance for the truth beneath the symbols, for the interlinear notes, the presence of something black (and somehow very funny) at the mirror rim of one's awareness', a 'something black' that David makes clear amounts to 'an implication of serio-comic death' (p.130). This analysis implies a view of his past techno-phobia as mere displacement of anxiety, particularly

with regard to death, which is similar to the view expressed by the engineer Samuel Florman. Of the widespread distrust of technology that he perceives in postmodern society, Florman asserts that the 'dread of technology is nothing other than a phobia, that condition which develops when people displace their anxieties...in an effort to control them'.¹⁸

These prolepses occur at approximately equal intervals in the text and, consequently, the important realisations they articulate about David's mental pathology function in ironic counterpoint to his limited third-person epistemology within the diegetic narrative. They also suggest the profound transformations of which the mind is capable, in contrast to the crippling self-imposed limitations of third-person consciousness (p.58). However, well before he retires to Africa, DeLillo shows that David is able to contrast the destructive third-person 'dream' of America with examples of relatively liberating, first-person experience. His classes in Zen Buddhism with Dr Oh fall into this category. The writing of Americana in the late 1960s coincided with considerable growth of interest in Buddhism in the United States. DeLillo suggests that the value of such Buddhist influence for Americans lies in its contrast with the comparative sterility of the American 'dream'. He specifically contrasts the exploration of first-person experience and the possibility of transcendence that characterises Zen with this 'dream', which he represents in the form of the American corporations. David reports that when he fails to meditate and gazes at his classmates:

Oh looked at me and motioned me down again, a whisper of
his eyes, down, my child, this is your last chance, tomorrow

¹⁸ Samuel Florman, Blaming Technology: The Irrational Search for Scapegoats (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), p.9.

the corporations come calling, never again will you come
close to this moment, the chance to capture the sleep of
awakening. (p.177)

The phrase 'the sleep of awakening' captures the notion that through the calm, apparently soporific self-examination of Zen, the students may gain the opportunity to 'awaken' from the third-person 'dream' of American culture. However, the students understand that, in David's words, 'a lifetime of small defeats was waiting' because 'Beauty was too difficult and truth in the West had died with chief Crazy Horse', dispiriting realisations that were the reason 'why Monday afternoons were so terrible' (p.174). Part of Zen Buddhism's importance to David's mental life lies in its status as a realist philosophy that takes seriously the access to the world that consciousness provides. Zen is known for the notion that the self can become one with the object it perceives. Indeed, in Dr Oh's class, 'a student named Humbro ate his copy of D.T Suzuki's introduction to Zen' because, as David intones drolly, 'One must become a book before one can know what is inside it' (p.175). Clearly, the idea that 'oneness' with an object is achievable relies on a belief that the mind, perceived rightly, allows unmediated access to the object. This is why the same D.T Suzuki argues that Zen Buddhism is what he calls a 'radical realism'.¹⁹ Like Nagelian realism, it treats the reality of mind and world with equal seriousness. Suzuki believes that, in Zen, the mind can adopt an 'absolute standpoint', which gives the human subject access to the 'suchness' or essence of things (p.72).

It is therefore particularly interesting that, alone on his African Island, David returns to thoughts that are closely comparable to Buddhist doctrine. He claims that,

¹⁹ Daisetz, Teitaro Suzuki, Studies in Zen, ed. by Christmas Humphreys (New York, Dell, 1978), p.72.

in his writing, he has taken 'the middle path, neither heaven nor hell', echoing the common notion that Buddhism represents a middle way (p.346). David also dwells on the notion of 'no-self', a doctrine, which, as Johannes Nobel points out, suggests 'there's no personality at all, but a series of Skandhas that change every moment'.²⁰ David informs the reader that 'Little of myself seems to be left' (p.345). Viewed in the context of his former terror of 'disappearance' and need for 'every ego-scrap', such tranquil acceptance of dissolution represents significant progress in overcoming his neuroses (p.41). Where he was previously unable to meditate, he now indulges in patient self-examination. In spite of this interest in Zen, David develops no programmatic adherence to its doctrines. Having begun to investigate realist epistemology, David remains curious about the experience of selfhood to which it might lead. After describing his delusions of philosophical grandeur, he remarks 'Fortunately I always return to myself', a statement that implies an unaccustomed pleasure in the growth of a sense of subjectivity (p.129). In spite of toying with 'no self', therefore, his quest accords with Harold Bloom's view of American ontology, which emphasises individuality above communal or inter-subjective experience.²¹ In America, asserts Bloom, 'each of us is subject and object of the quest, which must be for the original self' (p.22).

Nevertheless, in the novel's early chapters, David's death-anxiety confines him to an impoverished and objectivist third-person epistemology. DeLillo emphasises the importance of death in Americana by references to the Vietnam War and World War Two and the characters', particularly David's, terror-stricken reaction

²⁰ Johannes Nobel, Central Asia: The Connecting Link Between East and West and Other Lectures (Nagour: Arya Bharati Press, 1952), p.112.

to these conflicts. When David mentions Vietnam in the first chapter he makes clear that he and his contemporaries rigorously avoid the subject and the consideration of mortality it entails. He reports that 'The war was on television every night but we all went to the movies' (p.5). Notably, the line paraphrases the opening of Ernest Hemingway's story In Another Country, whose protagonist is also haunted by death-anxiety and which begins 'In the fall the war was always there, but we did not go to it any more'.²² Famously, Vietnam was the first televised war and David's professional concern with the medium suggests a significant personal reason must underlie his unwillingness to view this groundbreaking footage, a notion reinforced by his refusal even to discuss the conflict with his acquaintance Pru Morrison (p.5). War and the terror it provokes re-emerge later, when David's attempts to embrace 'first-person' consciousness are comically stalled by his fear of death. He enquires about his father's experience of the Bataan death march and, notably, stresses that his interest lies in examining his father's first-person experience, demanding 'what it was like for you, not for other people'. But, David cannot maintain his courage for long and the revelation that his father 'buried a man alive' causes him to retreat in panic, promising 'I won't ask you about it anymore' (p.242).

Early in the novel, though, David appears to have repressed death-anxiety and revels in reports of accidental fatalities, which he calls 'a tickle of electricity to the numbed brain' (p.4). Only when he leaves the television network, supposedly, to make a documentary about Navaho Indians does this repression dissolve. A telling moment occurs on his drive west, when he considers a memo from an executive,

²¹ Harold Bloom, The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post Christian Nation (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), p.31.

²² Ernest Hemingway, 'In Another Country', in Men Without Women (London: Arrow, 1994), pp.32-37 (p.32).

which quotes St. Augustine on death and runs 'And never can a man be more disastrously in death than when death itself shall be deathless' (p.99). The quotation is a clear metaphor for David's existential difficulties. Augustine's remark about the catastrophic results of death being 'deathless' seems particularly apposite in the context of David's repression and his extreme reaction indicates that he dimly perceives its relevance. He exclaims that 'It overwhelms me. I'm not sure why but it just hits me. It knocks me out' (p.99).

In addition to explaining the protagonist's apparent vanity, his death-anxiety allows the critic to elucidate David's obsession with cinema and what he calls 'the power of the image' in general (p.31). As we have seen, identification with his supposedly immortal mirror image is apotropaic, warding off terror in a way similar to that effected by what the psychoanalyst Otto Rank calls the immortal 'double'. Rankian psychoanalysis regards death-anxiety as the primary cause of neurosis and suggests that identification with an inorganic, and hence immortal, alter ego, such as a cinema actor or mirror image, which Rank calls a 'symbol of eternal life', helps to ameliorate this fear.²³ A letter from DeLillo to Tom LeClair attests to the novelist's interest in Rankian analysis (Loop, p. 213). In this revealing missive, he admits to having been influenced by Ernest Becker's theoretical work The Denial of Death, which itself draws heavily on Rank's theories about the unconscious phobia of death.²⁴ DeLillo demonstrates a similar concern with death-anxiety throughout his oeuvre. In Americana, he uses David's identification with Hollywood actors such as Burt Lancaster to suggest that postmodern America's pervasive image-culture is rooted in a national preoccupation with mortality. When David sees Burt Lancaster in From

²³ Otto Rank, Beyond Psychology (New York: Dover Publications, 1958), p.76.

²⁴ Ernest Becker, The Denial of Death (New York: Macmillan Free Press, 1973)

Here to Eternity, DeLillo makes explicit the protective power his protagonist finds in Lancaster's screen persona, having him claim extravagantly that 'He was like a city in which we were all living. He was that big' (pp.12-13). Notably, From Here To Eternity deals with the challenge, which is prominent throughout Americana, of confronting the possibility of death during wartime. The film's title refers pointedly to David's difficulty in constructing an immortal, or 'eternal', image of himself. Lancaster plays a desk sergeant in World War Two, who enjoys a love affair with the wife of a superior officer, immediately before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. Such is Lancaster's apotropaic value to David that DeLillo compares it to the existential comfort derived from religious faith, declaring that Lancaster's image appeared 'the icon of a new religion'. Rank argues that representative art began in classical times as a search for the 'soul' (p.101). Similarly, in David's eyes, Lancaster becomes an immortal emanation, through which the audience experiences salvation (pp.12-13).

When David makes a long autobiographical film, he metonymically transfers this sacred power of the screen image to the cinema camera. He speaks of it with the awe he previously reserved for Hollywood's iconic actors, asserting 'the prestige of the camera, its almost religious authority, its hypnotic power to command reverence from subject and bystander alike' (p.86). The quasi-religious protective power of the camera is crucially important to David because he uses it to explore his troubled psychological history, particularly the disturbing genesis of his death-anxiety. Nevertheless, though cinema assists David in analysing his first-person experience, DeLillo suggests that the medium distances subjective experience and emphasises an objective, third-person approach to phenomena. Indeed, on occasion, DeLillo shows that David uses film to perpetuate his evasion of subjective experience. To his old

college friend Ken Wild, he admits that, although nominally the film is an 'attempt to explore parts of my consciousness', it is only 'a sort of first-person thing, but without me in it in any physical sense'. Significantly, though, the 'sense' in which he does appear is as a 'mirror image', that recurrent symbol of his alienation (p.263).

Awareness of this bad faith prompts David to wish the destruction of all images; to 'smash my own likeness, prism of all my images, and become finally a man who lives by his own power and smell' (p.236). It is therefore a measure of David's progression in his filmmaking and during his island-life that he does ultimately return to film, not as a strategy of evasion, but deliberately underexposing in an attempt to represent and thereby confront mortality. As he reports, 'I began to underexpose then, to become ever more crude, destroying shape and light, attempting to solve the darkness by entering it fully' (p.347).

In Understanding Media (1964), Marshall McLuhan argues that film provides precisely the opportunities for escapism that DeLillo depicts.²⁵ It was published in 1964, two years before DeLillo began work on Americana, and the texts contribute to a characteristically postmodern effort to understand the relationship between contemporary technologies and the forms of subjectivity that correlate with their availability and use. McLuhan himself envisages his intellectual project as necessarily being carried out in partnership with what he calls 'The serious artist' (p.19). He suggests that this artist, of which we may take DeLillo to be one example, 'is indispensable in the shaping and analysis and understanding of the life of forms, and structures created by technology' (p.71). McLuhan argues that film operates according to the principle of 'sequentiality', performing a 'juxtaposition' of 'uniform and connected characters and qualities' (p.315) and, like DeLillo, suggests that this

²⁵ Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (London: Routledge, 2001)

‘sequentiality’ provides an escape from reality to a ‘world of fantasy and dreams’. Unlike DeLillo, McLuhan suggests film shares these qualities with the book and argues that this fact explains why literate societies took to movies with such enthusiasm (p.318). By contrast, in Americana, DeLillo associates the novel form with David’s search for a more subjective, first-person epistemology. Indeed, the transformation of what he calls the cinematic ‘manuscript’ into a written first-person narrative is emblematic of the shift David begins to make between third and first-person epistemology (p.238). Formally, the novel obstructs the ‘sequentiality’ to which McLuhan refers, by the use of regular prolepses. Nevertheless, the fact that David takes ‘pleasure’ in the film and the novel may suggest that he has both third and first-person consciousness available to him and can alternate between these modes. Less optimistically, it may imply that he remains darkly drawn to the self-destructiveness of his former third-person existence (p.347)

The fact that all the crucial moments of progress in David’s understanding occur as cinematic ‘flashbacks’ confirms that his filmmaking catalyses the release of repressed material about his early life. Of particular note is the relation between his death-anxiety and his oedipal family relationships that it reveals. In one analeptic episode, David recalls coming perilously close to sexual intimacy with his mother, who had just contracted terminal cancer. The moment is one of ecstatic anticipation, followed by the assertion of paternal law and inevitable guilt. He exclaims excitedly ‘I would cry in epic joy and pain at the freeing of a single moment, the beginning of time’, but reports, anticlimactically, that ‘Then I heard my father’s bare feet on the stairs. That was all’ (pp.196-97). It is worth contrasting the enthusiasm of David’s sexual response to his mother with his confession that in his twenties he would habitually ‘give nothing’ to his lovers ‘for fear that there would be nothing left for

myself' (p.41). This radical change in behaviour, which, he admits, causes him to act 'the fascist' with his girlfriends suggests that the death of his primary love object, his mother, bequeathed him a terror of mortality that causes him to avoid emotional response (p.42). Indeed, this connection between David's extreme oedipal longing and death-anxiety suggests that his Oedipus complex is also susceptible to Rankian analysis. Rank holds that the oedipal impulse is prompted by the desire for immortality, asserting that 'the incest of Oedipus with his mother' was motivated by 'the universal desire to be one's own successor' (p.124). It is therefore particularly notable that David appears to believe himself obliquely responsible for his mother's death, guilt that may be interpreted as displaced aggression, motivated by the desire to preclude the possibility of further children that might challenge his position. With reference to her cancer, he remarks ghoulishly that 'Inside her was something splintered and bright that might have been left by the spiral passage of my own body' (p.196).

DeLillo draws numerous parallels between David's compulsively third-person mental life and the third-person consciousness that he suggests prevails in the U.S. Glenn Yost, one of the interviewees in David's film, argues that television advertising makes intelligent use of Americans' tendency to live in the third person, declaring that 'To consume in America is not to buy; it is to dream. Advertising is the suggestion that the dream of entering the third person singular might possibly be fulfilled' (p.270). Glenn's notion of the 'third-person singular' has much in common with the notion of the 'Civilized American', which historian Stuart Ewen argues that 'Mass Industry' invented after World War Two to function as the target of their advertising campaigns.²⁶ Glenn also shares McLuhan's view that TV tends to engage the viewer

²⁶ Stuart Ewen, Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p.42.

as participant (pp.340-48) and suggests, paradoxically, that by appealing to the consumers' subjective knowledge advertisers persuade them to shift from 'first person consciousness to third person' (pp.270-1). This, he suggests, is accomplished by offering the audience realistic life style possibilities, exploiting what he calls 'the limitation of dreams' by admitting that the average citizen cannot hope for a love affair 'with Ava Gardner'; 'Only Richard Burton can accomplish that' (pp.270-71). Although critics such as LeClair take the determinist view that media technologies 'turn the first-person viewer into' 'the third-person singular', Glenn is adamant, and DeLillo gives us no reason to disbelieve it, that third-person consciousness is the archetypal American condition of mind and self (Loop, p.55). According to him, 'In this country, there is a universal third-person, the person we all want to be', which 'came over on the Mayflower'. Glenn clearly believes that advertisers have merely exploited a preference for 'third-person consciousness' that was instantiated by the grand aspirations of American culture. Like the critic Curtis Yehnert, David takes Glenn's historical narrative seriously and shares Yehnert's shrewd conclusion that 'Not dark conspiracy, but collective desire has created the simulacrum' (Sky, p.359). Yehnert's view applies particularly well to David's deliberate taking of refuge in images, which makes his remark to Glenn that he speaks of 'third-person consciousness' 'with persuasiveness and verve' especially appropriate (p.271). Their exchange recalls David's close acquaintance with advertising technique, through his father's work in the industry. The 'adolescent nights' he spent with his sisters watching the 'reels of TV commercials', which their father collected, gave him a first-hand education in the American simulacrum (pp.84-5). If Glenn's view of television

advertising is correct, David's early exposure to U.S. consumer culture may have helped create the alienated third-person consciousness he later endures in adult life.

Disturbingly, DeLillo suggests that the objectivism of 'third-person consciousness' is only one scion of a perverted, pernicious asceticism that is ingrained in American culture (p.257). The view is comparable to Baudrillard's, in The Mirror of Production, that capitalism inculcates 'an ethic of asceticism, suffering and self-mortification'.²⁷ DeLillo is one of many post-war authors who view America's corporate work ethic as excessively austere. Americana's combination of corporate life and a concern with warfare particularly recalls Sloan Wilson's The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit, whose protagonist speaks of post-war New York as 'frantic parade to nowhere' full of men 'pursuing neither ideals nor happiness-they were purging routine'.²⁸ But DeLillo's analysis is notable for its careful comparison, and contrast, of this brutal asceticism with the more authentic type, which entails self-denial and what David calls 'simplicity'. When DeLillo uses the term asceticism in this way, he seems to mean a practice of austere self-discipline that gives rise to genuine tranquillity. He often associates this latter form with the abstemious life of Native Americans and opposes it to the 'symbolic' order of existence with which he associates the destructive American 'dream'. In his island retreat, David appears entirely persuaded of the merits of this austere lifestyle, asserting the value of 'purity of intention, simplicity and all its harvests' as weapons in the struggle against the 'larger madness' of American culture (p.130).

Notably, it is an Indian Chief named Black Knife who, in conversation with David's artist friend Sullivan, first hints that a perverted asceticism haunts the

²⁷ Jean Baudrillard, The Mirror of Production, trans. by Mark Poster (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1975), p.64.

²⁸ Sloan Wilson, The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit (London: The Reprint Society, 1957), p.284.

American psyche. Black Knife sees a grotesque form of the ascetic impulse in the American urge to 'plan the destruction of everything that does not serve the cause of efficiency', such as 'trees' and 'mountains'. 'Hard to believe', he tells Sullivan, 'that we are ascetics. But we are, more than all the fake saints across the sea' (p.118).

David's restricted third-person consciousness is representative of the destructive objectivism that sanctions such environmental destruction, while the austere excision of the organic matter of 'trees' and 'mountains' parallels his horror of the mortal body. Nonetheless, just as David rejects his 'Fascist' behaviour, in favour of quiet 'simplicity', Black Knife's jeremiad against the aggression of U.S. culture ultimately becomes a prophecy of peace and contentment (p.42). He believes that after the world is 'on its knees before our crazed power', America's distorted asceticism will become the more authentic variety, which entails the rejection of 'symbols', and the nation will 'shed' the 'ascetic curse' (p.120).

The importance of Black Knife's analysis, both for David and the novel, is affirmed by DeLillo's treatment of Native Americans as an admirable model of the ascetic life and respect for subjective experience. It is a trip west to visit the Navaho Indians that first catalyses David's pursuit of first-person epistemology. During the journey, he refers repeatedly to an obese college acquaintance, Leonard Zajac, who dropped out to live with the Navaho Indians, and, in the process, 'lost forty or fifty pounds' and rid himself of 'inflammations' (p.149). Towards the end of the diegetic narrative, visiting white settlers at an Apache reservation, David repeats the story (p.357). His presence there and his interest in Zajac's progress towards self-discipline and health suggest Native American culture may provide him with a model for the achievement of the first-person perceptual framework that he later explores. He seems

to aspire to something like the experience of real-life settler, Flora Gregg Iliff, who, in his account of his years with the Havasupai, declares that 'They had taught me the beauty of unquestioning faith, of dignity and a tranquil mind'.²⁹ The importance of Native American culture to David is amplified by the striking relevance of the settlers' unprompted suggestions concerning his morbid fears. They stress the need to abandon mainstream American culture, which advice David later takes by fleeing to the tropics. Moreover, they insist that Apache life can help cure death-anxiety (p.356). A young woman named Jill advises David 'If you let yourself be what you want to be, physically and spiritually, you can kill a lot of the death inside you' (p.360). Tellingly, the mature David, who narrates the text, elaborates on Black Knife's analysis of American culture. By pursuing an ironic allegory between mystical experience and the architecture of the American 'low' motel, David intimates that mainstream American asceticism may be a distortion of the population's spiritual yearnings. As all dictionary definitions of the term allow, asceticism often refers to a variety of techniques designed for achieving closer union with the divine. Therefore, the comparison of mystical ascesis with the economically motivated form in which Americans indulge may suggest that the latter is vacuous and lacks legitimate ontological purpose. DeLillo makes obvious the continuity between David's ideas and those of Black Knife. David first mentions the 'rise of the low motel' as an image to fit 'our ascetic scheme' (p.210) and then proceeds to offer a critique of the alienation of the motel customer, by comparing it ironically with the potentially liberating Buddhist experience of 'no-self'. In such a place, David remarks, 'you can easily forget who you are'. 'You can sit on your bed and become man sitting on bed, an

²⁹ Flora Gregg Iliff, People of the Blue Water: My Adventure Among the Walapai and Havasupai Indians (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1954), p.271.

abstraction to compete with infinity itself'. He also appears to liken the hotel's isomorphic structure, with its 'hundred hermetic rooms', to the repetitions of Buddhist practice and implies, with apparent irony, that such architectural monotony might lead to a comparable sense of salvation. The building, he writes, 'embodies a repetition so insistent and irresistible that, if not freedom, then liberation is possible, deliverance' (p.257). DeLillo's choice of the word 'deliverance' may be significant because, as Sanskrit scholar Johannes Nobel points out, it is a literal translation of 'Nirvana', the Buddhist term for enlightenment or salvation (p.102). David's allegory therefore suggests that the motel's sterile efficiency is a perversion of the American search for transcendence. It implies that where Americans seek 'deliverance', their objectivist third-person consciousness allows them only numbing, mechanical reproduction.

Horror at this American asceticism persuades David to embrace a more contemplative self-discipline, what Black Knife calls living off 'roots and berries' (p.120). As critics suggest, David's finds his return to the image-obsessed culture of New York dispiriting. However, rather than a catastrophic finale to the novel, New York revivifies David's enthusiasm for the task of forging a first-person consciousness. Otherwise, he would not have abandoned New York for the African Island to which he flees. Critics judge David a failure because they do not appreciate the nature of his project. Cowart laments David's solitude and calls him 'the ultimate hollow man' (p.138). Yet, David's solitude is not evidence of disaster but part of the ascetic self-discipline he practises to rid himself of the third-person consciousness that plagues the American 'dream'. David may experience a measure of 'hollowness' in his being, but it is neither happiness nor the comfort of a substantial, stable self that he has sought. Rather, he has wished to develop sufficient confidence in his subjective mental experience to enable the creation of some sense of self, however wounded or

attenuated. The evidence of Americana suggests that, in his pursuit of this goal, he is at least partially successful.

Chapter Two

Beyond Signification: The Realist View of Consciousness in End Zone and Great Jones Street

In Americana (1971), DeLillo emphasises that David Bell's transition from a third to a first-person epistemology and the creation of a recognisable subjectivity is hindered partly by a conviction that his mental experience is unreal. David expresses the view that media technologies have overcome and co-opted consciousness to the point where 'We're all on tape' and the mind is denied access to reality by a sophisticated set of illusions.¹ In End Zone (1972) and Great Jones Street (1973), DeLillo isolates and elaborates upon this concern with the reality of mind.² In End Zone, he portrays a college footballer and, in Great Jones Street, a rock star, who both pursue solitude and asceticism, but whose most serious problems lie in the relation between language and mind. To varying degrees, Gary Harkness and Bucky Wunderlick harbour a troubling suspicion that mind may be ontologically dependent upon signification, which leads them to relegate thought to subservient status and treat the mutability of language as evidence of the unstable and factitious nature of mind.

In the course of the novels, both narrators move appreciably towards a realist view of mind, which resembles that advanced by Thomas Nagel. In Mortal Questions, Nagel expresses concern at a tendency among postmodern theorists to reduce the mental to the physical and then to proceed as if the subjective 'phenomenological

¹ Don DeLillo, Americana (London: Penguin, 1990), p.371.

² Don DeLillo, End Zone (New York: Penguin, 1986) and Don DeLillo, Great Jones Street (London: Picador, 1998)

features' of consciousness do not exist.³ He argues that this is achieved by assuming that 'mental states are states of the body; mental events are physical events', rather than attending to the distinctive blend of the mental and physical that characterises them (p.176), a synthesis that Maurice Merleau-Ponty, for example, attempts to convey with his notion of 'organic thought'.⁴ This kind of reductive theory, Nagel believes, produces specious solutions of the otherwise 'intractable' mind-body problem, simply by avoiding the problem of 'consciousness' (pp.165-66). Nagel suggests that 'consciousness' is 'left out' in this way, simply because theorists lack a vocabulary suited to its representation. Consequently, he appeals to what he calls a 'realism about the subjective domain in all its forms', which 'implies a belief in the existence of facts' that are 'beyond the reach of human concepts' and may be unrepresentable (p.171). In recommending such exploration beyond language, Nagel, implicitly, opposes the early Wittgenstein, who insists philosophy should draw back from the ineffable because 'If a question can be framed at all, it is also possible to answer it'.⁵ Nagel's 'realism' proposes the opposite case, that 'there are facts that do not consist in the truth of propositions expressible in a human language' (p.171).

Gary and Bucky's scepticism is often comparable to that of Nagel's opponents. They ignore or belittle mind, partly because the mutability of signification causes them to question the stability of mind, but also because of its resistance to representation. Bucky's experience of media life destroys his faith in the reliability of language and mind and causes him to believe his self a mere 'dream', dependent on the factitious signifiers of rock culture (p.92). Gary, meanwhile, accepts the low status

³ Thomas Nagel, Mortal Questions (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.171.

⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, trans. by Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p.77.

attributed to mind in postmodern capitalist culture and develops doubts about the stability and reality of mind, which cause him to feel alienated from his subjectivity. Consequently, he adopts numerous ascetic and religious practices, including self-starvation, to assist him in accepting and confronting the reality of mental life (p.242). This fast occurs on the final page and results in admission to hospital. In interview, DeLillo stressed that Gary is 'trying to face' 'Something nameless' and admits that he was himself struck by its enigmatic quality: 'I couldn't give a name to it' (Anything, p.83). This 'Something nameless', I suggest, is the unrepresentable reality of mind, which is an insistent presence in the novel, but which Gary finds impossible to approach directly. Instead, as we will see, he first studies death and nuclear holocaust, which persuade him of Nagel's point that the ineffable can be formidably real, and then applies the same principle to mind.

Critics of End Zone, such as Tom LeClair, have focused on Gary's emphasis on signifier and referent as evidence that he is engaged in a metaphysical 'search for origins' and DeLillo is offering a critique of his protagonist's 'unrecognised acceptance of logocentric values'.⁶ But DeLillo shows that Gary and Bucky ultimately recognise the irrationality of their linguistic anxiety and embrace what Mark Osteen calls 'silence and oblivion'.⁷ Osteen argues that Gary embraces silence in order to further his metaphysical quest. For him, Gary's retreat from the Word is one of the 'pseudo-ascetic strategies' he employs to 'pare away complexities of choice and rediscover transcendence' (p.31). By contrast, I argue that DeLillo's

⁵ Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logicus Philosophicus, trans. by D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuiness (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), p.149.

⁶ Tom LeClair, In the Loop: Don DeLillo and the Systems Novel (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1987), p.80.

⁷ Mark Osteen, American Magic and Dread: Don DeLillo's Dialogue with Culture (Philadelphia, PA: University of Philadelphia Press, 2000), p.31.

protagonists merely use ideas of 'transcendence' to persuade themselves of the intrinsic value of mind. The novels explore the difficulty of accepting the irreducible reality of the mental, even in the absence of language, and, in doing so, explore the mysterious area that DeLillo quotes Hermann Broch as calling "'the word beyond speech'".⁸ Another significant Teutonic influence in the novel is Rilke, whose notion of the 'untellable' in his ninth Duino Elegy forms the basis for a module at Logos College, where Gary eventually enrolls.⁹ Though Gary does not take the course, its existence is allegorical of his incremental appreciation of ineffable or 'untellable' experience, which climaxes in the Texan desert, at which point he is moved to paraphrase Rilke's exhortation to 'rename the world' (Anything, p.84).

End Zone and Great Jones Street share an ambivalent concern with popular culture, which they celebrate and excoriate by turn. End Zone sometimes treats football as symptomatic of a brutal patriarchal capitalist culture that militates against cerebral activity or respect for mind. Yet, at other moments, it allows that the sport's fetishisation of order offers a framework for productive self-scrutiny and suggests that the freedom it allows players and coaches to name 'plays' emancipates the mind's creative power. Its concern with interiority, in the context of sport, is similar to that of DeLillo's story 'Total Loss Weekend', published the same year, which treats sports gambling, but rates its technicalities less important than 'the interior contest, the struggle that takes place within and beyond the limits of the point spread'.¹⁰ In its analysis of sport as cultural symptom, End Zone bears comparison to Norman Mailer's 1967 sports novel Why Are We In Vietnam?, the apparent focus of which is

⁸ Tom LeClair and Larry McCaffery, eds. Anything Can Happen: Interviews with Contemporary American Novelists (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1983), p.85.

⁹ Rainer Maria Rilke, Duino Elegies, trans. by J.B. Leishman and Stephen Spender (London: Hogarth Press, 1959) p.85.

the aggressive competitiveness of a rural hunting expedition, but whose title implies that such brutal manifestations of American masculinity may be the driving force behind the nation's intervention in South East Asia.¹¹ Great Jones Street, meanwhile, emphasises the factitious nature of a rock music culture that thrives on the circulation of empty signifiers and which disseminates a sense of consciousness as equally vacuous and unreliable. Yet, its plot is also driven by a popular counter-culture drug, known as 'the product', which corrects Bucky's distrust of consciousness, by rendering him aphasic and heightening his awareness of mental reality. Like much of DeLillo's work, therefore, these novels treat American culture, particularly popular culture, as both poison and possible cure, capable, like Plato's pharmakon, of wreaking catastrophic destruction and providing ultimate redemption.¹²

Although End Zone is itself a piece of football jargon and its narrator a college player who claims 'My life meant nothing without football' (p.22), most critics accept DeLillo's assertion that End Zone 'wasn't about football' (Anything, p.83). DeLillo also makes explicit the importance of mind to End Zone, remarking that it 'seems to me to be about extreme places and extreme states of mind', a preoccupation with extremity that is manifest in the punning title of the text (p.57). In spite of its secondary status, football performs crucial thematic functions. It is one of several experiences that provide Gary with the 'illusion that order is possible' (p.112), all of which help calm his anxieties and create a less extreme 'state of mind' (De Curtis, p.57). DeLillo suggests that sport diminishes disturbing thoughts of chaos, by providing a model of society 'that is rat free and without harm to the unborn',

¹⁰ Don DeLillo, 'Total Loss Weekend', in Sports Illustrated, 27th November 1972, 98-118.

¹¹ Norman Mailer, Why Are We In Vietnam? (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988)

¹² Jacques Derrida, Dissemination, trans. by Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone Press, 1981)

'organised so that everyone follows precisely the same rules' (p.112). As Douglas Keeseey notes, football emphasises naming and, since 'language itself' is a central theme of End Zone, the game is highly appropriate.¹³ In DeLillo's words, 'It is the one sport guided by language, by the word signal, the snap number, the color code, the play name' (p.112). Football's obsession with the fit between signifier and referent parallels Gary's later intent search for such correspondence, which reassures him that the mind is capable of accurate perception. As Gary notes, with approbation, 'Each play must have a name'. 'No play begins until its name is called' (p.118).

Gary traces his anxieties about mind and language to childhood and, in particular, a sign in his room that read 'WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH THE TOUGH GET GOING' (p.17). After years of observation, the words lose all meaning, a voiding of sense that both enchants and terrifies Gary. He observed a 'beauty' that 'flew from the words themselves', which he calls 'a semi-self-re-creation from line to line' (p.17), a formulation that alludes to Broch's notion of the 'dusk-enshrouded semi-creation' of what he calls the 'pre-divine'.¹⁴ Yet, in spite of this 'beauty', he calls his realist discovery that 'words can escape their meanings' 'a sinister thing'. His ambivalence regarding his own views is traceable partly to the fact that Gary's austere father provided the sign as a disciplinary measure. This parent is firmly associated with patriarchal, capitalist values, which DeLillo satirises as the 'eternal work cycle, the blood-hunt for bear and deer', terms which call to mind Mailer's critique of patriarchal imperialism (p.17). Consequently, Gary's youthful wish to assert the independence of mind from language and therefore question the referential power of language constitutes a challenge to what Lacan calls the 'Symbolic function',

¹³ Douglas Keeseey, Don DeLillo (New York: Twayne, 1994), p.34.

¹⁴ Hermann Broch, The Death of Virgil, trans. by Jean Starr Untermyer (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p.118.

'identified' with the 'name of the father' and the 'figure of the law' he represents.¹⁵

His guilty anxiety may therefore be prompted by fear of paternal punishment, as much as the disintegration of the symbolic order the 'name of the father' guarantees. This interpretation is confirmed by Gary's frequent sense of the deathly power invested in traditional signifiers, which frequently causes him to retreat from his sense that reality and mind are fundamentally independent of language. For example, reflecting on a team-mate's clichéd promise to 'go through a brick wall' for the coach, he confesses it to be 'full of reassurance, comfort, consolation' and stresses that it is 'easier to die than admit that words might lose their meanings' (p.54).

Gary struggles with William James' modernist paradox that although 'Thought is always changing', 'Within each personal consciousness, thought is sensibly continuous'.¹⁶ Frequently, his tendency to mistake the bewitching mutability of language and mind for unreliability means that James' certainty of the stability of consciousness eludes him. Notably, as in Americana, DeLillo counterpoints the tension of the diegetic narrative's quest with hints that his protagonist is eventually able to gain this assurance. After complaining of the monotony of college life, Gary muses that 'I had not yet learned to appreciate the slowly gliding drift of identical things' (p. 18), a phrase striking in its implication of James' paradox of movement and fundamental stasis. At the time of narration, therefore, he has somehow acquired the Jamesian faith in the continuity of consciousness that he lacks in the novel's

¹⁵ Jacques Lacan, 'The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis', trans. by Anthony Wilden, in The Language of the Self, ed. Anthony Wilden (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp.3-87 (p.41).

¹⁶ William James, The Principles of Psychology (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp.220-231.

diegesis, an implied accomplishment that subtly defuses the otherwise febrile tenor of the text.

Gary employs myriad strategies in his attempt to accept the mind's stability and its independence of language. Football training is among the techniques that help him glimpse a measure of mental stability. The 'daily punishments on the field' become a 'pleasure' because 'I felt that I was better for it, reduced in complexity, a warrior' (p.31). At times, exercise reconciles him to the mutability of mind and world. During squat-jumps, momentarily, 'The indifferent drift of time and all things filled me with affection for the universe' (p.56). He adopts practices that emphasise personal autonomy and the mind, regularly spending 'some time in meditation' pursuing 'solitude, starkness, discipline upon discipline' (p.30). Critics dismiss these practices as unhealthy --David Cowart refers to Gary's 'pathological asceticism'--¹⁷ but these are self-willed forms of repetition that he opposes to the culture's oppressive 'human xerography' (p.19). As Gary puts it, 'There were profits here, things that could be used to make me stronger' (p.30).

Many conclude that Gary's quest to 'achieve, indeed, establish some lowly form of American sainthood' is a despairing withdrawal from a mutable world (p.20). But spirituality functions for Gary as a transcendental signifier, which he hopes will secure the status of mind. Tellingly, his references to religion occur in response to reductive analyses of consciousness. His response to the coach at Penn State is exemplary. After dismissing 'Oneness' as 'human xerography', his language turns religious, with the assertion that 'Oneness' ought to mean 'oneness with God or the universe or some equally redoubtable super-phenomenon' (p.19) Such absurdly circumlocutory references to divinity cause LeClair to conclude that DeLillo satirises

¹⁷ David Cowart, The Physics of Language (Athens, GA, University of Georgia Press, 2002), p.32.

Gary's spiritual views (p.70). DeLillo does wring considerable humour from the more ludicrous of Gary's practices, for instance, when Gary justifies walking in circles by the fact it 'is demanded by the mythology of all deserts and wasted places' (p.42). Yet, the comedy lies mainly in Gary's lack of genuine belief and his failed attempts at conversion. The fact that his religious phase ends when his anxieties about consciousness begin to diminish confirms that these practices are palliatives for anxiety. After the novel's mid-point, references to religious ritual disappear almost entirely.

As in all his first three novels, DeLillo heightens his emphasis on internal experience by narrating in the first person. Gary's tone is often darkly comic, to the point where irony sometimes seems pervasive. How seriously should one take his assertion that his problems will dissolve if only he 'walk in circles', particularly when he then proceeds to do so (p.42)? This ambiguity in tone sometimes arouses concern about the true extent of his anxieties and evasions. Gary makes clear his dislocation from mind and subjectivity, but is less troubled than Americana's David, who doubts the existence of his selfhood. Gary reports a sense of 'exile' from something that is, at least, unambiguously existent, which he calls 'whatever is left of the center of one's own history', a description most applicable to memory and therefore mind (p.31). This 'exile' is exacerbated by the contemptuous, objectivist view of consciousness that prevails at Logos (p.2). DeLillo remarks that End Zone's characters display 'fragmented self-consciousness', with a distinctly 'mechanical element' (Anything, p.81). In part, this foregrounds the characters' fictionality. As DeLillo says, their 'made-up nature' draws attention to their status as 'words on paper' (p.81). But this fragmented, mechanistic consciousness also allegorises the characters' experience of themselves as fictional, which arises from the dismissal of mind as mere, unreliable,

mechanism that is encouraged at Logos. The point is emphasised by the novel's imitation of an avant-garde cinematic aesthetic, apparent in its division into brief episodes, which end abruptly, sometimes arbitrarily. Gary shows particular sensitivity to this disrespect for mind. He rejects the Penn State coach's emphasis on teamwork because it reduces the human subject to mindless automatism. Gary rejects the coach's idea of 'Oneness', which, he argues, really means 'elevenness' or 'twenty-twoness', and accuses him of exemplifying the 'human xerography' that plagues America, which he condemns, with comic portentousness, as 'spiritually disastrous' (p.19). The same criticism is levelled at American culture in Peter Gent's sport novel North Dallas Forty, which was published a year after End Zone and is set in what its protagonist, football hero Phillip J. Elliott, calls 'a world striving for similitude'.¹⁸ Trapped in a technologically driven culture, he concludes 'we are being manipulated by our machines' and 'the individual is dead' (p.158). Like Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, these novels of the early 1970s suggest American capitalism creates a mechanised culture that 'impresses the same stamp on everything' (p.120) and cultivates a 'single mental state' that 'is not nuanced or extended in any way' (p.127).

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Gary briefly capitulates to his college's cynical approach to mind, which contrasts ironically with its metaphysical, even theological, name (p.2). When the coach compares mind with machine, calling his players 'substandard, industrial robots', Gary follows suit, calling his team-mate Hobbs a 'retarded computer' (pp.35-36). DeLillo notes that the characters' 'mechanical' quality manifests in 'wars of jargon', where quasi-scientific language is used to reduce the status of consciousness

¹⁸ Peter Gent, North Dallas Forty (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1973), p.40.

¹⁹ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Dialectic of Enlightenment, trans. by John Cumming (London: Verso, 1997), pp.120-127.

(Anything, p.81). When Tim Flanders describes his grandfather's 'whole identity' as 'dominated by some tremendous vision', Buddy Shock uses quasi-technical language to deny its validity, replying pedantically that 'Identity' is 'An equality satisfied by all possible values of the variables for which the standardized expressions involved in the equality are quantitatively determined' (p.57). Another student, Bing Jackmin, casually trivialises consciousness by attributing its properties to a football. He tells Gary 'it was too wild, too unbelievable', but 'I sensed knowledge in the football'. Unsettlingly for Gary, Bing's absurd account implies that the football is less alienated from its supposed consciousness than Gary himself. Rather than exiled from the 'center' of its 'history' (p.31), Bing's football 'knew it was the center of the game. It was aware of its own footballness' (p.37). The denial of interiority at Logos stimulates surreal behaviourist analysis, which, in Laurence D. Smith's words, is a psychology that offers a 'purely descriptive', third-person approach to mind.²⁰ While singing drunkenly with team-mates, Gary is 'unsure' 'whether I was singing at all or just listening to Gus sing' and feels only the objective evidence of hearing his 'own voice' will suffice. Comically, but also disturbingly, Gary reports that 'I thought I could hear my own voice but I wasn't sure and so I stood there with Gus, not wanting to leave if I was still singing'. Gary is markedly upset by such alienation from mind and body, describing the experience as 'disgusting' and 'ridiculous'; an unremittingly 'horrible night' (p.100).

In Gary's roommate, Anatole Bloomberg, DeLillo provides a robust counter force to the suspicion of mind that might otherwise overcome Gary. Bloomberg is

²⁰ Laurence D. Smith, Behaviorism and Logical Positivism: A Reassessment of the Alliance (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986), p.270.

conspicuous for his proselytising faith in the intrinsic strength and value of mind. When Gary expounds an arid theory of human behaviour, which excludes agency or emotion in favour of the dogma that 'History is the angle at which realities meet', Bloomberg extols the power of subjective thought and feeling (p.46). He repeatedly describes his wish to 'unjew' himself (p.46), which entails an effort to 'forge a new consciousness', stripped of Judaic traits, (p.186) and advises Gary to 'transform your mind into a ruthless instrument. You simply teach yourself to reject certain categories of thought' (pp.46-47). Bloomberg's advocacy of mental strength persuades Gary to consider his roommate more psychologically healthy than himself. He calls Bloomberg the 'opposite of death' and attributes a fully human ontology to him, while failing to distinguish his own from the animal, or even inanimate (p.49): his remarks on their room include the terse description 'Bloomberg himself. Harkness himself or itself' (p.44).

Death looms large in the American sports novel. The physical prowess required for athletic feats invokes its repressed opposite: the spectre of decay and mortality. North Dallas Forty concludes with the murder of Phillip J. Elliott's lover, while Bang the Drum Slowly, a 1950s baseball novel, is half-comically preoccupied by a player called Pearson, who contracts Hodgkin's disease and is, as he announces, 'doomed'.²¹ Frederick Exley's A Fan's Notes opens with what its protagonist believes to be a heart attack. Like End Zone, in which Gary fears being driven mad by his martial obsessions, Exley's novel touches on insanity, depicting the author's time as a mental patient who, like Gary, finds in football a satisfying measure of order, or a liberating 'island of direction in a world of circumspection'.²² More recently, David Foster Wallace published Infinite Jest, a novel concerned with the travails of the

²¹ Mark Harris, Bang the Drum Slowly (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), p.219.

young recruits to the Enfield Tennis Association, but which also explores the deathly power of U.S. media, which is allegorised by an entertainment 'cartridge', so ecstatically enjoyable that it induces death.²³ Although End Zone is no exception to this tendency, critics have often accepted that DeLillo maintains a clear separation between football and nuclear holocaust. Many have been swayed, understandably, by two outright denials of any analogy between them. Gary's colleague Alan Zapalac maintains that 'Warfare is warfare. We don't need substitutes because we've got the real thing'. Similarly, DeLillo himself dismisses 'commentators', 'willing to risk death by analogy in their public discussions of the resemblance between football and war' (p.111). Recently, though, critics have re-examined the parallels between sport and warfare, which, as Cowart rightly insists, are readily detectable. Osteen compares football's 'impenetrable argot' of 'signals' with the recondite 'jargon of nuclear strategy' (p.82), both of which persuade Gary of the possibility of order and counteract his fear that mind and reality are chaotic and illusory (p.112). Gary quotes, with approval, his teacher Major Stanley's comparison between sport and war. As Stanley describes nuclear conflict, 'There'd be all sorts of controls. You'd practically have a referee and a timekeeper' (p.82). Obversely, Gary's coach eulogises the harmony of football's warlike violence, which offers 'a sense of order even at the end of a running play with bodies strewn everywhere' (p.199).

Notably, the topic of death intensifies the students', particularly Gary's, concern for effective verbal representation. If death could be accurately depicted, reason Logos' appropriately rationalistic students, its horror might be overcome. They would like to emulate Tolstoy's Ivan Ilych in apprehending 'the idea' of death 'and

²² Frederick Exley, A Fan's Notes (New York: Pocket Books, 1968), p.7.

²³ David Foster Wallace, Infinite Jest (London: Abacus, 2004), p.78.

not the idea only but as it were the reality itself'.²⁴ On the difficulty of conveying the horror of nuclear holocaust, Gary laments that 'words don't explain, they don't clarify, they don't express, they're painkillers' (p.85). At a team-mate's funeral, he complains acidly of the mourners that 'Death is the best soil for cliché', 'The trite saying is never more comforting, more restful, as in times of mourning' (p.69). Since words fail, death must be represented by corporeal means: the players engage in the childish game 'Bang you're dead', in which one player verbally signifies gunfire, before 'The other person clutches a vital area of his body and then falls, simulating death' (pp.31-32). It functions partly to ameliorate death-anxiety, enabling them 'to pretend that death could be a tender experience' (p.34), but also provides the lesson, to which Gary will return, that the experience of death, like consciousness, as Nagel argues, can never be fully represented (p.32). Indeed, the game is notable for its suggestion that there may sometimes be positive value in a lack of connection between signifier and referent. After all, in this game, adequate representation would entail an actual death.

This ludic interlude proves typical of death's propensity to act as a source of catharsis, as well as terror in End Zone. The disquieting and comical rapidity with which DeLillo portrays Gary's involvement in several fatally 'destructive episodes' before he attends Logos alerts the reader, early on, to Gary's urgent need for such therapeutic crises (p.32). At 'Michigan State', he is 'one of three players' who 'converge' on a 'safetyman' and cause his death, after which he retreats to his bedroom for 'seven weeks' (p.22). Next, the fearful prospect of service in Vietnam precipitates a considerable shift in Gary's consciousness. On seeing the word

²⁴ Leo Tolstoy, 'The Death of Ivan Ilyich', in The Death of Ivan Ilyich/The Cossacks/Happy Ever After, trans. by Rosemary Edmonds (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), pp.99-161 (p.138).

'MILITARIZE' appear 'all over town' (p.20), he is panic-stricken, but reflects later that 'It represented some form of apotheosis': 'The air was thick with it' (p.171). He avoids the draft by enrolling at 'The University of Miami', but emphasises that, after this 'apotheosis', 'Repetition gave way to the beginnings of simplicity' (p.20), a more significant change than Gary's deadpan delivery suggests. Because he uses 'repetition' to imply a sterile 'human xerography' and 'simplicity' to refer to a more stable relation between mind and world, the shift between categories implies increased respect for mind (p.19). When he reaches Logos, therefore, he has acquired 'a passion for simplicity, for the true old things' and is prepared to confront his sceptical attitude to mind (p.4).

But Gary's most sustained meditation on mortality arises from his morbid interest in nuclear weaponry, which causes him to question his morality and his sanity, but also provides cathartic experience that eases his death-anxiety. In Gary, DeLillo portrays a protagonist who typifies the bewildered American response to the Cold War's destructive possibilities. The mental strain that the spectre of nuclear warfare causes him is congruent with a general decline in U.S. mental health during the Cold War. Margot A Henriksen argues that fear drove Americans to 'live a double life' and experience 'psychological torment', which is 'documented in the statistics on mental health'.²⁵ Gary is perturbed by his pleasure in studying mass destruction: after admitting that 'I liked reading about the deaths of tens of millions of people', he reports being 'seriously depressed' and wonders 'Had I gone mad?' (pp.20-21). Henriksen believes that the atomic bomb produced a 'schizoid' culture (p.85), exemplified by Stanley Kubrick's *Dr Strangelove*, whose 'mixture of nihilism and

²⁵ Margot A. Henriksen, *Dr. Strangelove's America: Society and Culture in the Atomic Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p.86, p.113.

good spirits' 'matched the destructive and creative potential of atomic chaos' (p.xxv). In its blend of terror and manic irony, Gary's narration often betrays something of Henrikson's 'schizoid' split. After an unsuccessful attempt to imagine 'firestorms' and 'millions dead' in Milwaukee, which is forestalled by the fact that he 'had no idea what the city looked like' and 'could not imagine it in flames', Gary emerges from his bedroom to declare, in mock-heroic fashion, 'Milwaukee is spared' (pp.43-44). M. Keith Booker explains the increase in mental pathology by the combination of rapid technological change and the bomb's terrifying power.²⁶ Like Henrikson, Booker describes the American malady as schizophrenic: in particular, he believes post-war Americans' sense of the stability of consciousness was seriously undermined, asserting that they suffered a 'schizophrenic' sense of discontinuity. He writes of the 'vertiginous pace of change' in technology and its deleterious effect on the human subject's 'perception of continuity of selfhood over time'. Booker believes this disrupted 'any sense of historical continuity' and convinced Americans 'they were living in unprecedented situations to which the experience of the past was irrelevant' (p.24). In similar vein, Gary reports that accounts of nuclear war were 'whispering shyly of cycles of destruction so great that the language of past world wars became laughable, the wars themselves somewhat naïve' (p.21).

The novel's early critics also emphasised what Cowart calls 'the parallels between the violence of war and the violence of football', subjects that receive roughly equal attention in End Zone (p.20). Gary divides his attention between football and a preoccupation with nuclear holocaust that appears nihilistic, but which offers him what, in describing post-war U.S. reaction to the bomb, Margot A. Henriksen calls 'catharsis and awakening' (p.xxiii). End Zone was written after the

²⁶ M. Keith Booker, Monsters, Mushroom Clouds, and the Cold War: American Science Fiction and the Roots of Postmodernism, 1946-64 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), p.24.

Cold War boom in nuclear holocaust novels, which peaked in the 1950s and early 1960s, and one might view its publication as demonstrating DeLillo's idiosyncrasy and courage, in working against literary fashion. What it does share with many 'nuclear' novels is its deliberate defamiliarisation of atomic conflict, which jolts one into fresh understanding of its horror. James Morrow's This is the Way the World Ends portrays atomic incineration in the unexpected form of a sixteenth-century prediction by Nostradamus, who speaks of the 'fireballs hurled from great spears' that will haunt the end of the second millennium.²⁷ Tim O'Brien's The Nuclear Age depicts a child's disorientation at the possibility of global conflagration.²⁸ For its part, End Zone unsettles with its suggestion that postmodern American anxieties are sufficiently intense that contemplation of nuclear inferno may provide cathartic pleasure, as it does for Gary.

In End Zone, the atom bomb is a sublime entity, comparable to death and the Lacanian real in its stern reality and resistance to representation. As David E. Nye points out, 'The specific advantage of the sublime is that it is beyond words'.²⁹ Nye takes the bomb as an exemplar of the 'technological sublime', whose invention formed 'the ultimate dead end of any attempted representation of the technological 'thing in itself'' (p.290). Major Stanley takes a similar view and draws a comparison with divine ineffability, referring to the 'theology of fear' that surrounds the subject (p.81). After nuclear weapons, declares Stanley, 'god is the force of nature itself, the fusion of teuterium and deuterium' (p.80). DeLillo gently mocks the spiritual longings such weapons arouse, when Bloomberg parodies contemporary physics by speaking

²⁷ James Morrow, This is the Way the World Ends (London: Victor Gollancz, 2000), p.8.

²⁸ Tim O'Brien, The Nuclear Age (New York: Dell Publishing, 1985)

²⁹ David E. Nye, American Technological Sublime (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), p.xiv.

of 'some unimaginable weapon able to pierce spiritual barriers, to maim or kill whatever dark presence inhabits the world' (p.215). Much of the atom bomb's influence arises from these religious connotations, which anticipate DeLillo's analogy in Underworld (1997) between the mushroom cloud and the mystical 'cloud of unknowing'.³⁰ Gary's habitual use of the spiritual as guarantor of mental constancy therefore renders him doubly susceptible to the bomb's psychological impact. Nye's research on early atomic tests suggests this religious response replicates that of first-hand observers. Nye's informant notes that 'Religious feelings and quotations welled up in most of the witnesses. One felt as if he had been present at the moment of creation when God said "Let there be light"' (p.228).

Gary yearns for the spiritual liberation that the nuclear sublime promises, demanding, paradoxically, that its cathartic power banish 'all sense of global holocaust' (p.43). In The Fate of the Earth, Jonathan Schell indicates the possibility of a satisfying sublime in such morbid thoughts, describing 'The huge --the monstrous-- disproportion' between the bomb and 'the merely terrestrial creatures in its shadow'.

³¹ Surprisingly, critics see End Zone's nuclear sublime as entirely destructive. Osteen remarks that it 'voids possibilities of meaning' (p.31). Yet, the bomb's capacity to defeat language is precisely its value; consideration of this quality leads Gary to appreciate the simultaneous reality and ineffability of mind inherent in Nagel's 'philosophical realism'. In a pivotal scene in the Texan desert, the bomb's ineffability helps persuade Gary that mind possesses a similarly redoubtable, if unutterable, ontology. Gary begins by craving what Saul Kripke calls a 'rigid designator', which

³⁰ Don DeLillo, Underworld (London: Picador, 1998)

³¹ Jonathan Schell, The Fate of the Earth (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), p.11.

'designates the same object' 'in every possible world' ³², or, in Gary's words, 'something that could be defined in one sense only, something not probable or variable, a thing unalterably itself' (p.88). Gary's desire for such epistemological certainty is unexpectedly consummated: he decides that a pile of 'simple shit, nothing more' is 'the one thing that did not betray its definition' and represents a perfect meeting of word and thing (p.88). This satisfies his wish for what Lacan calls the real, or 'what does not depend on my idea of it', and contributes to his acceptance of the mind's independent reality, as one of the 'facts' that Nagel suggests are 'not expressible in human language'. ³³ It seems appropriate that this meeting of 'word and thing' should assist Gary in accepting the existence of the ineffable, since the perfect union of signifier and referent would, logically, result in silence. Gary treats the episode as an existential epiphany and is stimulated to a series of associations that revolutionise his approach to mind (p.88). He meditates on excrement as waste and fertile matter, 'shit in life cycle' and 'shit as history', and then recognises the creative and destructive potential of the nuclear sublime as similarly paradoxical. As in many of DeLillo's most striking passages, he adopts a paratactic style, which omits conjunctions and prepositions. 'I thought of men embedded in the ground', he writes, 'all killed, billions, flesh cauterized into the earth, bits of bone and hair and nails, man-planet, a fresh intelligence revolving through the system' (p.89). The accumulation of connected ideas in this passage appears climactic and creates an expectation of profound revelation, which arrives once images of death and regeneration cause Gary to reflect on equally dynamic shifts within the mind. Buoyed

³² Saul Kripke, Naming and Necessity (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p.48.

³³ Bruce Fink, The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), p.142

by the representational comfort of his excremental epiphany and the Nagelian insight, derived from the nuclear sublime, that what is unrepresentable may, nevertheless, be real, he drops any neurotic need for linguistic correspondence to convince him of mental reality. Indeed, he describes a model of mind, blessed with at least partial autonomy and the capacity for profound self-transformation. He reflects that 'in some form of void, freed from consciousness, the mind remakes itself' and concludes that 'What we must know must be learned from blanked-out pages. To begin to reword the overflowing world' (p.89). This necessity of learning from 'blanked-out pages' and the concomitant notion of the 'overflowing world' represents a 'realist' acknowledgement of mind and world's independence of language. Meanwhile, the final exhortation to 'reword' the world is a clear paraphrase of Rilke's instruction to 'rename the world'. Gary has already witnessed this notion of 'learning from blanked-out pages' in the module on the 'untellable', for which his colleague Howard Lowry is asked to memorise Rilke's ninth Duino Elegy in German; 'a language he did not understand' (p.64). In light of the novel's persistent concern with this Rilkean notion, DeLillo's amusing presentation of its promotion at Logos seems only half-ironic. Gary's wish to learn from 'blanked-out pages' also offers further explanation of his powerful attraction to football, in which coaches are effectively able to 'reword' or 'rename' their world. As Gary reports enthusiastically, 'each team uses an entirely different system of naming'; 'Coaches stay up well into the night to name plays' (p.118).

Although Gary shows signs of continuing anxiety, DeLillo provides crucial indications of the nuclear sublime's cathartic effects. Though it does not banish 'all sense of global holocaust', Gary's interest in nuclear war diminishes dramatically (p.43). Where he had been 'the best student' in the 'Aspects of Modern War' tutorial,

Gary now admits that, during war games, 'I considered the scenario somewhat boring despite all the frenzy and tension' (p.223). Moreover, the final chapters contain a proliferation of references to the contingency of relationships between signifier and referent. Gary makes few of these, but their accumulation and his acquiescence to them suggests a resolution of his neurotic linguistic concerns. Gary congratulates Bloomberg on his 'fabulous name', only for Bloomberg to reply dismissively that 'It's a means of identification. It has no significance beyond that' (p.187). When Gary's team-mate Taft Robinson forgets the name of the 'black stone of Abraham' at Mecca, he is quick to downplay its importance. 'A name's a name' he tells Gary, 'A place could just as easily be another place' (p.241).

With the inclusion of a story by the fictional 'Tudev Nemkhu', DeLillo also provides a dark allegory of Gary's formerly compulsive relation to language, which reaffirms the wisdom of his realist elevation of the status of mind. The narrative functions as a sly, comical morality tale, which is introduced by Gary's friend Myna and may be her arch comment on his intellectual predicament. It questions the wisdom of word fetishism, which 'Nemkhu' presents as a limited and fragile approach to reality. Nemkhu portrays creatures named Nautiloids who replace referent with the signifier, by producing 'likenesses' of objects, which each become 'a word rather than a thing', and feeding them into their 'own circuitry' (pp.169-170). The Nautiloids thus transform themselves into the 'monadanom', or 'the thing that's everything', and thereby fulfil Gary's own fantasy of cancelling the mind-world relation. Finally, however, this concentration on the Word proves inadequate. In a clear parallel to Gary's Nagelian realisation that he must 'learn from blanked-out pages', the disorientated 'monadonom' is eventually forced to confront mind and

reality in the absence of signification, when, unexpectedly, the 'word just erased itself. It no longer exists' (p.170).

In spite of Gary's profound shift in consciousness, DeLillo denies the reader a harmonious or comfortable conclusion. The text terminates suddenly, after Gary starves himself to the point where 'High fevers burned a thin straight channel through my brain' and he is fed 'through plastic tubes' (p.242). Although the illness is alarming, his disintegration may be interpreted as merely another productive catharsis. The simultaneously physical and mental nature of the illness-fever in the brain-may symbolise acceptance of the mind-body unity that, we learn in the final pages, coach Creed has long recommended (p.237). Osteen argues that DeLillo's refusal to offer satisfying closure indicates DeLillo's rejection of the narrator's 'attraction to apocalypse' and endings in general (Osteen, p.32). Although the peremptory conclusion may imply rejection of Gary's former pursuit of catastrophe and finality, this view disregards the rapid diminution of his fascination for holocaust. In spite of its unsettling violence, the conclusion is accompanied by a potentially fruitful new alliance for Gary, with Taft Robinson, who shares Gary's interest in 'Atrocities in general' (p.241). After long discussion of Nazism, 'the teeth, the lampshades, the soap', which preoccupies Taft, Gary suggests to him, with apparent sincerity, that 'There must be something we can do' (pp.240-41). In this purposeful context, Gary's malnourished body represents his latest effort to purify the mind through mortification of the body. Although the disturbing image of a starving patient allows one the option of believing Gary remains enmeshed in terminal crisis, it is equally plausible that malnutrition is one more strategy, devised to counter and overcome his fear of the 'nameless' and ineffable (Anything p.83).

Great Jones Street

The narrator-protagonist of Great Jones Street (1973), rock singer Bucky Wunderlick, finds a similarly partial solitude in which to examine mind and selfhood. He retires to the unoccupied first floor of a house in Manhattan's 'Great Jones Street', but finds himself besieged by admirers and becomes involved in a complex struggle for the possession of an aphasia-inducing drug, known as 'the product' (p.132). He retreats from a media-saturated culture, whose vacuity feeds off a model of consciousness as unreliable and dependent upon the media's own factitious signifying practices. DeLillo describes Bucky as having a 'half-shattered mind' (Anything, p.82), Bucky's colleague Azarian dismisses him as that 'whole other myth' (p.35), and Bucky himself regards his consciousness as a mere 'dream', which is easily manipulated by the fiercely capitalist record business (p.92). The book therefore participates in a tradition of writing on rock music that takes as axiomatic the 'business' production of unreal and misleading mythifications of selfhood. In The Ground Beneath Her Feet, for instance, Salman Rushdie describes the young singer Vina Aspara as 'already passing into myth, becoming a vessel into which any moron could pour his stupidities, or let us say a mirror of the culture'.³⁴ In this text, Rushdie alludes repeatedly to the myth of Orpheus, which is also apposite to Bucky's transformational journey away from and back towards rock music. Bucky withdraws from rock's hall of mirrors, in the hope that solitude and meditation may help dispel his pathological sense of illusion. Through forced injection with the 'product', administered by his besotted fans, he eventually achieves 'Several weeks of immense serenity' in silent self-communion, which restores his trust in consciousness and persuades him to reengage with popular culture (p.265). Before his aphasia, he is

diffident and vague, reflecting limply on becoming a rock ascetic: 'I might yield to the seductions of void', 'be the epoch's barren hero', 'a man who knew the surest way to minimize' (pp.67-8). Afterwards, he ceases to identify mind or self with media artifice and claims confidently that 'When the season is right', 'I'll return to whatever is out there. It's just a question of what sound to make or fake' (p.265).

A major theoretical problem for the critic is the meaning, if any, of Bucky's silence and the reason for its revivifying effect. However, as Anthony De Curtis points out, Great Jones Street is not one of DeLillo's 'more highly regarded novels' and it may be this low opinion of the text that has led critics to dismiss Bucky's withdrawal as unproductive.³⁵ Cowart describes Bucky as a 'picture of anomie', 'largely indifferent to his surroundings' (p.34). LeClair even suggests that, by retreating, Bucky forfeits his human ontology and retains only an 'objecthood' that reduces him to a capitalist lackey (p.105). Bucky does confront powerful capitalist forces, including his record company Transparanoia, the threatening omnipresence of which is symbolised by its unsuspected ownership of the building to which Bucky retires. But this critical response ignores DeLillo's emphasis on Bucky's interior experience (p.8) and, in LeClair's case, risks replicating the objectifying practices of the system he purports to criticise. Bucky describes his enterprise as 'testing the depths of silence. Or one's willingness to be silent. Or one's fear of that willingness' (p.25). I argue that this descent to dumbness convinces him of the concrete existence of the 'half-shattered' mind he distrusts and permits him to adopt a 'realist' Nagelian view of the unrepresentable reality of mind (Anything, p.82). His mute exploration of

³⁴ Salman Rushdie, The Ground Beneath Her Feet (London: Jonathan Cape, 1999), p.6.

³⁵ Anthony De Curtis, 'The Product: Bucky Wunderlick, Rock 'n Roll, and Don DeLillo's Great Jones Street' in Introducing Don DeLillo, ed. by Frank Lentricchia (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), pp.121-131 (p.121).

consciousness also exemplifies what Curtis Yehnert calls the 'strategies of self-creation', which he believes DeLillo's characters adopt in response to the 'postmodern obliteration' of selfhood.³⁶ He calls the result a 'postexistential self, a concept of subjectivity grounded not on separation of psyche and socius but on a dialectic between form and formlessness' (p.361). Yehnert's dialectic provides a useful method of theorising Bucky's experience. In silence, Bucky seeks the 'formlessness', or, to use his term, 'wordlessness', of silence in order to embrace the 'form' of his mind and reconstruct his damaged subjectivity (p.361), or, as Bucky puts it, 'remake myself' (p.68). During the cathartic process of injection with the 'product', which allows this reconstruction to take place, Bucky's responses become comparable to those of the autistic patients described by Oliver Sacks. Bucky becomes 'an island, cut off from the main', with an enhanced ability to focus on 'intense particulars'.³⁷ He produces disorientating unpunctuated lists of these 'particulars', for example, 'HAND FOOT ARM', 'NOSE TOE FACE' (p.262) and discovers, in the process, what Sacks calls 'a mode of mind at the opposite extreme from the generalising, the scientific, but still 'real', equally real, in a quite different way' (p.219). Silent concentration on 'particulars' therefore restores Bucky's faith in the reality of perception, even in the absence of 'human language' (Nagel, p.171). Like death and the nuclear sublime in End Zone, mute contemplation convinces Bucky of the ineffable realities that Nagel insists upon, mind foremost among them.

Bucky's fans demonstrate a tenacious attachment to their hero and a desire to merge with him, which suggests that, like Rushdie's narrator Umeed, who states that

³⁶ Curtis Yehnert, "'Like Some Endless Sky Waking Inside': Subjectivity in Don DeLillo", Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction, 42 (2001), 357-66 (p.361).

³⁷ Oliver Sacks, The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat (London: Picador, 1986), p.221, p.219.

'the real was Vina' (p.63), they treat him as representative of the unrepresentable real or what Lacan calls the objet petit à. Tony Tanner argues that DeLillo's depiction of these obsessive fans marks the beginning of an interest in the dynamics of crowd behaviour, which continues throughout his career.³⁸ He also suggests that DeLillo is fascinated by Elias Canetti's work Crowds and Power.³⁹ Although Tanner provides no evidence for this claim, Canetti's views are certainly pertinent to Bucky's experience. Canetti emphasises the sense of 'equality' (p.30) that predominates in a crowd, which leads to the mass behaving as 'a single creature' with 'fifty heads and a hundred legs, all performing in exactly the same way' (p.32). Bucky's intense interaction with his fans leads him to feel his mind has been subsumed into a similarly amorphous mass consciousness. He suggests that, by the 'final tour', his performances relied on the crowd's 'reduplicated noise' and that, if 'deprived of people's screams', their recent music would be 'next to meaningless' (p.2). This symbiotic relationship eventually produces some threateningly proprietorial responses from his admirers, who demand either, his suicide, 'preferably in a foreign city' (p.2), or retirement, although they eventually accept the inwardness entailed by his forced aphasia. As they declare menacingly, 'We're your group image, Bucky. You've come inside to stay' (p.194). The fans' forcible projection of their anxieties and tensions onto Bucky causes him considerable disquiet and exacerbates his sense of personal dissolution. Notably, P-P Hartnett's recent novel Rock 'n' Roll Suicide suggests that, over the intervening three decades, the dynamic between star and audience has shifted, so that less crowd emotion is transferred to the celebrity and more concentrated among the

³⁸ Tony Tanner, The American Mystery: American Literature from Emerson to DeLillo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.203.

³⁹ Elias Canetti, Crowds and Power, trans. by Carol Stewart (London: Victor Gollanz Ltd., 1962)

devoted young audience. Like Bucky, the novel's protagonist Max comes to consider himself unreal, 'A construction of shadow and light that cannot be touched', but, although he is initially suspected of taking his own life after his disappearance, the 'Rock 'n' Roll Suicide' of the title is, in fact, his obsessive fan, who refuses to contemplate life without him.⁴⁰ In the late 1960s or early 1970s environment of Great Jones Street, though, DeLillo portrays the duties of stardom as more onerous. In the novel's opening passages, Bucky even accepts the decisive role that his fans play in his abandonment of his band. The irony of his reclusive withdrawal is therefore that it is prompted by his admirers' realisation that the 'culture had reached its limit' and their consequent cultic embrace of 'isolation'. Although they perceive Bucky's need for introspection before he does, they allow him to maintain the illusion of autonomy. As Bucky puts it, they became 'less murderous in their love of me, as if realizing finally that my death, to be authentic, must be self-willed' (p.2).

Bucky's eventual ambivalent 'return' to rock music creates an obviously circular structure. As DeLillo notes, the novel 'bends back on itself in the sense that the book is the narrator's way of resurfacing' (Anything, p.87). The ouroboric pattern implies a non-judgmental approach to the simulacral play of signification that characterises media culture. This sense of authorial detachment is affirmed by Bucky's fulfilment of numerous rock archetypes, which suggests DeLillo has assembled his characteristics from those of 1960s rock 'n' roll stars. One's sense of Bucky as an individuated consciousness is therefore diminished and the text constructed as a generalised examination of the impact of fame on individual consciousness. His solitary production of 'The Mountain Tapes' recalls Bob Dylan's 'Basement Tapes', which were produced in the late 1960s (p.201). The ferocious

⁴⁰ P-P Hartnett, Rock 'n' Roll Suicide (London: Sceptre, 2003), p.144.

guitar-work in Bucky's band, which he describes as 'the brute electricity of that sound' (p.12), suggests an allusion to Jimi Hendrix. As Simon Frith remarks, Hendrix emphasised the 'electric guitar' and the use of 'amplification as itself a source of new sorts of sound'.⁴¹ Moreover, Bucky's involvement with meditation and narcotics recalls the late phase of The Beatles, who, as Frith notes, had a 'public engagement with the trappings of hippie culture' (p.79).

In light of his composite character and submissive response to his devotees, DeLillo's use of the word 'authentic' to describe Bucky's actions may be partly ironic. As Keir Keighley remarks, in ancient Greece, the term authentic meant "'self-made'" and, etymologically, the word therefore opposes the 'mass-produced' or 'money-driven' (Frith, p.134). Clearly Bucky cannot lay claim to such autonomy, whether financial or personal. Although, in rock, the term 'authenticity' has become so polyvalent as to be almost meaningless, Keighley points out, and Bucky's experience demonstrates, that the difficulty of its definition in popular music 'underlines a general anxiety about the status of the modern self. Musical experiences considered 'authentic' are those which highlight or nourish individual identity' (p.134). Rock's complex preoccupation with the 'real' and the 'authentic' therefore offers DeLillo an ideal opportunity to depict a character whose professional concerns naturally converge with a more general scepticism in American culture about human consciousness.

A frequent trope of rock 'authenticity' is the solitary recording or performance, preferably with acoustic instrumentation. Prior to his disappearance, Bucky seeks musical legitimacy and personal autonomy in precisely this way, by recording 'The Mountain Tapes'. DeLillo's allusion to Dylan's 'Basement Tapes'

⁴¹ Simon Frith, Will Straw and John Street, eds. The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp.82-3.

carries heavy irony: the songs' lyrical content is, in Bucky's words, full of 'childlike blandness' and an 'abnormal naturalness' and conveys a despairing conviction that consciousness is radically illusory (pp.147-8). In interview, DeLillo describes a transition in Bucky's lyrics from 'extreme self-awareness' to 'child-like babbling' (Anything, p.82). Song 18 examines such 'child-like babbling' and adopts a Nagelian position on the unrepresentable reality of mind, by asserting the irreducible substance of illiterate infant consciousness; 'Undreamed of grammars float in my spittle' he announces, while assuming the persona of a young child (p.205). The simple statements in song 20, 'I know my toes' and 'I touch my hand/One touch One', fall into the former category and suggest a pathological need to affirm the reality of his perceptions and a determination to overcome his alienation from the physical (p.206). In this state, Bucky's responses are consistent with what Sacks calls the 'feeling of de-realisation' (p.62) among patients who experience a loss of "proprioception" (p.42), a hidden sense that he defines as being 'like the eyes of the body' and whose loss leads to a feeling of being 'disembodied' (p.44). Through solitary communion with his music, Bucky seeks to restore his faith in mind, the loss of which has caused this sense of 'de-realisation' and disembodiment.

Bucky's refusal to re-record and release the 'Mountain Tapes' is motivated by a paradoxical need to emphasise the reality and lasting ontological value of transitory mental experiences. As he tells his manager Globke, 'the effect of the tapes is that they're tapes. Done at a certain time under the weight of a certain emotion'. They 'can't be duplicated in a concert situation' (p.188). Bucky's sceptical attitude to repetition recalls that of Gilles Deleuze, who argues that authentic duplication is impossible, and therefore purely 'symbolic', because any supposed repetition will

occur at a later time and therefore fail to be identical.⁴² Globke regards Bucky's attitude as a betrayal and responds self-righteously by stealing the tapes and announcing his intention to distribute them (p.164). Yet, in the context of industry practice, Bucky's position may be interpreted as orthodox. As Michael Coyle points out, the record industry believes that 'The recording and not the performance is the "real" thing', a position that appears to vindicate Bucky's stubborn defence of his private recording.⁴³ Yet, the record industry also demands that the 'real' thing be made available for regular reproduction in performance. Consequently, Bucky's conviction that, in Deleuze's words, any reproduction contains a 'differential' that has been 'disguised and displaced' will not win him the commercial argument, but is, nevertheless, a skilful use of the industry's own logic, which demonstrates the hypocrisy of its position (p.xx).

DeLillo emphasises the thematic connections between Great Jones Street and its predecessor. Bucky refers to End Zone's title, when announcing that his retreat is motivated by an interest 'in endings, in how to survive a dead idea' and a wish to extend his 'personal limits, in endland, far from the tropics of fame' (p.4). DeLillo's sense of rock music as exploratory of the extreme limits of subjectivity and culture, what he calls 'a game at the far edge', 'a music of loneliness and isolation', persists in contemporary literary treatments of the genre (Anything, p.82). In Polaroids from the Dead, Douglas Coupland has a fan at a Grateful Dead concert make the disturbing observation that 'The guys here all look like Charles Manson' 'and the women all

⁴² Gilles Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, trans. by Paul Patton (London: The Athlone Press, 1994), p.17.

⁴³ Michael Coyle and Jim Dolan, 'Modeling Authenticity, Authenticating Commercial Models', in Reading Rock and Roll: Authenticity, Appropriation (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp.17-35 (p.18).

look like Sharon Tate'.⁴⁴ In Foster Wallace's story 'Girl With Curious Hair', meanwhile, punk rock is associated with extreme violence and hallucinatory unreality, with a narrator who casually sets a fellow fan's 'beard on fire' and his friend who insists that a 'girl's curious hair represented radioactive, chemical waste product anti-immolation mojo'.⁴⁵ Bucky's own aspiration to transcend 'personal limits' extends to exploring the 'void' that Gary defines as a Rilkean aphasic space in which the mind 'remakes itself' (p.89). Like Gary, in his exploration of the aphasic void, Bucky views excrement as a representation of the real, where signifier and referent meet harmoniously. Reporting the words of a woman 'cataloguing various items along the sidewalk', Bucky is particularly struck by 'NEWSPAPER VOMIT SHIT', 'SHIT GARBAGE SHIT GARBAGE' (p.260).

The word 'void' recurs in Great Jones Street and the meaning Bucky attaches to it functions as an index of his progress in reconstructing his 'half-shattered' mind and 'remaking' his subjectivity. It first appears in the baroque and portentous opening paragraph, where he describes 'true fame', with camp melodrama, as 'a devouring neon' and the 'edge of every void', which, at first, seems a self-consciously clichéd reference to the fabled perils of rock stardom (p.1). Later, though, the term grows in significance and its meaning oscillates between a sense of mental vacuity caused by the 'devouring' unreality of fame and the nihilistic idea of a drift towards emptiness and death, which, in moments of pessimism, is how he characterises his seclusion. Without a serious belief in the reality of mind, Bucky is vulnerable to the idealist notion, which his lover and 'groupie' Opel advocates fiercely, that signification only obscures a threatening meaninglessness. Her position recalls Žižek's view that the

⁴⁴ Douglas Coupland, Polaroids from the Dead (London: Flamingo, 1996), p.13.

⁴⁵ David Foster Wallace, 'Girl With Curious Hair', in The Girl With Curious Hair and Other Stories (London: Abacus, 1997), pp.53-74 (p. 62, pp.64-5).

'Real Thing' beyond language is neither unrepresentable trauma, nor the experience of consciousness, but only a terrifying nothingness; in Žižek's words, 'ultimately, the destructive void'.⁴⁶ When Bucky meditates, Opel argues that 'Evil is movement towards void' and remarks peremptorily that 'we both agree that's where you're heading' (p.88). Notably, the media-constructed persona of Rushdie's Vina inspires, in acolytes and fans, similar visions of desolation beyond signification's shimmering web. As her lover Ormus Cama declaims, 'Love was Vina, and beyond Vina there was nothing but the void' (p.15). The combination of her desire to rescue Bucky from the 'void' with her status as an ambitious groupie, who 'wanted to be lead singer' in 'a hard rock band', but 'had no talent' (p.12) suggests that she aspires to become a female Orpheus, who seeks to save Bucky from a self-created underworld. But, in spite of Opel's nihilism, mute examination of mind proves deeply rewarding for Bucky and constitutes the productive obverse of the, often pathological, 'extreme self-awareness', on which DeLillo remarks (*Anything*, p.82). Bucky reports approvingly that, when 'alone' and 'motionless as salt', 'I had centred myself, learning of the experience of an interior motion, a shift in levels from isolation to solitude to wordlessness' (pp.85-6). DeLillo's choice of the simile 'motionless as salt' alludes to the Old Testament legend of Lot's Wife, affirming his apparent concern with legends involving paralysis and providing further evidence for the relevance of the Orpheus legend to Bucky's descent to the 'unimprinted level' of consciousness (p.265).

DeLillo presents Opel's disruption of Bucky's meditation with utter lack of sympathy. Under her influence, Bucky, like Gary, is alienated from the 'centre' of his being and 'became the thing that swirled' around Opel (p.86). Yet, ironically, it is the

⁴⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Five Essays on September 11th and Related Dates* (London: Verso, 2002), p.12.

peripatetic and idealist Opel who eventually meets the undignified fate of Eurydice, by being reduced to 'objecthood' (Loop, p.105). She declares herself 'luggage. By choice, inclination and occupation', before her reified status is humorously confirmed by her sudden death. In Bucky's comical statement of the obvious, she becomes 'Very still. Never to be challenged in this particular stillness' (p.91). DeLillo emphasises the morbidity of her views, by having her continue to espouse her Žižekian position after death. 'Opel's mind' reappears 'in the room' as a spectral presence and prompts Bucky, as though hypnotised, to reaffirm her mantra that 'Evil is movement towards void'. Significantly, the recollection of Opel's idealism induces in Bucky the disorientating sense of 'disembodiment' and 'de-realisation' (p.44), which Sacks associates with the loss of 'proprioception' (p.42), and prompts him to a touchingly careful examination of the body. As he reports, 'I took off my shoes and socks, then sat on the bed and counted my toes' (p.150).

DeLillo provides regular reminders of the extreme disorientation that prompted this sense of 'disembodiment' and 'de-realisation'. Bucky's colleague Azarian reports near psychotic behaviour, on tour, when Bucky made 'unreal faces' at 'some old woman in a wheelchair': 'laughing and babbling and down on your knees'. In Azarian's words, 'There was no reality', and 'I knew it wasn't a joke. It was too unreal for that' (pp.34-5). Bucky's alienation from reality is also indicated by his encounters with duplicitous underworld drug-dealer Dr Pepper, who obscures his identity with a series of simulacral personae. Pepper, 'the scientific genius of the underground' (p.59), hopes to acquire 'the product' and, to this end disguises himself as a lame brush salesman and, later, a professor of 'Latent History', who studies fantasised events that 'almost' or 'probably took place' (p.75). Meanwhile, a stream

of fantastic news stories reminds the reader of the factitious environment Bucky has endured. Oblivious to Bucky's need for seclusion, Globke casually alerts him to the fact that he was 'seen stealing a can of pineapple chunks in Fresno' (p.146).

Bucky's sense of his mind as thoroughly mediated creates a vacuous and powerless sense of self. Like Rushdie's Vina, he becomes 'Literally selfless'; his 'personality smashed' (p.121). In the same way as Gary, he struggles to accept Nagel's dictum that the 'fact' of consciousness subsists independently of 'human language' (p.171) and his wish to convince himself of the reality of mind and self therefore becomes a search for the signifier that denotes them perfectly. Walking through New York, he repeats his name in search of inspiration, but quickly discovers the limitations of language for this purpose:

'Walking south on Broadway (downtown, always down), I repeated these sounds over and over, trying to penetrate vapour, to reach beyond the sounds to whatever it was that they designated, the dream guiding the body through the snow, wun-der-lick, object of the enquiry' (p.92)

Because Bucky's distrust of language convinces him that the signifier can only refer to a media-inspired 'dream', his search for the 'object' 'designated' by the signifier (himself) is abortive (p.92). DeLillo's depiction of Bucky's alienation here is comparable to Herbert Marcuse's portrayal of the subject of postmodernity, who lacks an 'individual consciousness' distinguishable from 'public opinion and behaviour', a notion that is itself indebted to Adorno's conception of the media-conditioned personality as merely 'the centers where the general tendencies meet' (Dialectic,

p.154).⁴⁷ Globke also regards Bucky's selfhood as mere impersonation, emptied of subjective content, and advises him to execute 'a surprise return to your old self. There was nobody better at it' (p.10). Bucky's conception of mind as oneiric and unreal is typified by a nightmare in which he is 'dreamed by a preternatural entity' (the media?) and reduced to the 'stale chemical breath of the dreamer' (p.142). Again, the scene is comparable to the opening of The Ground Beneath Her Feet, in which Vina 'woke sobbing from a dream of human sacrifice in which she had been the intended victim' and is surrounded by 'the popping of flash bulbs' (p.3). Bucky's distrust of mind is clear from the dream's account of him, even in his waking state, as 'barely conscious'. He fully acknowledges the catastrophic loss of autonomy this causes, admitting 'The essential question was one of control', 'I went deeper now, struggling to produce a dream of my own' (pp.142-3).

Just as Gary rejects the mutability of language as evidence of the mind's instability, the superficiality and frequent falsehood of media discourse causes Bucky to distrust language and mind. Like Umeed, he nurtures an urge to 'break free into the real' (p.223). His responses to journalists imply that the media undermines public consciousness and annuls the distinction between truth and illusion. He instructs 'RUNNING DOG NEWS SERVICE', whose name foreshadows the automated thought that later pervades Running Dog, that they need not be accurate, since 'Whatever you write will be true' (p.21).⁴⁸ As one of Foster Wallace's characters remarks before a television appearance, 'Sincerity is out', 'The joke is now on people who're sincere'.⁴⁹ The singer's dark view of technology's power over mind is shared

⁴⁷ Herbert Marcuse, One Dimensional Man: The Ideology of Industrial Society (London: Sphere, 1964), p.25, p.24.

⁴⁸ Don DeLillo, Running Dog (London: Vintage, 1992)

by many media theorists, including Niklas Luhmann, who calls media outlets 'recursively stabilized functional mechanisms, which remain stable even when their genesis and their mode of functioning have been revealed'.⁵⁰ Bucky instructs the same journalist that 'Everybody under contract' at 'Transparanoia' 'has his or her facsimiles' and that, while Bucky 'is having his toenails clipped', 'You've been conducting an interview with his facsimile' (p.24). Although his ex cathedra delivery of such maxims implies a despairing alienation from mind and subjectivity, the relative equanimity with which he receives reporters and record company representatives suggests that, even in hiding, he guards his public image carefully. His projection of an enigmatic persona may even indicate a canny awareness that, as an ABC journalist asserts, 'your power is growing', 'The less you say, the more you are'. (p.128). Yet, Bucky also aims to achieve sufficient mental tranquility to facilitate his re-emergence into rock culture. Paradoxically, therefore, while he uses media outlets for self-publicity, he also adopts the role of a 'half-saint, practised in visions' and 'informed by a sense of bodily economy', seeking, like Americana's David, to reconstruct his selfhood through the embrace of asceticism (p.19).

This self-discipline creates appropriate conditions for the re-interpretation of 'void' as the contemplation of silence, which is central to Bucky's mission of self-scrutiny. As Robert Nadeau puts it insightfully, 'Bucky seeks to withdraw into the silence of awareness without symbolic content', wherein he hopes to escape his anxious need to match signifier with referent.⁵¹ Where he has sought linguistic 'form' to extricate himself from supposed 'formlessness', he now reverses Yehner's

⁴⁹ David Foster Wallace, 'My Appearance', in The Girl With Curious Hair and Other Stories (London: Abacus, 1997), pp.173-202 (p.182).

⁵⁰ Niklas Luhmann, The Reality of the Mass Media, trans. by Kathleen Cross (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), p.1.

'dialectic' and embraces the 'formlessness' of silence as a way of accepting the reliable 'form' of consciousness. In the process, Bucky notes the arbitrary nature of the relation between signifier and referent but draws radically different conclusions from this than those of the post-Saussurean linguistics that have been so influential in postmodernity. Indeed, for him, the contingency of the relationship between signifier and referent diminishes the existential influence of language. To 'RUNNING DOG', he remarks playfully that the term 'malfeasance' 'carries tremendous weight in a court of law', 'Much more weight than misfeasance or non-feasance' (p.21). When seeking coffee, he insists rigorously on the separation of referent and signifier, while also satirising his own pedantry and philosophy of language in general. He asserts casually that he is seeking 'some sign of a coffee can', but corrects his remark, by noting that 'Either the coffee can would be there or it wouldn't. There was no sign involved' (p.40). Bucky's attempt to withdraw from signification sometimes becomes slightly hysterical, disintegrating into bewildered assertions like 'Signs that serve no purpose are logically meaningless, according to something I'd read once' (p.40), perhaps because, he secretly fears, like Opel, that beyond signification lies mere 'void': an unrewarding nothingness (p.88). By these uneven stages, Bucky adopts a more flexible Kripkean, outlook on language, which acknowledges that names are not determined by 'some unique properties satisfied by the referent' but 'contingent marks of the object', and accepts the realist Nagelian position that mind exists independently of language (Kripke, p.106). He lambasts himself as a 'votary of dupe and superstition' and scorns his linguistic preoccupations with the parodic dismissal that 'Spoon secured, named and agreed on, we pursue the formal concept to its inevitable end, which is coffee' (p.40).

⁵¹ Robert Nadeau, Readings from the New Book on Nature: Physics and Metaphysics in the Modern Novel (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981), p.169.

Significantly, the one character that asserts an existential connection between signifier and referent is treated with complete lack of sympathy. Edward B. Fenig is an obscure and lamentably uninspired writer who lives upstairs from Bucky and who, rather pathetically, believes they have ‘something a little bit in common, at least retroactively’, by virtue of their allegedly similar professions (p.18). DeLillo mercilessly satirises Fenig’s fetishisation of the signifier, which, in light of Bucky’s fevered attempt to discard a similar obsession, appears backward looking or decadent. Considering the possibility of literary renown, Fenig claims ‘I won’t let it destroy me. Fame. The perfect word for the phenomenon it describes’, at which point he supplies a ludicrous list of anagrams, ‘Amef. Efam. Mefa’, which he believes fail to fit their referent with the same precision (p.49). By virtue of their vaguely comparable vocations and linguistic anxieties, Fenig serves as a disturbing doppelganger of Bucky’s. Indeed, read in terms of Gaston Bachelard’s ‘topoanalysis’, with its association of ‘the roof’ with ‘rationality’ and ‘solid geometry’, Fenig’s position as Bucky’s ‘upstairs neighbour’ (p.18) implies that he may function as the star’s superego.⁵² In this role, his professional failure and amorality provide a saturnine reminder of the obscurity that beckons, if Bucky remains at ‘Great Jones Street’. Fenig’s literary work on infancy parallels Bucky’s engaging enquiry into infantile consciousness, in several songs, including the ‘infantile babbling’ of ‘Pee-Pee-Maw-Maw’ (p.205). By contrast, however, Fenig examines infantile sexuality, in some remarkably distasteful fiction that he calls ‘pornography for kids’ (p.51). Incredibly, in this work, he plans to hint at the ‘Kaleidoscopic sex organs’ of children, which, he believes, are capable of ‘wild fiery pleasure’ (p.50). In every respect, therefore, Fenig

⁵² Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, trans. by Maria Jolas (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1994), p.8, p.18.

represents a level of degeneracy to which Bucky fears descending, if he fails to overcome his scepticism about consciousness and return to work. DeLillo extends these parallels by suggesting that the sinister effects of pornography are similar to the destruction wreaked by the self-referring signifiers of rock. As Fenig asserts, 'pornography' 'makes people easy to manipulate' by placing them 'on the level of things' (p.223). Just as Bucky's sense of agency has been undermined, in writing porn, Fenig experiences a 'hardening of mechanisms' within him and complains that 'I the writer was being manipulated by what I wrote' (p.223).

DeLillo provides another disturbing, but, ultimately, false analogy with Bucky's 'motionless' solitude, in the eccentric 'Happy Valley Farm' commune (p.16). These uninvited visitors describe themselves as a 'new earth family', with an admiration for Bucky, rooted in a mistaken belief that he shares their ideological quest to 'return the idea of privacy to American life' (p.16), which, according to Opel, involves 'some old idea of men alone with the land' (p.60). Their name derives from the fictional paradise inhabited by Samuel Johnson's Prince Rasselas.⁵³ Like Bucky retreating from the materially comfortable but distorted world of rock music, Rasselas emerges from his unreal, womb-like home, where 'Every desire was immediately granted' (p.3), to better acquaint himself with reality. But, where Rasselas finds the world cruelly disillusioning, Bucky is reinvigorated by his experience. The commune members, however, share Rasselas' jaundiced view of reality and their 'Revolutionary solitude' and determination to 'build inward' quickly becomes the corruption and violence of radical individualism (p.194). One particularly aggressive member, Bohack, casually expresses the hope that he can 'wholesale dope' to fund his quest for inner experience (p.194) and promotes 'mindless violence' as the only 'truly

⁵³ Samuel Johnson, The History of Rasselas: Prince of Abissinia (London: Oxford University Press, 1971)

philosophical violence' (p.191). But, unlike Fenig, who Bucky could ignore, Happy Valley are committed fans of Bucky's music and feel entitled to the psychic union with Bucky and influence over him that they once enjoyed (p.2). Bohack tells Bucky that 'your privacy and isolation are what give us the strength to be ourselves. We were willing victims of your sound. Now we're acolytes of your silence' (p.194). Bohack therefore attempts to force Bucky into the nihilistic 'isolation' that Happy Valley favours, by robbing him of speech. As narcotics expert Fred Chess instructs Bucky, before injecting him, the commune seeks 'the wrong kind of privacy, the old privacy, never again to be found' (p.252) and, as Bucky's experience bears out, 'true privacy is an inner state'. 'The mind has to level itself across a plane of solitude' (p.253).

But, against the expectations of Happy Valley, the illegal drug of the counter-culture acts as 'pharmakon', repairing the damage inflicted by the poison of rock culture's vacuous media representations. Ironically, since Bohack's intention is to prevent any attempt from Bucky to 'step back into the legend' (p.243), the process restores Bucky's faith in consciousness and encourages him to 'return to whatever is out there' (p.265). Although Bucky is aware of the commune's penchant for violence, including their recent murder of Bucky's colleague, Azarian (p.240), his dismissive response to warnings about the drug's side effects suggests little anxiety and considerable impatience for the anticipated benefits of aphasia. 'I know all this. This is boring', he tells Fred Chess, as Chess explains the possibility of damage to Bucky's left brain (p.255). Asked for 'last words', Bucky repeats the infantile lyric 'Pee-pee-maw-maw', reminding the reader that the minimisation of language, perhaps even speechlessness itself, has long been his goal (p.256). Bucky insists his retreat from the Word is blissful and reinvigorating, referring to the 'several weeks of immense serenity' that follow his 'withdrawal to that unimprinted level where all sound is

silken and nothing erodes in the mad weather of language' (p.265). His ecstatic dumbness recalls Nye's remark that 'The specific advantage of the sublime is that it is beyond words' (p.xiv). Nye's view suggests that Bucky's aphasia is exemplary of the sublime and, since the drug is a manufactured product, the technological sublime. Once free of the 'mad weather of language' Bucky reports an augmented sense of physical reality (p.265). He mentions that 'Having no words for things affected even my movements across the room. I walked more slowly, as though in fear of objects, all things with names unknown to me' (p.264).

Weeks of 'serenity' persuade Bucky to reconsider his former Žižekian view of 'void' as wholly destructive and contemplate other meanings of the word, one of which is introduced late in the text, when Bucky debates Upanishadic mysticism with Globke's wife Michelle. She is keen to persuade Bucky that the truly dangerous 'void' is worldly 'attachment' (p.237), which, in the context of Bucky's long 'attachment' to fame and the signifier and his pursuit of asceticism as a 'half-saint' (p.19), seems especially pertinent to his aspirations. R.D. Rande's view of the Upanishads' portrayal of mind suggests that these scriptures may have a similar relevance to Bucky's struggles with consciousness.⁵⁴ According to Rande, the Upanishads present a notably realist view of mind and attribute to it an exalted ontological status. In Rande's words, the Upanishads consider that self-consciousness constitutes the 'ultimate reality' (p.197), while they also lay great stress on 'Thought-power' (p.92) and treat 'Intellect' as 'the backbone of reality itself' (p.86).

Michelle's attempts to persuade Bucky that 'Non-attachment is the path to beyond-reality', 'where our true nature indwells', go unheeded. Bucky's

⁵⁴ R.D. Rande, A Constructive Survey of Upanishadic Philosophy: Being an Introduction to the Thought of the Upanishads (Chowpatty, Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavari, 1968)

determination to accept reality is such that the suggestion that this 'reality' may be only another level of illusion is unwelcome to him (p.237). But, in spite of this failure, Michelle is not the caricature that some critics have suggested. Although Globke reports wearily on her three years 'reading the Upanishads in paperback' and refers mockingly to her view that the East is the 'petal of all energy' (p.9), the reader knows, and Globke admits, that he shows 'perpetual bad taste' and his sensibility is wholly untrustworthy (p.237). Moreover, Michelle provides the novel's single moment of authentic emotion, by kissing Bucky's 'left temple' in a seeming gesture of compassion. Bucky's response is cynical: he suggests that the kiss demonstrates her 'need for what she took to be my suffering' (p.237). However, in the context of the drab irony to which the novel's other characters perpetually retreat, the incongruity of Michelle's unguarded and humane gesture associates mystical thought with the possibility of deliverance from the market-driven banality of Bucky's pop culture world. It is striking that confronted with his wife's concern for Bucky, even Globke becomes 'oddly deferential to the moment's solemnity' (p.238).

Given Bucky's blissful aphasic experience, his continued insistence to Michelle that motion towards 'void' is pure 'evil' is puzzling and implies that 'void' retains strong associations for him with a notion of the Real as emptiness, meaninglessness, and death. Indeed, there is significant evidence that Bucky's fear of 'void' and 'wordlessness', is directly due to the displacement of death-anxiety (p.86). When Fenig tells him of the 'retarded' boy on the floor beneath him, who 'can't talk or dress himself', Bucky connects the boy's muteness with his own horror of organic matter (p.27). In Bachelard's terms, the boy's status as downstairs neighbour suggests that he represents the instinctual and physical qualities, generally attributed to the Freudian Id. Bachelard speaks of the 'irrationality of the depths', connoted by the

'cellar' (Space, p.18). The fact that the child's dream life impinges regularly on Bucky's mind also suggests that he may be a manifestation of the singer's unconscious. Bucky remarks on the noise that emanates when the 'boy's dreaming' that 'I had never heard a sound so primal. It expressed the secret feculent menace of a forest or swamp' (p.51). The image makes a further Bachelardian connection between 'the presence of dormant water' and the 'melancholy' it inspires in Bucky, as well as supporting Bachelard's view of water as 'dream-like' and 'the land of total death'.⁵⁵ Bucky's subsequent confession that he associates the boy's 'feculent menace' with the 'beauty and horror of wordless things' (p.52) makes it plain that, for Bucky, fear of silence is fear of death, or what Žižek calls the 'destructive void' (p.12).

DeLillo's repeated exploration of the importance of death-anxiety in the American psyche recalls his acknowledgement of Ernest Becker's influence, who argues that 'Consciousness of death is the primary repression, not sexuality'.⁵⁶ Becker argues that the category of hero, to which Bucky clearly aspires, is born of collective desire to transcend mortality. In Becker's words, 'heroism is first and foremost a reflex of the terror of death' (p.11). In his role as what he calls a 'hero of rock 'n' roll' (p.1), Bucky's lyrics betray an intense concern with death (p.1). V C Sweetheart begins with the surreal and despondent lines, which appear to parody Samuel Beckett, 'Born in a hearse/Left foot first/Nursed on a hand-me-down nipple' (p.97). The assertion in Nothing Turns that 'Nothing turns from death so much as flesh/ Untouched by aging' (p.101) indicates a preoccupation with the preservation of youth that is also apparent in Bucky's response to Globke's cutting observation that 'one day you'll be thirty'. Bucky's adamant rebuttal of this obvious fact reminds one

⁵⁵ Gaston Bachelard, Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter, trans. by Edith R. Farrell (Dallas, Tex.: Dallas Institute Publications, 1994), p.7, p.6, p.74.

⁵⁶ Ernest Becker, The Denial of Death (New York: Macmillan Free Press, 1973), p.96.

of rock heroism's dependence on the illusion that physical decay might somehow be eluded. 'Never', replies Bucky, prompting Globke to dismiss him sarcastically as the 'ageless wonder' (p.10).

Bucky's international celebrity makes his death-anxiety fertile ground for DeLillo to return to the idea, first explored in Americana, that the iconic images of U.S. culture function as apotropaia, designed to ward off death. Several characters draw an analogy between contemporary visual media and the burial rituals of ancient Egypt. At a party thrown by Bucky, an unnamed figure declares deceased cinema actors 'Dead but not really dead. Never really dead. The concept of movies is so fundamentally Egyptian' (p.73). This notion of the cinema image as immortal 'alter ego' is, again, identical to Otto Rank's idea that art entails a search for the 'soul' and seeks to bestow immortality on its subjects.⁵⁷ DeLillo's view of contemporary Western culture's repression of death is close to the one articulated by Baudrillard, with whom DeLillo's depictions of postmodern media culture are often associated.⁵⁸ Baudrillard alludes to an 'irreversible evolution' towards marginalisation of the dead in the postmodern city, which has transformed our societies into death-cultures (p.126). Its disturbing corollary, he suggests, is a massive return of the repressed: 'The cemetery no longer exists because modern cities have taken over their function: they are ghost towns, cities of death' (p.127). Having experienced being the subject represented in a profoundly visual rock culture, Bucky feels sufficiently detached to analyse the practices he has fled and avers that 'television is a study in the art of mummification', peopled by those who would 'dwell forever in hermetic substance, free of every ravage, secure as old kings asleep in sodium' (p.136). He satirises

⁵⁷ Otto Rank, Beyond Psychology (New York: Dover Publications, 1958), p.101.

⁵⁸ Jean Baudrillard, Symbolic Exchange and Death, trans. by Iain Hamilton Grant (London: SAGE Publications, 1993)

Hollywood as a hieratic Baudrillardian 'death culture', where they 'tear the entrails out of dogs and cats and offer them up as devotions to dead movie stars' (p.153), a characterisation echoed, a decade later, by Brett Easton Ellis in Less than Zero, whose Hollywood-born narrator is haunted by 'Images of parents who were so hungry and unfulfilled that they ate their own children'.⁵⁹ Bucky's analysis of the death-anxiety implicit in American media culture implies acknowledgement of the mortal fear that has retarded his own acceptance of the silence he sought. Some, like Osteen, believe Bucky to be engaged in a quest for Thoreauvian simplicity, but life among actual death-prone organic matter would terrify him (Osteen, p.46). Bucky's pretension to asceticism is a strategy designed to still the mind long enough to convince himself of its reality. Rather than what Osteen calls a 'moral form to master commerce' (p.55), his silence serves to render credible the existence of mind and world, even after the withdrawal of what Nagel calls 'human language' (p.171).

⁵⁹ Brett Easton Ellis, Less than Zero (London: Picador, 1986), p.207.

Chapter Three

Ratner's Star: The Unification of Consciousness

DeLillo's fourth novel Ratner's Star (1976) takes as its subject the arcane worlds of postmodern mathematics and science and deals, in particular, with the discoveries, intellectual and emotional, of the precocious fourteen-year-old mathematician Billy Twillig, recent winner of the Nobel Prize.¹ The eccentric cast of characters, with whom this brilliant but naive protagonist interacts, is a hyper-rational group of scientists that comprise the membership of a radical think tank, based somewhere in Asia. These academics serve as the perfect object of satire for DeLillo, whose theme, I suggest, is the self-reflexivity of the intellect and the limited 'human identity' that results, when the mental is regarded as the sole component of selfhood (p.432). Throughout Ratner's Star, DeLillo uses the metaphor of 'joining the hemispheres' of the brain to suggest that, if used rightly, the mind might point beyond restrictive definitions of the self as purely intellectual (p.195). He shows that the implicit trust that the scientists of 'Field Experiment Number One' place in their intellect becomes fanatical identification with the rational mind and leads them to the sterile assumption that this faculty is identical to subjectivity (p.16). In the course of the novel, DeLillo places them in unexpected circumstances, in which this assumption begins to unravel, and in which they have to confront the consequences of their rejection of the body and of intuitive modes of thought. Many of these perturbing situations relate to the central task of the novel's protagonist, which is to translate a Morse Code message, consisting of 'One hundred and one pulses and gaps', thought to be from the inhabitants of a planet named 'Ratner's Star' (p.47). This intellectual

¹ Don DeLillo, Ratner's Star (London: Vintage, 1991)

problem is notable for the simplicity of its ultimate solution and the intuitive, even unscientific, mode of thought with which Billy effects its discovery. The need for subjective insight unsettles the scientists' certainty that objectivist epistemology is the only useful model of thought and supports the views of Jacques Hadamard and Henri Poincaré, who DeLillo quotes in the novel, that intellectual breakthroughs arrive as spontaneous 'flashes' of insight (p.297). Equally crushing to these elite academics, however, is the discovery that the source of the message is an advanced ancient civilisation that inhabited 'planet earth' in the 'very distant past' (p.402-3). Near the end of the text, the archaeologist Maurice Wu uncovers evidence of beings who 'resembled modern man both outwardly and otherwise' and who 'were capable of beaming radio signals into space' (p.403). To their sadness, this realisation dissolves their faith in a linear evolutionary model of history. Their extreme reactions, which include think tank leader Rob Softly's hysterical retirement to a hole in the ground, suggest that their copious sacrifices of identity have been made for the sake of this grand but unsustainable illusion of permanent progress.

When Billy 'steps aboard a Sony 747', on his way to a 'distant land', he believes his forthcoming project to be uncomplicated code breaking work, soluble by purely objective calculation; he has no suspicion that it will demand the resources of his whole self, physical, intellectual, and emotional (p.3). Although all critics of the text emphasise the probing critique of scientific method DeLillo provides in Ratner's Star, few remark on the theme of selfhood that complements it and follows logically from it. David Cowart hints at it when, paraphrasing DeLillo, he remarks in passing on the 'limitation of identity' that Rob Softly suffers in his pursuit of 'logical rigour', but does not elaborate upon the remark or appear to recognise the central importance

of this theme (p.272).² Commonly, critics, including Cowart, have chosen to emphasise the critique of the scientific empirical method that pervades the text, Nadeau, for example, offering the representative and influential view that the text examines ‘the inability of closed scientific paradigms to fully contain or define natural process’.³ Similarly, Charles Molesworth contends that the ‘satirical focus’ of the novel is ‘the totalizing impulse that must recontain all difference in a system of identity’.⁴

It seems likely that the flat and one-dimensional quality of the characters has discouraged critics from exploring the presentation of identity in Ratner’s Star. When comparing the novel to DeLillo’s earlier novels, Douglas Keeseey remarks that there is even less ‘emphasis upon traditional modes of characterization’ and refers to the complaints of early reviewers that the text was populated by caricaturish figures.⁵ But this one-dimensional quality is employed by DeLillo, as it was in End Zone, to indicate a pathological rejection of interiority on the part of these characters, which precludes the full birth or exploration of selfhood. In conversation with Tom LeClair, DeLillo compares the two novels, in this respect. Referring to the ‘made-up nature’ of the characters in End Zone, he reveals that he ‘took this further in Ratner’s Star’ and goes on to remark that, in the latter text, ‘The people had to play a role subservient to pattern, form, and so on’.⁶ If anything, in Ratner’s Star, DeLillo is more eager to

² David Cowart, The Physics of Language (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2002), p.160.

³ Robert Nadeau, Readings from the New Book on Nature: Physics and Metaphysics in the Modern Novel (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981), p.17.

⁴ Charles Molesworth, ‘Don DeLillo’s Perfect Starry Night’ in Introducing Don DeLillo, ed. by Frank Lentricchia (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), pp.143-156 (p.155).

⁵ Douglas Keeseey, Don DeLillo (New York: Twayne, 1994), p.66.

⁶ Tom LeClair and Larry McCaffery, eds. Anything Can Happen: Interviews with Contemporary American Novelists (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1983), p.81.

draw attention to the characters' transparency, largely in order to foreground their, often, abstruse ideas. He does so through the characters' jargon-filled speech and bizarre, often childish, behaviour. The text is filled with absurd and puerile characters such as Howie Weedon, who encourages Billy to spy on a woman that 'takes her bath every night at this time' and ask her to displays her 'titties' and 'cheeks' (pp.40-42). Yet, just as in End Zone, where a sense of unreality is allegorical of the characters' experience, this 'subservience to pattern', which DeLillo mentions, seems true, not only of the characters' aesthetic function, but of their tendency to identify subjectivity with intellectual abstraction (Anything, p.86). However, as DeLillo acknowledges in the same interview, in homage to Lewis Carroll's 'Alice' books, the novel is divided into two sections, 'Adventures' and 'Reflections', whose concerns are, respectively, what DeLillo calls 'positive, negative. Discrete, continuous. Day, night. Left brain, right brain'. This division situates the text in a tradition of fantastic intellectual comedy, which includes Jonathan Swift, as well as Carroll, and allows the selfhood, which is the repressed matter of Part One, to be more fully explored and revealed in the novel's second, 'night' and 'right brain', section (p.87).

The characters' thinness is also due, in part, to its generic status as a Menippean satire; a distinction it shares with Alice in Wonderland.⁷ As Northrop Frye puts it, the Menippean Satire 'deals less with people as such than with mental attitudes', while its characterization is 'stylized rather than naturalistic and presents people as mouthpieces of the ideas they represent'.⁸ Joel C. Relihan summarises the

⁷ Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978)

⁸ Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), p.309

⁹ Joel C. Relihan, Ancient Menippean Satire (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p.3 and M.H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms (New York: Holt, 1987), p.167

genre as an ‘unsettling or subversive combination of fantasy, learning, and philosophy’, while M.H. Abrams asserts, with more precision, that ‘its major feature’ ‘is a series of extended dialogues and debates’, in which representatives of various points of view ‘serve to make ludicrous the attitudes and viewpoints they typify by the arguments they urge in their support’.⁹ ‘Adventures’ contains just such a series of debates, in which the limitations and contradictions of scientific and mystical ideas are exposed to a measure of ironic treatment. Yet, once the novel’s emphasis shifts to exploration of selfhood and the ‘right brain’, these become less frequent and give way to meditations on subjectivity, sometimes delivered in the first person by individual characters. Given Ratner’s Star’s concern with the division and unity of consciousness, Mikhail Bakhtin’s remarks on the genre are also highly illuminating. Bakhtin writes of ‘The dialogical attitude of man to himself (containing the seeds of the split personality) which appears in the menippea’.¹⁰ In light of the doubleness of the novel’s structure and its conceptual dialectic of left and right brain, Bakhtin’s connection of the menippea with the notion of ‘split personality’ suggests that DeLillo’s fourth novel may be particularly representative of its genre (p.16). Notably, as we will see, the fissuring of mind and selfhood in Ratner’s Star is strikingly close to the concepts of the ‘disembodied self’ and the ‘false-self system’ that R.D. Laing develops in his celebrated analysis of schizophrenia.¹¹ Relihan’s views confirm the impression Bakhtin’s view gives of the novel’s typicality. Relihan glosses Bakhtin’s reference to the dialogical in the menippea as a ‘loss of central authority’ or ‘single point of view’ and agrees it is highly representative of the form (p.17). In accordance

¹⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics, trans. by R.W. Rotsel ([n.p.]: Ardis, 1973), p.16.

¹¹ R.D. Laing, The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness (London: Penguin, 1990), p.69, p.75.

with this, throughout the great majority of Ratner's Star, DeLillo's even-handed approach to mystical and scientific thought militates against any sense of such 'central authority' or imposed authorial viewpoint. Relihan asserts that the genre assumes 'no world can be understood' and that it therefore emphasises the 'inadequacy of preaching'. However, the difficulty of maintaining such studied neutrality is that any hint of authorial assertion will tend to draw 'the narrator and author into self-parody', which effectively means that in Menippean satire self-parody is almost impossible to avoid (pp. 24-5). The novel's closing pages, which address mathematicians directly, contain an element of just such 'self-parody'. In a climactic passage that covers several pages, the narrator accuses scientists of seeking 'metaphysical release', comparable to that achieved by mystics, at the expense of identity and self-awareness (pp.432-33). The text therefore seems to preach, where previously it limned the impossibility of acquiring objectively verifiable knowledge. The informed reader is therefore left uncertain whether to attribute authoritative force to this peroration, an interpretation that would be supported by DeLillo's consistently satirical portrayal of his mathematicians, or to regard it as one more conflicting voice in the dialogical cacophony of the 'menippea' (Bakhtin, p.16).

DeLillo's emphasis on the fusion of intuitive and logical thought echoes much of the 'two cultures' debate initiated by C.P. Snow in the late nineteen fifties.

Although Snow is English, the essay Thomas Pynchon wrote to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Snow's lecture, in which he asserts that the distinction between the 'two cultures' has since grown considerably less clear, demonstrates clearly that the influence of Snow's intervention reached DeLillo's generation of

American writers.¹² DeLillo's engagement with this debate appears to second the view expressed by Jacob Bronowski and Bruce Mazlish, in The Western Intellectual Tradition, that the 'creation of a contemporary culture' hinges on finding a 'coherent relation between science and the humanities'.¹³ DeLillo repeatedly draws attention to multifarious examples of mystical and theological speculation in mathematical history, facts that demonstrate the split between the 'two cultures' to be of relatively recent origin and suggest the possibility of regaining what Morris Berman has called 'unified consciousness'.¹⁴ Berman's concerns are particularly relevant to DeLillo's concern with the alienation from self and body that attends purely objective thought. He examines the systematic separation of subject from object and mind from world since the Renaissance and argues for a reunification of these categories that is closely akin to the task of joining 'the hemispheres' of the brain, which is assigned to Billy (p.195). DeLillo's ventures in science's deep past, which include the introduction of Pythagorean mysticism into his contemporary scientific scenario, suggest agreement with the fear of Snow's contemporary Michael Yudkin that the expansion of contemporary rationalistic science might develop imperialist tendencies that cause the 'atrophy of traditional culture'.¹⁵ Indeed, DeLillo describes the legendary mystic and mathematician, Pythagoras, as the 'guiding spirit' of the novel (Anything, p.86). As Peter Gorman points out, Pythagoras created a rousing union of logical and intuitive

¹² Thomas Pynchon, 'Is it O.K to be a Luddite?', New York Times Book Review, 28th October 1984, pp.1, pp.40-41.

¹³ J. Bronowski and Bruce Mazlish, The Western Intellectual Tradition: From Leonardo to Hegel (London: Hutchinson, 1960), p.vii.

¹⁴ Morris Berman, The Reenchantment of the World (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), p.74.

¹⁵ F. R. Leavis, Two Cultures? The significance of C.P. Snow and Michael Yudkin, An essay on Sir Charles Snow's Rede Lecture (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962), p.44.

thought, preaching that, in their immutability, numbers are comparable to Gods.¹⁶ He also demanded to be treated as a demagogue and organised quasi-religious rituals, during which he was concealed 'behind a curtain' (p.122). However, in spite of having the former mathematician Henrik Endor wistfully describe the cultic status of number and 'the intuition of the ancients, who believed that number is the essence of all things', DeLillo's attitude to his 'guiding spirit' is far from one of uncomplicated approbation (p.195). Indeed, DeLillo provides a stern critique of what Alexander George and Daniel J. Velleman call the platonistic philosophy of mathematics, which takes mathematics to exist 'quite as independently of us as does the natural world'.¹⁷ He suggests that this is an arcane strategy of self-annihilation, largely designed to banish the exigencies of physical existence. In the final chapter, he follows the bald statement that 'Mathematics is what the world is when we subtract our own perceptions' with the accusation that this 'subtraction' is the goal of platonistic mathematics, intended to remove its practitioners to the 'painless non-existence' of 'n space' (p.432). Although the desire to banish physicality is recurrent in DeLillo's work, as we will see, in Ratner's Star, DeLillo posits a direct link between neglect of the somatic and the extreme, sometimes psychotic, behaviour of certain scientists.

Endor, Billy's predecessor as code-breaker, who becomes the adolescent's unlikely mentor, demands a less hieratic union of rationality and imagination from his protégé than that promulgated by Pythagoras. Endor addresses Billy from the hole he has inhabited since, unbeknown to colleagues, he understood that the satirically named 'Artificial Radio Source Extants', or 'ARSE', are an ancient culture attempting to inform their descendants of an imminent solar eclipse (p.274). The satire is directed

¹⁶ Peter Gorman: Pythagoras: A Life (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), p.134.

¹⁷ Alexander George and Daniel J. Velleman, Philosophies of Mathematics (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), p.7.

at the scientist's blinkered inability to appreciate the message's reflexive path, which has not originated from 'Ratner's Star', but merely rebounded off it, back to its source on Earth. DeLillo imagines it forming a boomerang shape that resembles a scientific diagram, named in Billy's honour and known as the 'stellated twilligon', variations of which DeLillo uses throughout the novel to symbolise the often ideal, even illusory, nature of scientific claims to truth (p.117). Endor's instructions to Billy use the metaphor of joining 'the hemispheres' of the brain to represent this union of scientific and humanistic 'cultures' and the liberating recognition of a self not restricted to the intellect. Endor's hopes for Billy's integration of consciousness receive prophetic support from Siba Isten-Esru, who remarks on the derivation of the name 'Twillig' from 'Lig -- to bind, as in "ligate" and "ligature"' and demands archly 'Is it your destiny then to bind together two distinct entities? To join the unjoinable?' (p.155). As Cowart asserts, the novel presents this cultural union of science and humanism as immensely significant, an 'epistemic death knell, a paradigm shift like no other' (p.151). Endor informs Billy urgently that 'It's the object of your labor, lad, to join the hemispheres. Bring logical sequence to delirium' and 'language and meaning to the wild child's dream' (p.195). He especially urges Billy to make use of the 'right side of the brain' in order to enjoy 'Intuition and motion and the conquest of time' (p.195). As the work of Gerard M. Edelman and Guilio Tononi makes clear, Endor's apportioning of right brain to the sensory and imaginative and left to logical and empirical thought has a substantial basis in anatomical reality. They mention the fact that, when a surgeon 'severs the large number of reciprocal connections between the two halves of the brain', severe problems then arise with the 'interhemispheric integration of sensory and motor information'.¹⁸ Endor is particularly keen to

embrace this 'sensory' and, he believes, imaginative 'right brain'. Indeed, he makes clear that he inhabits the soil, in part, to counter the denial of the physical that he believes is endemic among scientists. The fact that Endor's quest for reconnection with the body takes him underground exemplifies Ratner's Star's connection of the somatic with the subterranean and, by implication, the unconscious mind. DeLillo suggests Billy's fear of both by his phobia of underground sites, which is rooted in a traumatic childhood visit to the New York subway. The excursion was prompted by his father's desire to expand Billy's notion of subjectivity to include irrationality and the unconscious, or, as DeLillo puts it, to introduce 'his lone son to the idea that existence tends to be nourished from below, from the fear level' (pp.4-5). Therefore, when Billy arrives at the 'armillary sphere', in which the 'Experiment' is housed, what he learns of the architecture's subterranean underpinnings immediately alerts the reader to the possibility that his stay will force him to expand his concept of selfhood beyond mere rationality. Evinrude informs him that the building extends far into the ground and includes the 'old structure' as 'buttress for the foundation'. In the 'armillary sphere', quips Evinrude, 'the Great Hall' is really 'the Great Hole' (p.204). Billy's preference for stern rationality, even objectivism, therefore makes him the ideal protagonist for Ratner's Star, since 'joining the hemispheres' involves a significant shift in his understanding of mind and subjectivity. We get some idea of this early on, when Eberhard Fearing, a fellow air passenger, professes admiration for Billy's 'Hard, cold and cutting' intellect (p.6) and DeLillo states Billy's belief in the 'arch-reality' of pure mathematics', along with its 'links to simplicity and permanence' (p.13). Tellingly, when asked about the 'mystery' of mathematics, how numbers 'interconnect', he asserts crisply that 'I don't think we can talk about it being

¹⁸ Gerald M. Edelman and Giulio Tononi, Consciousness: How Matter Becomes Imagination (London: Penguin, 2000), pp.63-4.

a mystery. There's no mystery' (p.23). Billy badly needs Endor's advice: in solving the radio code, Endor suggests, 'there's a point after which it's possible to stop digging and take the free fall. Use your imagination. That'll tell you when to make the switch' (p.196).

Under Rob Softly's leadership, right brain activity is severely restricted at 'Field Experiment Number One'. DeLillo indicates these in a variety of ways, but most strikingly by Rob's habit of playing a game with Billy called 'halfball', which resembles softball, but with only one half of a sphere (p.333). Rob tells Billy 'Get the ball, cut it in half and let's go play'. The game is so blatantly allegorical of Rob's crude sensibility that it foregrounds the clumsy nature of the symbolism involved and, again, draws attention to the novel as literary construct and Menippean Satire, in which 'form' and 'pattern' override the significance of individual characters (Anything, p.86). Rob's scepticism is such that mystical ideas provoke him to the satirical use of gibberish words, such as 'Musjid pepsi kakapo' (p.333). He later demonstrates his extreme rationality, by advocating the long discredited Fregean notion of a logical language, which he names Logicon. Such a language would be based upon the logicist assumption that, as George and Velleman put it, 'arithmetic is usually a direct development of the science of inference', or logic (p.17). On the subject of Logicon, Rob insists that 'So-called intuitive truths have to be subjected to the rigors of logic before we can take them seriously' (p.272). This emphasis on the primacy of rationality forecloses the possibilities of human subjectivity and, as Morris Berman argues, in relation to the empiricist revolution of the Renaissance, risks identifying 'human existence with pure ratiocination' (p.34). As Berman suggests and, as Part Two of Ratner's Star bears out, conflating self with intellect diminishes

subjectivity and creates the alienating illusion of separation from the world. In 'Adventures', DeLillo often explores the way mathematicians' emphasis on objective thought causes mental and physical enervation. In pursuit of rational thought and behaviour, Billy's hosts discourage modes of communication they consider excessively subjective. When Billy answers 'I have understood', he is requested to adopt a more impersonal mode of communication. 'Most people just nod', he is told, 'It's more universal' (p.17). Later, Billy's adoption of 'universal' communication even extends to supplementing this motion with an objective assertion of its occurrence: in reply to architect Soma Tobias, he remarks 'I'm nodding' (p.77). This 'rational' withdrawal from the subjective sometimes becomes an inability to experience subjectivity. Billy's chauffeur provides a comical example, when, while driving, he makes the apparently self-contradictory claim that 'I couldn't tell you what words I'm in the process of saying' (p.83). Similarly, researchers often experience total estrangement from the body, which transforms straightforward physical acts into elaborate technical feats. When Billy flees from a pigeon and instructs his companion Evinrude to do the same, Evinrude replies helplessly that 'I don't know how to run' 'I never learned' (p.236). Endor's desperate attempts to reconnect with the earth indicate that withdrawal from the body and the senses leads to similar feeling disconnection from the physical. As Berman states, the felt disjunction of mind and world, as experienced by the text's academics, is caused by disregard for the extent to which, as medieval alchemy accepted, and as contemporary quantum physics emphasises, 'we participate reality' (Berman, p.144). Berman contrasts such 'total separation' of consciousness from its environment (p.17) unfavourably with alchemical mysticism, which assumed the 'union of subject and object' to be a reality (p.73). Berman also suggests that the human subject's retreat

from the world creates an ideal situation for capitalism. After such 'total separation', it is assumed that 'nature is dead' and, consequently, 'there are no restraints on exploiting it for profit' (p.126). The insight is relevant to Ratner's Star, in which DeLillo associates scientific objectivism with the unsentimental detachment of capitalist economics. This connection is clear from Billy's first moments in the 'Field Experiment', when he catches sight of the 'small inscription: OMCO RESEARCH' and understands the project to be a mere scion of corporate capital. Ultimately, we learn that the Experiment is controlled entirely by 'OmCo' and that intellectual freedom at the think tank is highly vulnerable to alterations in business practice. At the text's conclusion, monopoly capitalism triumphs, at the expense of academic research, when 'OmCo Research' is 'acquired in a complicated stock deal by ACRONYM, a long-term international speculative monopoly that operates beyond maritime limits'. As Mainwaring informs Rob, their operation will now 'be restructured beyond present recognition' and, since Rob's 'identification with OmCo is greater than anybody's', he should consider his position. DeLillo's pointed omission of any reply from Rob suggests that, to the contrary, Rob understands that his objectivism will be entirely wholly compatible with the outlook of the incoming magnates (Ratner's, pp.412-13).

As one would expect of a novel that takes Pythagoras as its 'guiding spirit', Ratner's Star strays beyond the merely humanistic and gives mystical ideas prolonged and serious consideration. Nevertheless, as Jonathan Little rightly points out, DeLillo treats the noumenous with the same irony he applies to 'the limitations of the Western empirical method' and never allows 'readers an unironized or unmediated mystical encounter with the sacred'.¹⁹ Although critics rarely make the point, DeLillo suggests

explicitly that scientists and mystics, in varying ways, engage in similarly credulous searches for 'metaphysical release' (p.433). Early on, scientists observe an Aboriginal whirling dervish. With the help of 'tektite manipulation', a substance which, as the performer's spokesman acknowledges, is rumoured in New Age circles to be of 'extraterrestrial' origin (p.105), the Aborigine aims to replace 'Time and space' with 'the nameless dimension of the whirl' and journey, by astral means, to 'Ratner's Star' (p.106). The scientists' interest in such practices indicates a latent sympathy with this quasi-mystical project, which they rationalise weakly, by appealing to the need to investigate objectively 'every shred of evidence concerning the aborigine's totemic powers' (p.100). DeLillo emphasises this covert comradeship, showing that the scientists frequently pursue ideas that mirror the mystical. These include the 'mohole', named after its inventor, which, like the putative spirit world or paradise, is said to exist outside time and space, or as Mohole puts it, 'part of a theoretical dimension lacking spatial extent and devoid of time value' (p.181). On arrival, the researcher LoQuadro tells Billy that the 'Experiment' has the distinctly unscientific aim of helping us 'think as a single planetary mind' (p.65). Distinguishing science from less rigorous disciplines has apparently become an insuperable challenge. Cyril Kyriakos is writing a definition of science that 'ran some five hundred pages' (p.31) and admits the heretical possibility that 'obscure ritual and superstition may be perfectly legitimate scientific enterprises' (p.36). As we saw, in a long peroration, DeLillo compares the supposedly irreconcilable aims of science and mysticism. In this climactic passage, he attacks the scientific urge to 'unsnarl us from our delimiting senses' and suggests that scientist's urge for 'metaphysical release' is the desire to escape physicality; the 'pain, the life-cry'. He warns against a purely intellectual

¹⁹ Jonathan Little, 'Ironic Mysticism in Don DeLillo's *Ratner's Star*', *Papers on Language and Literature: a Quarterly Journal for Scholars and Critics of Language and Literature*, 35 (1999), 301-32

victory over these somatic terrors, since to 'out-premise' them, 'by whatever tektite whirl you've mastered, would be to make us hypothetical, a creature of our own pretending, as are you' (p.432-33). This reference to the 'tektite whirl' attributes to mathematicians a covert yearning for transcendence similar to the dervish's and implies that science and mysticism mirror one another's wish to overcome the agonies of bodily existence. Without a belief in transcendence, however, contempt for the somatic becomes a mere wish for self-annihilation: an unrestrained death-drive.

DeLillo claims that 'In your earthly study of the subject, you went beyond its natural association with the will to live and found that it contained a painless 'nonexistence', the theoretical ideal of n -space' (p.432). By pursuing this 'theoretical ideal', scientists achieve a near catatonic withdrawal from consciousness, what DeLillo calls 'Awareness of not being self-aware', implying the near total destruction of their subjectivity (p.433). Nevertheless, the scientists fail to acknowledge this imputed kinship with mysticism. Confronted by the injunction of the dervish's spokesman that God's name remain unspoken, they form 'a nearly general exodus', in protest at such unscientific credulity (p.106). The comical disjunction between the scientists' covert wish for transcendence and their horrified rejection of actual mysticism emphasises that the preference for left brain thought arises from the apparent freedom it offers from the body and death, subjects that are never absent from mysticism. As Cyril remarks pertinently, early in the novel, 'Mysticism's point of departure is awareness of death', which 'doesn't occur to science except as the ultimate horrifying vision of objective enquiry' (p.36).

The result of their flight from physicality is a tortured dualism that creates what, in his analysis of schizophrenia, R.D. Laing terms a 'disembodied self' (p.69).

Laing's concern with the consequences of the psychological neglect of physicality is in sympathy with the concerns of much of DeLillo's work, which presents numerous disorientated characters, in desperate retreat from the body. Laing's fame in America increased appreciably at the beginning of DeLillo's writing career and DeLillo would almost certainly have been exposed to Laing's theories. When DeLillo was completing his first novel in 1970, for example, Laing undertook a 'coast to coast' tour of the U.S. The event was sufficiently high profile that he appeared on television in DeLillo's home town of New York, in conversation with Norman Mailer, and received requests for interviews from Penthouse, Reader's Digest, and the Times.²⁰

In The Divided Self, Laing argues vigorously that the etiology of schizophrenic psychosis is not traceable to repressed matter, but, rather, to a conscious sense of 'ontological insecurity' (p.39). Like many of DeLillo's scientists, these psychotics regard their being as 'primarily split into a mind and a body' and envisage selfhood as consisting almost entirely of mind; or, as Laing puts it, 'they most closely identified with the "mind"' (p.65). In the case of Rob, DeLillo symbolises outright rejection of the somatic by his body being 'child-sized' (p.261) and his head 'disproportionately large' (p.262). Others, like Evinrude, convince themselves of their body's uselessness and attempt to disregard it (p.236). Their flight from physicality in order to avoid death is what Laing would call the 'denial of being as a means of preserving being', which he believes typical of psychosis (p.150). Given that the scientists have gained 'Awareness of not being self-aware', this type of ontological contradiction seems both apposite and credible (Ratner's, p.433). According to Laing, the 'disembodied self' 'becomes hyper-conscious'; a phrase that captures the febrile intellectual activity and relentlessly abstract thought these academics pursue (Laing, p.69). Laing also remarks

²⁰ Richard I. Evans, Dialogue with R.D. Laing (New York: Praeger, 1991), p.xxviii, p. xxxiii.

that this type of Schizophrenic ceases to perceive their body as the 'core' of their 'own being' and sees it as only 'one object among other objects in the world' (p.65). This, in turn, creates the same separation of mind and world that Berman sees in contemporary scientism. It leads to the creation of a so-called 'false-self system', which the patient projects, while nursing what Laing calls a 'shut-up self' that is 'unable to be enriched by outer experience', 'until the individual may come to feel he is merely a vacuum' (p.75). In 'Adventures', DeLillo portrays numerous scientists, with a similarly vacuous nature, who present such a Laingian 'false-self' to the world. Laing describes this 'false-self' as 'an amalgam of various part-selves', which includes 'compulsive actions of every kind', an apt description of DeLillo's gallery of neurotic caricatures (p.73). The negligible information DeLillo provides about each, their uniformly waspish wit and lush eccentricities, added to the speed with which they appear and depart the text, contribute to a sense that they are devoid of content and virtually interchangeable.

The novel contains numerous references to the creation of false selves and, increasingly, the recognition that, beyond these factitious masks, there may subsist an embryonic subjectivity that exceeds mere intellect. In 'Reflections', moments of such understanding increase in frequency and the alienated ciphers of 'Adventures' are either abandoned or begin to explore beyond their stunted, disembodied selves. But, in Part One, DeLillo focuses on the artificial forms of selfhood that populate the novel. He shows that even Billy and Endor have sought energetically to split mind from body and create false selves designed to afford them immortality. Significantly, the scientist and mystic Ratner tells Billy that he 'reminds' him of a 'A golem' or 'artificial person', which, according to 'secret manuscripts', may be manufactured from earth and water, provided that the Kabbalistic name of God or YHVH is recited

over the mixture (pp.225-26). In light of Laing's theory, Ratner's reaction is unsurprising. Billy's terror of organic matter may impel him to seek to become an 'artificial person', forging a 'disembodied self' and creating an attendant 'false-self system'. Indeed, DeLillo often draws particular attention to Billy's phobic reaction to the body. In the first chapter, Billy hesitates to use an air plane toilet, on the basis of an unwarranted suspicion that an 'elderly woman' may have 'left behind some unnamable horror, the result of a runaway gland. Old people's shitpiss' (p.6-7). DeLillo also remarks dryly that Billy 'often occupied himself with thoughts of rot. His own death, wake and burial were recurrent themes. Of secondary interest was the putrefaction of his immediate family' (p.37). Such visceral preoccupations may also prompt Billy's interest in the cognitivist model of the mind as an information-processing machine, his thoughts on which may extend to fantasies of fusing his mind with a computer, thus creating the ultimate 'false-self system'. Cognitivist theories of mind are often criticised for their exclusion of the somatic. Roger Penrose, among others, has alluded to the dualism that they imply.²¹ Similarly, Elizabeth A. Wilson has suggested that 'cognition is the projection of the masculine desire to be free of the body'.²² Driven by fantasies of escaping the 'rot' and 'shitpiss' of the human condition, this disembodiment is likely to attract Billy to this theory of consciousness. Certainly, several episodes testify to the close attention that he pays the notion of computational 'thought'. He betrays his preoccupation with the union of mind and computer early on, when, unprompted, he relates to LoQuadro a movie plot, in which a computer that 'dreams' is opened to reveal 'little pieces of baby human brain tissue grafted onto the circuits' (p.77). One also notes his exceptional ability in arithmetic,

²¹ Roger Penrose, Shadows of the Mind (London: Vintage, 1995), p.396.

²² Elizabeth A. Wilson, 'Loving the Computer: Cognition, Embodiment and the Influencing Machine', in The Body and Psychology, ed. by Henderikus J. Stam (London: Sage Publications, 1998), p.79.

as well as Edna Lown's remark that there is 'a strong computational strain running through' his work, facts that evidence a latent willingness in Billy to think like a machine (p.285). Tellingly, when Rob suggests he have a 'Leduc electrode' inserted into his brain and fuse his mind with the vast 'Space Brain' computer, Billy hints at previous interest in the possibility, admitting it 'Sounds familiar, talk of this combination' (p.244). His indecision may even indicate a temptation to accede to the plan, in the light of which his protestation that 'I don't know how I let it get this far' rings hollow (p.246). Billy's notion of eradicating his human mind may be interpreted as the ultimate logic of objectivism: that subjective consciousness be utterly destroyed. If, as Berman claims, modern science treats nature as dead matter, it is only logical that it learns to regard mind with the same scepticism, or even contempt. As Berman explains, this tendency is exacerbated by the always bewilderingly prolix task of analysing the mind. The failure to 'explain mind (or Mind)' leads directly to less respectful attempts to explain 'it away'. Consequently, as has occurred throughout the postmodern era in which DeLillo has written, theories proliferate that seek, either explicitly or implicitly, to question 'The reality of Mind' (p.237).

In his latter guise of earth-dwelling hermit, Endor provides an early exemplar of the deleterious effects of the factitious, apotropaic self that Laing describes. Endor's false, disembodied self robs him of a stable sense of reality and leaves him desperate to re-establish contact with the physical. After years of scientific research, Endor's desire to credit his perceptions is such that he denies all of modern science. Pathetically, he claims that 'It's the sun that moves around the earth'. 'It moves. We see it. I'm tired of denying such evidence' (p.87). Laing asserts of the false, disembodied self that 'Losing the conditional, it loses its identity; losing reality, it loses its possibility of exercising effective freedom of choice in the world' (p.142). By

choosing an irrational viewpoint, Endor reclaims, perversely, this 'freedom of choice', lost through separation from the 'conditional' of physicality (p.142). Endor explains his extremism to Billy, by complaining that scientists 'don't extend the senses to probe microbe and universe. We deny the senses. We deny the evidence of our senses. A lifetime of such denial is what sends people into larva-eating rages' (p.87). By accepting sensory data uncritically, he rejects science's tendency to seek meaning 'within' or 'behind' phenomena, which he implies is motivated by fear of the organic.

As so often in DeLillo, flight from physicality is metonymic of death-anxiety. Laing's definition of psychosis as the 'denial of being as a means of preserving being' is thus appropriate to the bewilderment of Endor's colleagues, who flee the somatic to evade thoughts of mortality (p.150). Endor's self-interment is only one example of the imitation of death practised throughout Ratner's Star to preserve psychological equilibrium. Endor's subterranean refuge prefigures that of Rob, who, after discovering the non-existence of the Ratnerians, chooses burial, rather than confronting the failure of 'logical rigour' to interpret the radio signal (p.272). Questioning such logic would entail revivifying the 'shut-up self' he has long ignored; by now, as Laing writes of psychotic patients, he has become 'afraid not to be dead and lifeless' (p.113). Having gained 'the kind of dismal insight that caused twinges of professional shame', Rob seeks the hole's womb-like comfort to avoid the painful process of enlarging his subjectivity (Ratner's, p.435). Even the journalist, Jean Venable, a mere visitor to the think tank, is a victim of this double bind. Ludicrously, Jean tells Billy she 'loved pretending to be dead' to amuse her husband and admits the tactic was intended to preserve a state of 'being', since she hoped such morbid gaming might shore up her marriage: 'When he'd lean over me for a really close look, I'd jump up screaming. That would keep our marriage going for another week'

(p.315). Like the scientists who seek 'non-existence', Jean refers wistfully to the 'pain of being self-aware', hinting that these ludic episodes may be rooted in a genuine death wish (p.396).

'Reflections' examines a more reasoned case than Endor's for rejecting science's claims to absolute truth. Several characters gain a seemingly neo-Kantian awareness of the limitations of scientific enquiry, or what Little calls 'the Western empirical method' (Little, p.304). In 'Reflections', this awareness of the intellect's natural reflexivity creates a gradual expansion of these characters' sense of self. In Critique of Pure Reason, Kant states that 'All our intuition is nothing but the presentation of appearance. The things that we intuit are not in themselves what we intuit them as being'.²³ Thus Kant's transcendental aesthetic, with its notion of the inaccessible 'thing in itself' (p.99), sets an apparently indissoluble limit to the aspirations of the 'Western empirical method'. Similarly, Billy remarks that 'mathematics' did not 'grow against' the real objects of 'nature', 'but imagination', a manifestly Kantian insight in its suggestion that intellectual systems have no verifiable link to the world beyond mind (p.80). LoQuadro seconds this view, questioning the notion of intellectual progress and the evolutionary model of history, remarking that science 'curls into itself and bends back and then thrusts outward in a new direction. It refuses to be contained' (p.65). In philosophy of mathematics, LoQuadro's Kantian exposition makes him an intuitionist, which entails the belief that 'mathematical reality' 'remains to be determined through our mathematical activity' (George, p.96). The difficulty with this Kantian intuitionist disconnection of mind and world is that it lacks a guarantee of the mind's sanity. If consciousness has no bearing

²³ Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, trans. by Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1996), p.94.

on reality, how can one distinguish fact from illusion, or madness from genius? The transcendental subject of Kantian philosophy is uncomfortably close to the psychotic self which, in Laing's words, is 'transcendent, empty, omnipotent, free, in its own way' but 'comes to be anybody in phantasy, and nobody in reality', while, in object relations, it is condemned to be 'related primarily to objects of its own fantasies' (p.142). The implication is that the mathematician, working steadily to determine this intuitionist 'mathematical reality', always verges on becoming Laing's psychotic 'split' self. Nevertheless, DeLillo suggests that awareness of this intellectual reflexivity can counteract any tendency to self-annihilation, or to being 'nobody in reality' (p.142). In 'Reflections', those who continue in their objectivist dogmatic slumbers remain subject to psychotic alienation, while more self-critical scientists use recognisably Kantian insights to deconstruct their fallacious selves. Maurice Wu exemplifies this realisation of a larger, undiscovered ontology. He recognises Kant's point that the mind cannot penetrate 'the intrinsic character belonging to the object in itself' (Kant, p.99), through an analogy with the 'echolocation' that bats employ for navigation; an insight that DeLillo suggests causes Wu to see science as absurd. The bats around Wu locate their position relative to surrounding objects by sending out 'ultrasonic frequencies' and tracing the angle of their reverberation (p.395). After 'pondering the reflecting mechanism of this kind of navigation', and, by implication, making the connection between 'echolocation' and the reflexivity of scientific study, Wu 'sat laughing into the night' (p.395).

Wu's insight leads to a model of self that extends beyond ratiocination. In these passages, DeLillo conveys this expansion of subjectivity formally by omitting any indication of where Jean's thoughts end and Wu's begin. The reader must infer from the context which is being described, creating a blurring or fusion of characters

in the reader's mind, which implies that mind and self may be larger entities than their instantiations in individual beings. The possibility recalls LoQuadro's view that the centre exists to create 'a single planetary mind' and causes the remark to haunt the novel as a quasi-mystical possibility, susceptible to neither confirmation nor denial (p.65). In Wu's case, DeLillo emphasises that the fact that the 'environmental demands of the cave were few' creates propitious conditions for effecting radical inward change, offering him the ideal opportunity to 'remake himself' (p.381). Wu approaches this task through meditative experience of the mind, a process that, in The Politics of Experience, Laing calls the exploration of 'the inner space and time of consciousness' and which he recommends for the treatment of alienation and psychosis.²⁴ DeLillo presents this reformation in the same esoteric language of meditation that the narrators of his earlier novels sometimes adopt, suggesting that Wu's desire to transform himself arises from a similar need for a subjectivity that he can recognise and value. The emptiness of the cave means that Wu perceives 'the smallest irregularities in the silence and semidarkness with brilliant quickness and clarity' (p.381). He is therefore able to 'build within himself a separate presence, something unremembered, a receptive mentality' that frees him from his 'Wu-experienced causal reality' (p.381).

In Part Two, Billy also explores unfamiliar areas of subjectivity and appreciates that his objectivist epistemology neither provides a complete model of mind, nor creates a satisfactory sense of self. Consequently, he examines more intuitive modes of thought, which assist him with the riddle of 'Ratner's Star', at the centre of the novel. Early in the text, Billy expects mathematics to create a vision of

²⁴ R.D. Laing, The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise (London: Harmondsworth, 1967), p.105.

his mind, which is coextensive with his identity. In his words, 'The work's ultimate value was simply what it revealed about the nature of his intellect. What was at stake, in effect was his own principle of intelligence or individual consciousness; his identity, in short' (p.117). Towards the end of 'Adventures', however, Billy sees the limitations of this logically created self, especially its inability to explain his creativity, the spark of inspiration he contributes to otherwise computational intellectual processes. DeLillo explains that 'Because his work's natural tendency was to provide a model of his own mind, of himself as a distinct individual, he was puzzled by the lack of an adequate vocabulary for mathematical invention, by his inability to understand what made his mathematics happen' (p.238). DeLillo emphasises that invention relies on subjective, meditative states of mind that the objectivism of the 'Field Experiment' disallows. Significantly, Jean Venable quotes Henri Poincare's assertion that he received creative inspiration in 'sudden flashes' (p.297). Similarly, prior to solving mathematical problems, Billy is inert and withdrawn, exhibiting a lack of 'voluntary motion' and 'coherent speech' (pp.237-8). In this near senseless state, Billy realises that the 'Ratnerian' code is structured according to 'Notation by sixty' (p.239). DeLillo rather wryly indicates the epic quality Billy attributes to this insight, his sense that he witnesses the idea 'unerase itself, most evident of notions', while remaining 'oblivious to everything but one emerging thought' (p.238). The literature on mathematical invention often describes what Jacques Hadamard calls the 'spontaneous and almost involuntary creation' reported by many mathematicians.²⁵ The notion of creation being preceded by physical lethargy also figures in Hadamard's work, which notes the extreme 'fatigue'

²⁵ Jacques Hadamard, An Essay on the Psychology of Invention in the Mathematical Field (London: Dover, 1954), p.18.

that can give rise to creativity, as well as the catalysing effect of ‘unconscious ideas’ (p.34). This resemblance to Hadamard may be coincidental, but DeLillo’s admission that, in writing Ratner’s Star, he aimed to ‘immerse’ himself in mathematical literature, these details may bear the influence of the French scholar (Anything, p.85). The possibility is supported by a reference to what Hadamard calls the ‘special “bump” on the head’, which the phrenologist ‘Gall’ believed indicated mathematical ability (p.3). When Cheops Feeley touches Billy’s head, he exclaims ‘The mathematician’s bump’. ‘You’ve got it all right’ (p.243). Like Hadamard, Thomas S. Kuhn emphasises the ‘individual skill, wit, or genius’ needed ‘to recognize’ an anomalous test result as a creative discovery (p.173).²⁶ Notably, in the context of the novel’s concern with the importance of unified consciousness, Kuhn also insists on the necessity for a tension between ‘convergent’, or conformist, thought and more ‘divergent’, original thinking (p.226). Billy’s own intellect develops from purely convergent objectivism, to a more divergent approach, which allows him to depart from stereotyped cognitive patterns, exploring intuitive and unconscious sources of invention and directly contradicting Rob’s view that ‘The slightest intuitive content has to be eliminated from our finished work’ (p.272).

Billy’s quest for a vocabulary to articulate or explain ‘invention’ leads him to speculate that creativity emerges from unexplored regions of subjectivity, which he calls ‘the unknown self’ (p.237). Although Billy initially fears this ‘self’, his exasperation at Rob’s insistence on communicating with the Ratnerians through a ‘logistic cosmic language that is based on mathematical principles’ demonstrates his understanding of the limitations of objectivist epistemology (p.273). After Rob

²⁶ Thomas S. Kuhn, The Essential Tension: Selected Tradition in Scientific Tradition and Change (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), p.173.

dismisses his discovery of the Ratnerians' use of 'notation by sixty', Billy replies wearily 'Let's have the gory details' and, two paragraphs later, 'I think I feel sick' (p.272). As Rob's Logicon project progresses, Billy shows telling signs of psychological strain and imitates Endor, by seeking an enclosed space in which to hide, building a 'canvas roof' over his cubicle and becoming 'the enclosed area's concealed zone's secluded figure'. In seclusion, Billy replicates Endor's attempts to reconnect with the body. Like Gary, in End Zone, Billy endures a fever that symbolises his rapprochement with organic matter. In this context, the fever has the advantage of leaving him 'luxuriating in the unprecedented smell of his sweat' and causing him to enjoy the 'pleasantly disgusting' sight of 'watching his own spit hit the dust' (p.363). Like Endor, Billy appreciates that alienation from the somatic leads to a 'false-self system' he must now deconstruct (Laing, p.73). In an enigmatic fragment entitled 'I AM NOT JUST THIS', which is apparently written in the first person by Billy and which explores the protagonist's shifting awareness of his subjectivity, Billy contends that 'I am different from this. I am not just this but more', 'Just outside my reach there is something else that belongs to the rest of me' (p.370). Having dispensed with his disembodied, hyper-conscious self, which, in Laingian terms, is 'by its detachment precluded from a full experience of realness and aliveness', Billy is ready to embrace new definitions of selfhood (Laing, p.82). He is in search of what Laing calls 'identity'. As Laing puts it, 'An "I" has not ceased to exist', but 'it lacks the quality of realness, and it has no identity, it has no "me" to go with it' (p.172). Like the protagonists of DeLillo's two previous novels, Billy acknowledges the reality of experience that remains impervious to representation. Yet, Billy's difficulty lies not in the relation of mind to language, but in discovering parts of selfhood beyond rational thought. In the absence of encouragement from his mentors, he explores these alone,

undertaking what Laing would call a journey into 'inner space and time' (Politics, p.105). Accordingly, the section ends with the assertion that 'There is something in the space between what I know and what I am and what fills this space is what I know there are no words for' (p.370).

Although Little is right to insist that DeLillo offers no 'unironized' route to the sacred, the parallel between Billy's 'unknown self' and the Kabbalistic notion of the 'en-sof' or 'hidden god' that DeLillo explores in the text suggests that this 'unknown self' may contain a divine element. Like Pythagorean mathematics, Kabbalism reminds Billy of the mythical and mystical properties sometimes attributed to numbers. As the Hebrew scholar Gershom Scholem remarks, in Kabbalistic doctrine, 'the ten primordial numbers are called Sefiroth', or emanations of God, and are each 'associated with a particular category of creation'.²⁷ When the distinguished scientist and Kabbalist Ratner visits the think tank, he proposes the creationist hypothesis that this hidden divinity, or 'en-sof', contracted to make room for the 'point of pure energy that created the universe' (p.217). In spite of the apparently bizarre nature of this belief, DeLillo presents at least its judicious consideration as essential to Billy's task of unifying the hemispheres. When Ratner realises Billy is omitting the mystical elements of his speech, he tells him to 'Give the whole picture' and 'repeat both sides' (p.220), an inclusive philosophy which, when he accepts it, causes Billy to augment his selfhood immeasurably. Although tentative and exploratory, this shift in Billy's subjectivity feeds back productively into intellectual activity. It immediately prompts the crucial intuition that he should seek Endor's old room, where he happens upon the stopped clock that provides the clue to the mysterious radio message. The clock's

²⁷ Gershom Scholem, The Origins of the Kabbalah, ed. by R.J. Zwi Werblowsky and trans. by Allan Arkush (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp.26-27.

paralysis alerts Billy to the ‘Ratnerians’ attempt to communicate the time of a total eclipse of the sun: ‘Fourteen hours, twenty-eight minutes, fifty-seven seconds’ (pp.384-5).

DeLillo also portrays the scientist Edna Lown’s dismantling of her own ‘false-self’ system; her appreciation that ‘It was a mistake really, what she’d always taken her life to be. That was someone else’s life’ (Ratner’s, p.426). As with Billy, realisation comes via recognition of the severe limits of the rational intellect. Where once she enjoyed work ‘shaved of the dangers of intuitive reckoning’ (p.329), she now perceives this approach as self-destructive. When reflecting on her past evasions of full subjectivity, she exclaims, in astonishment, ‘To barely know the person not known to those who know me. To be in this sense a witness to my own adventure’. In Edna’s case, it is partly through meditation on language that her selfhood is enlarged. She compiles notes on the subject, which she calls ‘devices of the punchy brain inside her’ (p.426). Like Bucky, in Great Jones Street, she affirms the ontological status of illiterate, or even infant, consciousness, claiming of Geometry, for example, that ‘The child knows these things before it knows words’ (p.366). She goes further than Bucky in her theorisation of babbling, broaching the possibility that infantile speech contains the codes to language and forms a sophisticated ‘meta-language’ on speech (p.365). Appropriately, then, Edna concludes one section of notes, by implying that the ineffable parts of the mind deserve as much analysis as the more articulate. DeLillo wittily has her parody Wittgenstein, in her assertion that ‘This leaves unexamined what has remained unsaid’, a remark that affirms the substance of mind and self, regardless of language or objective analysis (p.383).

Although Rob Softly experiences similar intuitions of a larger ontology, he flees from them. Like Billy, he felt that ‘there was something between or beyond,

something he couldn't account for between himself and the idea of himself'. Rob distinguishes between his notion of self as pure mentation, which DeLillo calls the 'negative mental invention', and a larger experience of selfhood that is 'inexpressible' and 'had the effect of imposing a silence'. Because he fears this train of thought 'That was as far as his thinking went on the subject. There was nowhere else for it to go, he believed' (p.361). Rob's distaste for the somatic condemns him to maintain his false, bodiless self. Soon after these musings, we learn that 'Softly had never set eyes on his own semen' (p.367). More telling is that these anxious ontological speculations are catalysed by thoughts of 'Death', which he would normally shun. Although, with characteristic objectivity, he dismisses mortality as a 'logical conclusion', he concludes these speculations with evident relief that enables him to feel 'better about the site he'd chosen for his life and thought' (p.361). Rob's psychological disintegration dominates the novel's final pages and can be traced to this failure to deconstruct his false self. The solar eclipse confirms Billy's intuitions and renders obsolete Rob's purely rational model of self. Rob's wish to 'hide himself more fundamentally than was possible in the antrum' is caused by shame at the obvious limitations of his consciousness, as well as anguish at his failure to solve the code (p.435). With its talk of the scientific quest for 'painless nonexistence', DeLillo's long peroration, which precedes Rob's disappearance, prefigures and explains his reluctance to reject his fragile, artificial model of consciousness. In his stubborn wish for interment, Rob resembles the Laingian schizophrenic, who, as Laing suggests, 'really wants to be dead and hidden in a place where nothing can touch him and drag him back' (p.167). To achieve this, he crawls far enough underground to enter 'the hole's hole' (p.437), aiming, in Laing's terms, 'to be nothing, to be nobody' (Laing, p.153).

The novel's conclusion involves a figurative eruption of past, ancient time into the approximately contemporaneous moment of the text. History, according to the Ratnerians, is not a pattern of linear evolution, but cyclical, with peaks of civilisation separated by vast troughs of decadent nullity. Given the somewhat phenomenological struggle of many DeLillo characters to articulate subjective human experience, it is notable that DeLillo's treatment of time is strikingly close to that of Martin Heidegger. The emergence of past time, with the solar eclipse, is very much like the 'Bringing forth' into 'unconcealment' Heidegger envisages as the process by which technological inventions, with their roots in the Scientific Revolution of the Renaissance, have burst 'into bloom' in modernity.²⁸ Billy's relation to death is also closely comparable with that of the Heideggerian subject. In Being and Time, Heidegger asserts that 'Anticipatory resoluteness' towards death has the effect of unifying past and future for Dasein, allowing it to 'come toward itself futurally in such a way that it comes back'.²⁹ Similarly, Billy's 'resolute' overcoming of anxiety concerning physicality and death directly precedes his intuitive solving of the code and provokes the eruption of ancient time into postmodernity.

The mood of the conclusion is balanced between dramatic culmination and the fears of incipient enervation that solar eclipses traditionally arouse. This implicit tension is heightened by the realisation that contemporary civilization may not be destined to expand and evolve but, rather, to decline and vanish like that of the notional 'Ratnerians'. For Rob, this is a fearful prospect, arousing the quasi-primitive 'need to chew the fleshy leaves of aloe plants' (p.435). To communicate Rob's

²⁸ Martin Heidegger, The Question of Technology and other Essays, trans. by William W. Lovitt (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1997), p.11.

²⁹ Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp.372-73.

intense fear in these seemingly irrational circumstances, DeLillo uses free indirect style for the first time in relation to this character, remarking that 'Something here made no sense' and referring to the encroaching 'deviant night of total solar eclipse' (p.433). The prose style also becomes more elliptical than that hitherto employed to depict Rob. Noun phrases are combined without connectives or resolution, for example, 'a sense of violated space, the air itself fused with this infrared surprise', to suggest the utterly unfamiliar and terrifying uncertainty the think tank leader experiences, as he attempts to understand this astonishing event (p.436). DeLillo emphasises Rob's unease at the unification of consciousness implied in these events, as well as their near mystical implications, which are apparent in 'a sense of interlocking opposites. The paradox, the comedy, the fool's rule of total radiance' (p.438). Meanwhile, DeLillo presents 'a boy' in 'jacket and tie', unnamed but likely to be Billy, 'madly pedalling' a tricycle (p.438) and, hence, returning symbolically to the childhood or 'wild child's dream', of which his obsessive intellectual life has so far deprived him (p.195). In the final lines, the focus returns to this adolescent figure and ends, rather pessimistically, with a familiar trope in DeLillo's work, the American alienated from his interior experience, engaging in quasi-behaviourist self-analysis. He rings the tricycle bell, but hears nothing, 'producing as he was this noise resembling laughter, expressing vocally what appeared to be a compelling emotion'. If the child is Billy, the disjunction between inner and outer experience in this last paragraph does not seem consonant with the ontological insights he has gained. DeLillo may therefore be suggesting that Billy cannot sustain his new understanding, when confronted by the shock of the eclipse, which causes him to emit 'involuntary shrieks'. Whatever the child's identity, however, its behaviourism emphasises the alienation scientism has brought many characters in Ratner's Star, while the

'reproductive dust of existence' 'bouncing in the air around him' is a luminous symbol of the fertile physical world from which they have withdrawn (p.438).

Chapter Four

'Players' and 'Running Dog': Mind as Machine

In the Menippean satire of Ratner's Star (1976), DeLillo examines the severe ontological restrictions that result when the rational mind is treated as the sole component of subjectivity.¹ Among the 'false-self' systems DeLillo describes is the hypothetical one Billy considers forming by a fusion of mind and digital computer, but rejects, before exploring ideas of selfhood that are not restricted to intellect. DeLillo's subsequent two novels, Players (1977) and Running Dog (1978), elaborate upon the possibilities of this relationship between human and computer cognition and explore the possible consequences of the fusion that Billy refuses.² In these novels, DeLillo portrays characters that welcome the extreme mental restrictions of an arid, unyielding mode of thought, which appears modelled on the action of the computers and other technologies with which they work. The last decade has witnessed a steady flow of literary novels exploring the question of Artificial Intelligence. Richard Powers' Galatea 2.2 (1995) imagines the construction of a computer called 'Helen', designed to emulate human thought, but which recognises its inability to emote and opts to 'Shut herself down'.³ David Lodge's more recent Thinks (2001) is comparable, both in its campus location and portrayal of a protagonist, Ralph Messenger, who aspires to create genuine computational intelligence.⁴ Although authors of the 1960s and 1970s took considerable interest in the nature of consciousness, they produced few literary treatments of Artificial Intelligence. Joseph

¹ Don DeLillo, Ratner's Star (London: Vintage, 1991)

² Don DeLillo, Players (London: Vintage, 1991) and Running Dog (London: Vintage, 1992)

³ Richard Powers, Galatea 2.2 (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), p.326.

McElroy's novel Plus provides an astonishingly detailed phenomenological account of a mind's formation and growth in controlled conditions, but its interests do not extend to the wholly man made.⁵ Of DeLillo's contemporaries, only Thomas Pynchon, who, in his first novel V (1963), repeatedly implies that the postmodern world has, disastrously, taken robotic thought as its model, appears to have been drawn to the relation between mind and machine.⁶ Like Pynchon, DeLillo portrays a world 'run more and more fond of the inanimate' (p.290). In doing so, he pursues his perennial interest in the relationship between postmodern epistemologies and the ontological conditions they create. Yet, if some of his characters become what Donna J. Haraway would call a 'hybrid of machine and organism', DeLillo does not see in this transformation the potential for the ontological emancipation that Haraway insists upon, in her influential Simians, Cyborg and Women.⁷ Haraway speculates that the cyborg may be the 'telos of the "West's" escalating dominations of abstract individuation, an ultimate self untied at last from all dependency, a man in space' (pp.150-51). On the contrary, DeLillo suggests the reduction of mind to calculation, a balance of input and outputs, produces less a self than an anti-self, a sterile negation of human ontology stripped of emotion, autonomy, or creativity and profoundly alienated from the body. The contrast between Haraway's idealised view and DeLillo's grim portrait is cruelly summarised by a scene from Players, in which the Stock Exchange employee Lyle Wynant yearns for a drink that is transcendently 'outer-space-like', only to receive a cocktail, aptly named the 'zombie' (p.72).

⁴ David Lodge, Thinks (London: Penguin, 2001)

⁵ Joseph McElroy, Plus (New York: Carroll and Graf Publications, 1987)

⁶ Thomas Pynchon, V (London: Picador, 1978)

⁷ Donna J. Haraway, Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: the Reinvention of Nature (London: Free Association Books, 1991), p.149.

Critics have observed what David Cowart calls the 'dislocation of consciousness' in Players, but have had difficulty explaining the nature of this displacement.⁸ Several have followed Tom LeClair in accepting that the novel's conceptual scheme is divided between the abstractions of high finance and what he calls the 'human body as organism', 'fearing its own death, repressing its own physical complexity'.⁹ Although the characters are indeed haunted by death-anxiety, this view neglects the absolute abstraction and complete freedom from concrete reality, somatic and economic, that DeLillo's characters aim to discover in a computational mindset. For DeLillo, this desire to think 'like' a computer entails something like the insular epistemology John R. Searle believes is characteristic of computation, in which signifiers act as isolated counters that refer to neither referent nor signified.¹⁰ In Searle's view, the computer merely manipulates such symbols without appreciating their meaning or the fact that its programmer takes them to 'refer' to objects in the world. Cowart notes DeLillo's tendency to foreground signifier over signified and referent in Players, but concludes that DeLillo views postmodern Manhattan as a mere 'play of simulacra' (p.51). Cowart's Baudrillardian view implies a lack of any original reality. Yet, DeLillo's characters are acutely conscious of physical reality, but find it threatening and distasteful and seek to limit contact with it, by stripping language of its referential function. The protagonists' identification with the computer is therefore exemplary of Curtis Yehmert's remark that DeLillo's characters are not alienated by the technologies in their environment

⁸ David Cowart, The Physics of Language (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2002), p.52.

⁹ Tom LeClair, In The Loop: Don DeLillo and the Systems Novel (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1987), p.147.

¹⁰ John R. Searle, 'Minds, Brains, Programs', in The Mind's I: Fantasies and Reflections on Self and Soul, composed and arranged by Douglas R. Hofstadter and Daniel C. Dennett (Frome, Somerset: Penguin, 1981), pp. 353-73 (p.371).

but, rather, seek to use 'their mediated environment to flee their own inwardness'.¹¹

As we will see, their attempts to replace this 'inwardness' with emotionless, machine-like formalism result in severe mental and emotional enervation.

DeLillo himself has remarked on the mental and emotional restrictions these characters embrace. When discussing 'games' in his fiction, he points out that 'In Players, the rules become almost metaphysical. They involve inner restrictions. There's some of that in Running Dog as well'.¹² DeLillo implies that there is a ludic element to New York's financial district, where Players is set, calling it 'a test environment for extreme states of mind', an opportunity for experiment of which Lyle and Pammy Wynant, the protagonists and 'players' of the title, take full advantage (p.27). The unpleasant ontological consequences of the epistemological 'games' in which they indulge confirms DeLillo's own observation that, in his fiction, the search for reassurance in the disciplined structure of games 'sometimes turns out to be a cruel delusion' (Anything, p.81). The 'metaphysical' quality DeLillo attributes to the characters' 'inner restrictions' manifests in the near eschatological finality that attends their decisions. Having embraced the notion of mind as computer, Lyle cannot regain his human qualities. In the final scene, Lyle's human characteristics dissolve in a 'blaze' of light that alludes ironically to notions of paradise. Lyle sheds 'capabilities and traits by the second', a dissolution that DeLillo calls a moment of 'luminous cleansing', which suggests his protagonist's self-destructive identification with technology is motivated by desire for a secular form of transcendence (p.212).

¹¹ Curtis Yehnert, "'Like Some Endless Sky Waking Inside': Subjectivity in Don DeLillo', Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction, 42 (2001), 357-66 (p.359).

¹² Tom LeClair and Larry McCaffery, eds. Anything Can Happen: Interviews with Contemporary American Novelists (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1983), p.81.

By presenting characters that believe that their mind can become machine, DeLillo touches on the controversial question of the relative ontology of mind and computer. In particular, he raises two unresolved and inextricable issues: whether the mind is susceptible to electronic simulation and, if so, whether it is identical with or analogous to a machine. DeLillo's interests, at this time, have moved in parallel to those of mainstream philosophy. The late 1970s, when these novels were published, witnessed a considerable intensification in the philosophical discussion surrounding what John R. Searle has called 'Strong AI', or the belief that the computer will eventually simulate all functions of the human brain.¹³ Daniel Dennett emerged at the forefront of those who support 'strong AI', asserting that human awareness is without function and that the computer, which lacks such awareness, can therefore substitute adequately for it.¹⁴ Dennett's faith in artificial intelligence thus relies strongly on the behaviourist exclusion of first-person experience, or what Searle calls the 'first-person ontology' of consciousness, which I argue DeLillo satirises in Americana. Dennett's use of behaviourist methodology to provide a foundation for 'strong AI' demonstrates the continuing influence of behaviourism in American philosophy and makes clear the underlying theoretical link between Americana, published in 1971, and the two novels presently under discussion.

'Strong AI' has generated considerable and ongoing theoretical debate throughout postmodernity. Its opponents insist that emotion is crucial in producing characteristically human thought and is impossible to simulate mechanically. Roger Penrose, for example, has attempted to prove mathematically that human thought is

¹³ John R. Searle, The Rediscovery of the Mind (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), p.21.

¹⁴ Daniel C. Dennett, Brainstorms: Philosophical Essays on Mind and Psychology (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978a), p.192.

'non-computational' and that, given the emotional content of their thought processes, human beings will remain capable of 'flashes of insight' unknown to computers.¹⁵ In Penrose's words, the work of a computer 'expresses nothing because the computer itself feels nothing' (p.400). This emphasis on thought's emotional content recalls DeLillo's insistence on this quality of cognition in Ratner's Star. Indeed, Penrose's use of Poincaré's phrase 'flashes of insight', which DeLillo employs in Ratner's Star to refer to the intuitive component in any mathematical discovery, indicates the similarity of their outlook. Emotion and the intuitive thought it promotes are again central to DeLillo's concerns in Players and Running Dog. In both novels, he suggests that the psychological retreat from the body implied by a computational model of consciousness helps destroy intuition and creative thought. This connection of the 'computational' with mind-body dualism finds considerable support among theorists such as Elizabeth A. Wilson, who contends that thought, as imagined by cognitivism or 'Strong AI', 'is realized via the constraining and expulsion of flesh'.¹⁶ Searle, meanwhile, demonstrates convincingly that 'conceptual dualism' follows logically from the notion of mind as computer. For him, the analogy between brain and computer implies unavoidably that the mind 'runs programs'. This, in turn, suggests the clearly incorrect conclusion that the mind's 'programs' or 'thoughts' are separable from the physical 'stuff' of the brain and that mind might withdraw at will from the matter in which it is lodged (Rediscovery, p.26).

In the context of this retreat from physicality, it is notable that the novels' protagonists work for aggressively capitalist enterprises, whose habitual abstraction of

¹⁵ Roger Penrose, Shadows of the Mind (London: Vintage, 1995), p.205.

¹⁶ Elizabeth A. Wilson, 'Loving the Computer: Cognition, Embodiment and the Influencing Machine' in The Body and Psychology, ed. by Henderikus J. Stam (London: Sage Publications, 1998), pp. 71-93 (p.77).

exchange value from commodities and labour may convince them that emotion and the body can be similarly sublimated to pure information. Running Dog depicts a corrupt, profiteering wing of the U.S. intelligence service, while Players presents Stock Exchange employee Lyle Wynant and his wife Pammy, who works in the World Trade Centre for the austere named 'Grief Management Council' (p.18). A manic interior monologue makes clear Lyle's intense desire to replace the physical matter of mind and body with pure digital abstraction. When viewing an 'Attractive woman standing behind the bulletproof glass' at the Exchange, Lyle notes that 'Numbers clicked onto the enunciator board', before declaiming inwardly 'Eat, eat. Shit, eat shit. Feed her to us in decimals' (p.64). The surreal notion of cannibalising and excreting his colleague in digital form indicates Lyle's desire for a noetic level of physical and mental experience, which parallels the abstraction of exchange value from the use value of goods in the Stock Exchange. His preservation of 'teleprinter slips' 'for days', driven by the fantasy that they 'contained nerve impulses' seems metonymic of a wish to merge with the computer, especially given his pleasure at the 'impression of reality disconnected from his own senses' that these documents offer him (p.70). Lyle's fear of the somatic is exacerbated by the murder of his colleague, George Sedbauer, by the terrorists Lyle later joins (p.28). But, DeLillo shows such wholesale rejection of the body to be an arduous task and suggests it provokes disturbing spectral returns of repressed matter. One particularly traumatic experience occurs after work in the business district. Lyle becomes acutely aware of his physical presence, perceiving himself to be 'present in things' and imagining the city 'never visited' 'and how buildings such as these would seem to hold untouchable matter, enormous codifications of organic decay' (p.49). The timing of the revelation, only twenty-four hours before his first meeting with the terrorists' representative,

Rosemary, suggests the incident disturbs him sufficiently that it catalyses his defection. Like Marx's bourgeoisie, after attempting to transcend 'All that is solid', Lyle is presented with the opportunity to 'face with sober senses his real conditions of life'.¹⁷ Yet, his death-anxiety is such that, rather than confront organic matter and face these 'real conditions', Lyle flees this unwelcome vision by deepening his identification with the computer and fabricating an alternative identity as a revolutionary.

The ill-defined nature of his tasks distances Lyle further from concrete reality and prevents him, or the reader, perceiving coherent meaning in his work. It also emphasises his culture's failure to afford him a sense of belonging, what Heidegger calls the 'autochthony' or 'rootedness' that he believes is absent in industrialised postmodernity, and adds further credibility to Lyle's alienation and his decision to become a violent anti-capitalist.¹⁸ As DeLillo remarks, Lyle's society leaves him 'spiritually undernourished', which increases his susceptibility to the abstract, even noumenous, quality of computer systems and the superficial glamour of terrorism (*Anything*, p.82). Far from being politically motivated, Lyle views criminality in terms of its potential to afford his mental experience greater abstraction. It is the logical extension of a computational model of consciousness and the psychological equivalent of his Spartan physical habits and sterile social life, which is driven by a 'desire to compile' he and Pammy have long since lost (p.15). The ennui and enervation that these children of postmodern capital suffer indicates that their drive towards abstraction quickly becomes dreary nihilism, bearing out Marshall Berman's view that, in capitalism, 'everything nonmarketable gets repressed or withers away for

¹⁷ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Penguin, 1988), p.83.

¹⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. by J. Anderson (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p.49.

lack of use'.¹⁹ Lyle's treatment of his body provides a potent symbol of this drive towards transcendence. He keeps it ascetically 'devoid of excess' (p.27) and, during sex with Pammy, treats it more or less as a machine, useful only in so far as it can "perform" and "service" his wife (p.35).

Once Lyle adopts computational thought and flees the physical and emotional attachments that he despises, he loses any substantial sense of self. In particular, he foregoes all autonomy, responding to the instructions of his commander Kinnear with a subservient 'Starting when?' (p.159) and proving incapable of terminating a mission without specific instructions (p.212). He claims he will 'pack and leave' after counting to a hundred, but counts again, first to 'fifty', then 'twenty-five', a numerical reduction metonymic of his diminishing capacities (p.212). Lyle's disintegration is exacerbated by his disorientating role as an FBI double agent, an agency DeLillo presents as irredeemably brutal and lawless, in accordance with the testimony of former agents such as M. Wesley Swearingen, who asserts that 'corruption' 'permeated' the Bureau.²⁰ Lyle's dual function debilitates him, inducing such helpless paranoia that he is driven to ask a fellow agent, 'Don't you have my phone plugged into the computer that runs the world?' (p.153). Yet, his ambivalent and liminal position draws attention to the similarity between his terrorist colleagues' abstract, insubstantial model of self and the one frequently adopted by Exchange operatives. J. Kinnear is exculpated of blame for being a double agent because he is regarded as lacking substantial subjectivity. It is said of him that his 'disclosure of information' 'merely confirmed the material existence of the space he'd chosen to

¹⁹ Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Free Association Books, 2003), p.191.

²⁰ M. Wesley Swearingen, *FBI Secrets: An Agents Expose* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1995), p.45.

occupy, the complex geography, points of confluence and danger' (p.145). By reducing selfhood to such abstract ideation, the Marxist terrorists seek liberation from moral responsibility, but only reproduce the logic of the highly abstract system they oppose. This involuntary repetition bears out the difficulty that Fredric Jameson sees for anti-capitalist movements in transcending the pernicious 'philosophical and linguistic' abstractions of capitalist ideology, which are themselves 'a by-product of exchange'.²¹ In particular, he suggests that the 'freedom' and 'equality' for which revolutionaries strive are the ideological products of capitalism and therefore unattainable. In Jameson's view, these notions 'cannot be realized' and, consequently, 'The only thing that can happen to them is for the system that generates them to disappear, thereby abolishing the 'ideals' along with the reality itself' (pp.262-63).

Parallel to this ontological enervation, Lyle constructs a second, secret self, which, like the computer, depends on instruction and remains detached from the world. In his first meetings with his clandestine revolutionary gang, we learn, Lyle finds that 'The pleasure here was inward-tending, an accumulation of self' (p.75). The search for a more discrete identity arises partly from anxiety that the fluid abstractions of the Exchange's financial system might dissolve the boundaries of selfhood. He seems to sense that disruptive power of capitalism of which Marx speaks, when he declares that 'All fixed, fast-frozen relations' 'are swept away' (Manifesto, p.83). Lyle worries paranoically that 'everyone knew his thoughts' and imagines 'the message in greenish cipher' on the electronic board might rapidly become 'the read-outs of Lyle Wynant' (p.22). To render his new secret 'self' impermeable, Lyle cultivates a quality of 'apartness' and 'self-command' (p.72). Pammy is similarly

²¹ Frederic Jameson, Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (London: Verso, 1993), p.233.

fearful that mind might transcend the limits of subjectivity and is unnerved by the talk of strangers being ‘a little universal’, ‘giving the impression they were communicating out to her from some unbounded secret place’ (p.51). DeLillo conveys this sense of destabilisation, by structuring much of the early part of the novel using a quasi-cinematic form of montage, which allows the reader phenomenal experience of the instability the protagonists fear (p.63). Early scenes, in which Lyle and Pammy are situated in their work environments, merge into one another without explanation or indication of the occurrence. From Pammy’s repetition of the word ‘Maine’, for example, the text lurches into a scene at the Exchange with only the understated link that ‘Lyle saw his number on the enunciator board’ (p.21).

Lyle’s creation of an insular, computational self annihilates all humane emotion. He refuses even to lunch with his friend, McKechnie, who wishes to share concerns about his ‘hearing-impaired son’ and dying wife (p.66). Such heartless behaviour suggests that, as with Ratner’s Star’s academics, alienation from the body has a deleterious effect on emotional life, affirming the fact that, in neuroscientist Antonio Damasio’s words, the ‘mind is grounded in the body’.²² Damasio shares R.D. Laing’s view of the body’s importance to mental and emotional function, suggesting that the ‘body is the main stage for emotions’ and that this emotion ‘probably assists reasoning, especially when it comes to personal and social matters, involving risk and conflict’.²³ Given Lyle’s increasingly reckless pursuit of violence, the point is apposite. Yet, Lyle derives little satisfaction from his defection and his bewildered response to his new lifestyle is indicated by a daydream in which he

²² Antonio Damasio, Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow and the Feeling Brain (Orlando: Harcourt Books, 2003), p.191.

²³ Antonio Damasio, The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness (London: Heinemann, 1999), p.287.

imagines an 'astronaut', adrift in outer space, who speaks 'movingly of weightlessness as a poetic form of anxiety' (p.108). This suggests that, as in DeLillo's previous novel, each increase in psychological or intellectual abstraction brings further alienation from a recognisably human identity.

Lyle's new comrades are well aware that the noetic economic and social codes of the Exchange enabled him to flee the exigencies of physicality. Lyle could ignore the 'madness and squalor' around him (p.27), by working with the rarefied economic charts that are typical of what James G. Carrier calls the 'virtualism' of contemporary economics.²⁴ For Carrier, this term refers to postmodern economic thought in which 'models of economic abstraction are taken to be the fundamental reality that underlies and shapes the world', implying a widespread alienation from concrete economic activity that Jameson calls the loss of the 'literal' (Jameson, p.270). Lyle's comrade Marina refers to the electronic data he studies as 'Currents of invisible life' that constitute the 'system that we believe is their secret power' (p.107). Her scathing remarks, which she intends as a critique of the capitalist reduction of use value to numerical abstraction, are similar, in their emphasis on progressively greater intangibility, to Marx's analysis of the conversion of commodities into money, which he calls a 'transubstantiation'.²⁵ Yet, Marina moves beyond Marx by observing that, in postmodernity, money itself undergoes a further 'transubstantiation', being subjected to a quasi-mystical 'paring away of money's accidental properties, of money's touch', a process metonymic of the fear of organic matter pervading American capitalist culture (p.110). Marina's paramilitaries are clearly influenced by

²⁴ Virtualism: A New Political Economy, ed. by James G. Carrier and Danie Miller (Oxford: Berg, 1998), p.2.

²⁵ Karl Marx, Capital, ed. by David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.68.

Marxism and use terms like 'revolution' and 'The people' with the assurance of experienced militants (p.107). Their aggressive class-consciousness suggests DeLillo may be borrowing from contemporary European terrorism and basing the group on the anti-capitalist Baader-Meinhoff gang, whose reign of terror climaxed in the early 1970s and who were indicted in 1974, three years before Players was published. It is a view supported by their use of terms such as 'pig justice', which closely resemble the vocabulary of Baader-Meinhoff members (p.146). As Jillian Becker points out in Hitler's Children, the 'standard form of address' of the Baader-Meinhoffs, when conducting a raid, was 'Open up, you pigs!'.²⁶ Notably, DeLillo's 2002 story 'Baader-Meinhoff' suggests that his interest in the group continues to the present day.

27

The topic of terrorist violence may strike the reader as more appropriate to a 'thriller' than a conventional literary novel. Indeed, according to the criteria Tzvetan Todorov outlines for the 'thriller' genre, the committal of a mysterious crime early in the diegetic narrative, so that 'the narrative coincides with the action' marks out both texts as at least related to that category.²⁸ The pared down prose DeLillo employs throughout accentuates this generic quality and proves remarkably appropriate to the limited cognitive and emotional responses of many characters. However, as John Johnston points out, in DeLillo's early novels, he tends to cross the conventions of the genre in which he writes, with 'at least one other kind of content', causing 'normal or conventional expectations to be short-circuited and attention directed elsewhere'.²⁹ In Players, the implication of fusion between mind and computer introduces an element

²⁶ Karl Marx, Capital, ed. by David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.68.

²⁷ Don DeLillo, 'Baader Meinhoff', in The New Yorker, 1st April 2002, pp.78-82.

²⁸ Tzvetan Todorov, The Poetics of Prose, trans. by Richard Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977), p.47.

of science fiction, while Lyle's role as FBI double agent alludes to the 'spy thriller'. Since the 'thriller' and 'spy thriller' demand characters who form clear ideas and take decisive action, the tropes DeLillo borrows from these genres permit him to parody their conventions and accentuate the decline of his characters' personal capacities. As Michael Denning remarks, the spy thriller's protagonist performs the ideological function of appearing to return 'human agency' to an 'incomprehensible social order', 'which seems less and less the product of human action'.³⁰ Players gently satirises these generic conventions, stubbornly refusing to show 'human agency', whether of Exchange dealer or terrorist, as effective against the complex capitalist systems of Wall Street, with the consequence that, by generic standards, the text limps to a tame and anti-climactic conclusion.

Without referring to Players or Running Dog, Joseph Tabbi makes the pertinent observation that many 'contemporary fictions' present 'figurations of technology as an outward embodiment of thought'.³¹ DeLillo's presentation of 'Strong AI' suggests these novels might appropriately be placed in this category, with the qualification that, in both, the perception of the machine as an 'outward embodiment' is merely a precursor to the characters' internalisation of computational principles. Of the prevalence of such 'outward' embodiments of thought in postmodernism, Tabbi remarks that they 'would seem to have moved narrative away from romantic and modernist preoccupations with order, autonomy, or organic models of wholeness' (p.21). Tabbi's statement can be usefully applied to the austere asceticism of DeLillo's aesthetic throughout Players, as well as the appalling fate that

²⁹ John Johnston, 'Generic Difficulties in the Novels of Don DeLillo', in Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction, 30 (1989), 261-275 (p.262).

³⁰ Michael Denning, Cover Stories: Narrative and Ideology in the British Spy Thriller (London: Routledge, 1987), p.14.

befalls many of his characters. The correlation is apparent in DeLillo's elliptical prose style in Players and the gradual reduction of interior monologue and indirect discourse, which parallels the reduction of interiority, 'autonomy', and experience of 'wholeness' that afflicts several characters, but is particularly marked in the treatment of Lyle. Although these techniques are common in modernism and postmodernism, DeLillo's variation of their use to convey a character's withdrawal from, or embrace of, subjective experience is characteristic of his work. In Part Two, after Lyle becomes a terrorist, DeLillo emphasises his determined exclusion of subjective experience. When Lyle imagines himself an astronaut being interviewed about his experience of 'weightlessness as a poetic form of anxiety', DeLillo presents the episode entirely in the third person, without formal acknowledgement that it is 'a long conversation with himself, internal' (p.108). Similarly, in the novel's final scene, DeLillo describes Lyle as a 'propped figure' and feigns ignorance of the character, claiming to 'know nothing else about him' (p.212).

Players opens with a dense and opaque chapter-length prologue, entitled 'The Movie' (p.3). This is set on an aircraft and revolves around an in-flight film, watched by the seven passengers, which shows the 'lush slaughter' of bourgeois golfers (p.9). The gruesome subject matter foreshadows Lyle's yearning for terrorist violence, while the mockingly upbeat piano accompaniment, described as 'a typical score for a silent film', indicates the brutality of the cinematic aesthetic DeLillo associates with computational thought throughout Players (p.4). The prologue presents what DeLillo calls 'the major characters', 'embryonically, not yet named or defined'.³² He suggests

³¹ Joseph Tabbi, Postmodern Sublime: Technology and American Writing from Mailer to Cyberpunk (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), p.21.

³² Adam Begley, 'Don DeLillo: The Art of Fiction CXXXV', in Paris Review, 28 (1993), 275-306 (p. 286).

that the passage represents 'the novel in miniature' and, indeed, it gives numerous indications of DeLillo's concerns in the novel (p.286). The omission of names is one of many initial hints at the dehumanising effects of their lifestyle and introduces an aesthetic more arid than anything DeLillo has previously employed. The characters interact by becoming 'gradually aware of each other's code of recognition', suggesting a machine-like formalisation of mind and emotion (p.3). The prose is dense and elliptical, with few connectives, and parallels the sensory deprivation the main characters embrace. A man and woman are said to be 'clearly together, a couple, wearing each other' (p.4), while the evocation of mood in a film soundtrack is described as 'More Bass chords. Accumulating Doom' (p.7). The self-conscious minimalism of this style draws attention to the signifier at the expense of signified or referent. It is the formal equivalent of the computer's inability to comprehend the referential function of language and prefigures the characters' embrace of this computational fetishisation of the signifier.

The title 'The Movie' suggests DeLillo may be comparing his own narrative gaze to a camera eye, an idea supported by his reference to the seven passengers as existing in a 'frame of arrested motion' (p.3). DeLillo is certainly concerned with the relation between human and camera eyes, but shows more concerted interest in what he suggests is the contemporary identification with the camera as a seductively disembodied and emotionless form of vision and cognition. In line with his frequent use of form as allegorical of thematics in his novels, when DeLillo's narration imitates the camera, it indicates the detachment of a particular character's thought process or aesthetic. In analysing the movie, he remarks on the passengers' sense of 'the special consciousness implicit in a long lens' (p.7), hinting at their desire to escape subjectivity and become their idealised notion of the camera, what Geoffrey

O'Brien calls 'the mechanical, invulnerable eye passing disembodied through space'.

³³ The 'camera eye' narration John Dos Passos employed in his USA trilogy was, as Donald Pizer points out, 'a symbol of impersonal and "objective" depiction'; effectively a variant of modernist impersonality. ³⁴ DeLillo's postmodern interest in the 'camera eye' arises from a more disturbing sense that contemporary Americans wish to identify with the camera to radically excise their internal experience. In *Players*, as Lyle's interest in the Stock Exchange computers intensifies and his involvement with terrorism deepens, his gaze grows correspondingly to resemble the 'camera eye'. DeLillo describes 'the neutral way his eyes recorded an audience' (p.64) and mentions his cultivation, at the Exchange, of the explicitly camera-like habit of 'swiveling toward a face and beaming an anemic look right past it' (p.72). The detachment of this 'anemic look' derives from the desire for an abstract mode of consciousness, which, though influenced and encouraged by capitalism, is apolitical in intent. DeLillo associates it with Lyle's involvement with revolutionary Marxism, but later links it with the inhumanity of fascism. When Pammy has sex with her friend Jack, for example, she envisages his 'Muscled body against the sky' as a 'Soft-core fascist image', a response whose stark cinematic objectivity DeLillo emphasises with the acerbic remark, 'But what the hell, folks, it's fun to mythologize' (p.165).

This cinematic narrative mode is first introduced in the prologue. It is often distinguished by a quasi-behaviourist aesthetic, which focuses solely on external dress and gesture to indicate a character's ruthless exclusion of interiority. It is the parodic counterpart of the behaviourist epistemology DeLillo repeatedly satirises and forces

³³ Geoffrey O'Brien, The Phantom Empire: Movies in the Mind of the 20th Century (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993), p.9.

³⁴ John Dos Passos, USA (New York: Library of America, 1996) and Donald Pizer, Dos Passos' USA (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1988), p.56.

the reader, like a behaviourist, to analyse unelaborated data and connect 'effects' with whatever 'cause' might appear plausible. One woman is said to be 'in her early forties, indifferently dressed. We know nothing else about her' (p.4). A young woman is shown yawning compulsively in the presence of machinery: 'planes', the 'roller coaster' and the 'phone', as though suffering 'a mild attack of something'. Her response may be anxiety or unconscious imitation of their mechanical action; the reader receives no guidance and is forced to choose (p.4). DeLillo's simulation of ignorance parallels Lyle's cultivation of vacancy, in his acquisition of habits that 'required no conscious planning yet reassured him' (p.26). DeLillo also implies that imitation of the 'camera eye' exacerbates mechanical thought and action. During the silent film, a man 'boots' a woman 'lightly in the rear' with 'a stylized jerkiness that's appropriately Chaplinesque in nature', a reference that foreshadows DeLillo's analogy between Charlie Chaplin's comic persona and the CIA agent, Glen Selvy, in Running Dog (p.5). Although seemingly light hearted, it suggests the cinematic gaze might eventually reduce both parties to objects of vaudevillian ridicule. As André Bazin points out, in Chaplin's films, such farcical mechanical behaviour usually precedes disaster.³⁵ Indeed, Bazin claims that 'I am confident that in all Charlie's pictures there is not one where this mechanised movement does not end badly for him (p.151). In Players, mechanised thought also 'ends badly' for those involved, diminishing intellect and autonomy to the point where individuals become parodies of their former selves.

One interpretation of the young woman's automatic 'yawning' is that it indicates a desire to acquire the insensitivity of the machine (p.5). Given that the woman is probably Pammy, who later emulates her husband's computational mind-

³⁵ André Bazin, What is Cinema?, trans. by Hugh Gray (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1968)

set, the view is highly plausible. The unnamed female character is the only woman in the prologue who, like Pammy, is one half of a couple. Moreover, DeLillo also hints at her identity, by remarking later on Pammy's habit of yawning while phoning her father (p.55). Paradoxically, Pammy expresses extreme disapproval of the influence of behaviourism and AI, which suggests her embrace of computational thought may be largely unconscious. As DeLillo remarks, Pammy is 'more humane' than Lyle, but also 'more prone to be affected by the shallow ideas drifting through her world' and may succumb easily to the cognition favoured by friends and colleagues (Anything, p.82). Early on, she expresses horror at simulation of mind, exclaiming 'it's so stupid. It's so modern-stupid. It's this thing that people are robots that scares me' (pp.42-3). Like Dennett, she connects Artificial Intelligence with behaviourist methodology, which she finds in her sterile work environment at the 'Grief Management Council', for whom she writes bloodless brochures with the rather mechanistic aim of helping clients 'assimilate' grief (p.18). Her distaste for this leads her to speculate that 'teams of behaviourists' created the company and 'assembled in the sewers and conceived a brand of futurism based on filing procedures' (p.19). Despite resenting the behaviourism of postmodern U.S. culture, she cannot extricate herself from the shallow cynicism it breeds. Her belief that her clients 'crave the means to codify their emotions' recalls Lyle's wish for flesh transformed to 'decimals' and inspires little faith in her wish to engage with their subjective experience, or her own (pp.18-19). Her behaviour towards the end of the novel suggests even more clearly an intense wish to escape the 'first-person ontology' of consciousness (Rediscovery, p.17). After the death of her friend Jack, Pammy is able to experience grief only when accompanied by a 'near obliteration of self-awareness'. Appropriately, the 'near obliteration' is supplied by technology, in this case television, on which she finds an

'inept and boring' movie that offers a 'choppy sobbing release' from her pent-up emotion (p.205). DeLillo's contemptuous description of the movie emphasises that liberation bought at the price of 'self-awareness' is partial at best. Ironically, her desire to annihilate 'self-awareness' finds significant theoretical support in the work of the behaviourists she professes to despise. As we saw, Dennett argues that first-person experience of mind is functionally irrelevant. He brusquely dismisses the view that experiences like 'pain' cannot be simulated, by drawing an astonishing analogy with the simulation of hurricanes. To 'the skeptic' who 'might reply that it is a simulation at best only of pain behaviour', he suggests that they 'consider hurricane simulation: what else is there to simulate but the hurricane's behaviour?' (Brainstorms, p.192). In this context, Pammy's momentary escape into the comfortingly abstract 'celestial energy' of television constitutes a significant moral and ontological defeat, since it is acquired at the price of contradicting her previous denunciations of behaviourism and lending support to the Dennettian view of consciousness as purposeless.

In addition to radically reducing self-awareness, Lyle and Pammy seek to alleviate their suffering by divorcing mind from world, by stripping signifiers of referential function. By splitting signifier from signified and referent and thereby refusing to name objects or experiences, they seek freedom from the more disturbing aspects of reality, particularly death. They aspire to something like the insular epistemology John R. Searle considers characteristic of the computer. Searle asserts that the computer does not do 'information processing', rather

What it does is to manipulate formal symbols. The fact that the programmer and the interpreter of the computer output use the

symbols to stand for objects in the world is totally beyond the scope of the computer. The computer, to repeat, has a syntax but no semantics. Thus, if you type into the computer '2 plus 2 equals? It will type out '4'. But it has no idea that '4' means 4 or that it means anything at all. (Minds, Brains, Programs, p.371)

Searle argues that the computer has no concept of 'meaning' because it has no notion of the existence of a world in which meaning is produced. It is a blissful state of ignorance that DeLillo's co-protagonists desperately envy (p.70). Lyle adores his 'teleprinter slips' for their hermetic quality, or what he calls their 'artful reduction of the world to printed output, the machine's coded model of exactitude', a radical transformation of matter that frees him to imagine himself entirely free of physicality (p.70). So intensely does he desire the cancellation of linguistic reference that this limited epistemology defines the spaces he inhabits. In Players' final paragraph, we learn that in Lyle's motel room even 'Spaces and what they contain no longer account for, mean, serve as examples of, or represent' (p.212).

Pammy encounters a similar hostility to reference at the 'Grief Management Council'. DeLillo mentions the 'patch of pure white hair' belonging to Pammy's friend Jack and refers mockingly to their colleagues' opinion of it as 'the mark, the label, the sign, the emblem of something mysterious', employing numerous synonyms to indicate its true status as a simple 'genetic misconception' (p.19). Jack's first reported act in the novel is to tell his partner Ethan that he yearns to live in 'Maine', even though, as Ethan remarks, it is only a 'word' to him, since 'he's never been there'. Nevertheless, such is Pammy's willingness to accord with her

contemporaries' privileging of signifier over signified and referent that she fatuously agrees Maine is 'a good word', 'You feel it's the sort of core, the moral core' (p.20). By the novel's conclusion, Pammy finds, like Lyle, that avoiding conventional signification effectively distances her from discomfort and trauma. After Jack's horrific suicide, prompted by his sexual infidelity with Pammy, and in which he incinerates himself 'down to nerves, blood vessels, bones' (p.198), she calms herself by abandoning the naming of objects. DeLillo states that 'She'd declared everything nameless. Everything was compressed into a block. She fought the tendency to supply properties to this block. That would lead to names' (p.199).

DeLillo suggests that the restriction of mind to computational cognition causes the intellect to atrophy. As Penrose points out, computation lacks reflexivity, the ability to analyse its own operations, and cannot break free of 'loops' or resolve contradictions (Shadows, p.196). The consequence is that Lyle and Pammy become steadily more robotic, subjecting themselves to what Slavoj Žižek, with reference to Lacan, calls the 'automatism of the signifier', which constructs the 'symbolic network in which the subjects are caught'.³⁶ The notion of language as a chain without substantial content is paralleled by the recurrence of motifs of circularity. After losing a bottle of wine, Pammy suggests to Jack that 'We'll hail a cab, Jack. Our bottle of wine will be in the back seat. It will complete the circle. I believe in circles' (p.44). The connection between the first and last scene also creates a Uroboran, autotelic structure, which recalls the high modernism of texts like Finnegans Wake.³⁷ In the novel's first line, Lyle remarks on the desirability of 'Motels. I like motels. I wish I owned a chain' (p.3), while the final scene makes cruel, ironic reference to this

³⁶ Slavoj Žižek, The Sublime Object of Ideology (London: Verso, 1989), p.36.

³⁷ James Joyce, Finnegans Wake (London: Faber, 1975)

aspiration, by locating the eventual dissolution of Lyle's subjective autonomy in the comfortless sterility of a motel room (p.212). By the end of Players, Pammy also takes on this 'automatism', becoming progressively more suggestible and less intellectually responsive. Her decision to have sex with Jack is determined by a litany of liberal mantras such as 'Follow your instincts, be yourself, act out your fantasies', which she adopts without apparent independent thought (p.143). Her evasion of reference gradually undermines her ability to connect signifier with signified or referent. Her last act in the novel is to stare without comprehension at a word on a street sign. It is 'Transients', which is highly suggestive, given Pammy's sense of anomie and her efforts to detach herself from subjectivity. As DeLillo puts it, she finds that 'It took on an abstract tone', 'subsisting in her mind as language units that had mysteriously evaded the responsibilities of content' (p.207). As we have seen, the damage to Lyle's intellectual and emotional life is at least equally severe.

Nevertheless, the epilogue reveals that Lyle retains unsuspected nostalgia for the mind-body unity he has discarded and even remains able, at the 'imperceptible urging' of his partner, to 'descend' and 'occupy his body' (p.189). In his final scene with Rosemary, he frankly admires her ability to achieve apparent harmony between mind and body. While watching her asleep, he witnesses 'a mode of wholeness, an immanence and unit truth that his feelings aren't equal to' (p.209). This idealisation of his female partner accords with Tabbi's view that in postmodern fiction's portrayal of technology, 'a detached, male ego' often 'tries to gain embodiment through a maternal other, whose reproductive force is conceived in opposition to the technological absolute' (p.4). DeLillo portrays Lyle with exactly this longing for the abstractions of the 'technological absolute', while also seeking comfort in the idealised 'mode of wholeness' he attributes to Rosemary. Yet, DeLillo presents Lyle's

view of Rosemary's supposed 'immanence' with acute awareness of its fantastic nature. Indeed, he emphasises Rosemary's drive to escape biology, which nearly equals that of Lyle, especially in her use of 'a plastic phallus harnessed to her body' (p.197). Lyle therefore knows intimately what DeLillo calls Rosemary's 'limits', 'the unvarying sands of her being', because they are also his own (p.210). In any case, he is well aware that his yearning for her female 'unit truth' is already mere nostalgia, since he is no longer capable of such organic experience. Far from being on the brink of rebirth through contact with her female 'immanence', DeLillo assures us that Lyle's yearnings for abstraction have wreaked such physical and emotional damage that he is 'barely recognizable as male' (p.212).

Running Dog: The Mechanics of Totalitarianism

Where Players portrays its protagonists' adoption of a computational mode of thought and the depletion of emotion and intellect that follows, in Running Dog, DeLillo presents an environment in which the robotic mind-set of its central character, the intelligence agent Glen Selvy, appears long established and taken for granted. Consequently, the text focuses largely on the political causes and consequences of this form of cognition, paying particular attention to the institutional manipulation Selvy suffers and the totalitarian subordination of his will to CIA directives, which is made possible by his computational model of mind. DeLillo's portrayal of the CIA in Running Dog accords with what Frances Stonor Saunders calls their 'reputation as a ruthlessly interventionist and frighteningly unaccountable instrument of American Cold War power', yet focuses less on political influence per se than on the potential

for capitalist self-enrichment it creates.³⁸ Selvy's mental limitations render him the ideal tool for his unit, 'Radial Matrix', the illegal offshoot of a CIA funding mechanism. This entity is the creation of brutal Vietnam veteran Earl Mudger, a manipulative and dictatorial leader who DeLillo repeatedly compares to Hitler and who refers to his intelligence work as 'just one slam-bang corporate venture' (p.139). Few characters escape some form of involvement in his aggressive pursuit of profit. The plot is driven by his avarice, being largely organised around the search for a movie of 'Hitler's' last days in the Berlin bunker, which is rumoured to be pornographic and, therefore, of immense commercial value. In the event, the movie portrays only 'Hitler's' pastiche of Charlie Chaplin's famous 'tramp' persona, a revelation that serves as a metaphor for the emptiness of the acquisitive quests that propel the novel and the totalitarian power that feeds off such arid capitalist 'ventures'.

Mudger's experience in Vietnam is portrayed as critical in distorting his personality and forging his cupidity and disregard for law. In this sense, Running Dog is part of a considerable post-war American tradition of films, novels, and television programs that study the way that foreign wars have wounded the American psyche. One notable forerunner is the feature film The Manchurian Candidate, whose subject is the Korean War of the early 1950s and a covert communist threat to America in its aftermath.³⁹ In a striking parallel to the computerised automatism adopted by CIA agent Selvy, in the wake of Vietnam, while in Korea, Staff Sergeant Raymond Shaw is hypnotised by enemy forces and employed as an assassin, whose subsequent killings in the U.S. are designed to lead to a communist coup. Rather like Selvy, and

³⁸ Frances Stonor Saunders, 'Who Paid the Piper?': The CIA and The Cultural Cold War (London: Granta, 1999), p.3.

³⁹ The Manchurian Candidate. Dir. John Frankenheimer. UA/MC. 2000.

many Vietnam veterans, Shaw's colleagues are tormented by nightmares that their actions were neither moral nor heroic. But, in the movie, the danger, in the form of overseas communism, is finally presented as reassuringly external and is forestalled, at the last moment, by a reawakened Shaw. DeLillo's novel, more darkly, portrays the pathological consequence of Vietnam as the triumph and intensification of a well-established domestic capitalism, its corruption of the organs of government, and its further dehumanisation of the American citizenry. Its pessimism about the consequences of imperialism recalls the Vietnam veteran Tim O'Brien's remark that 'you can tell a true war story by the way it never seems to end'.⁴⁰

The cinematic parallel is apposite because, in Running Dog, DeLillo, again, pursues the association between computation and the brutality of the cinematic gaze that pervades Players. Indeed, if anything, the aesthetics of cinema are more thoroughly embedded in the sensibility of Running Dog. DeLillo indicates this formally by the increased frequency of seemingly arbitrary changes of scene, which resemble 'jump cuts', while, thematically, it is exemplified by the centrality of the quest for the 'Hitler' movie, a film that foregrounds the connection between totalitarianism and the text's cinematic aesthetic. DeLillo also notes the increased importance of film in postmodernity for organisations that attempt to impose totalitarian control, referring to the contemporary network of surveillance technologies, which includes 'Spy satellites, weather balloons, U-2 aircraft' that, as Lightborne avers, are 'Putting the whole world on film' (p.150). Critics note the oppressive power of these appliances, which are capable of creating what Mark Osteen calls 'omnipresent cinematic surveillance' or a 'superpanopticon', but ignore Radial Matrix's deliberate cultivation of exaggerated fear of technology and

⁴⁰ Tim O'Brien, The Things They Carried (London: Collins, 1990), p.88.

dependence upon it to advance its acquisitive schemes.⁴¹ DeLillo suggests Mudger is well aware that anxiety about death and the body render agents like Selvy vulnerable to the notion of technology as substitute religion, with the power to protect and punish, and uses his own comparative fearlessness to maintain and enhance his power. In portraying these malevolent practices, DeLillo implies that paranoia about technology, which, as Mudger puts it, is 'enough to make us feel like criminals', may be as damaging to the psyche as the oppression such devices facilitate (p.93).

Critics often mention the close connection between Players and Running Dog, especially noting the continuity between the novels' main protagonists, Lyle Wynant and Glen Selvy. Yet, they fail to observe their common imitation of limited, mechanical thought. Tom LeClair suggests the novels are 'companion pieces' (p.146), while Bill Mullen asserts, more expansively, that 'Running Dog is the second half of Players, but its obverse and very different half'.⁴² Keeseey remarks on the relation between Lyle and Selvy, pointing out shrewdly that 'Glen Selvy could be described as taking up where Lyle left off' (p.101). I concur with Keeseey's assessment; in particular, Selvy appears to have achieved more thoroughly the mental and emotional nullity for which Lyle strives. He is untroubled by any conflict between his will and that of his masters, like the one Lyle experiences in Players. Selvy's desires have become indistinguishable from those of the people that have programmed, or, as his trainer Arthur Lomax aptly puts it, 'run' him (p.141). Similarly, in Selvy's case, even

⁴¹ Mark Osteen, 'Marketing Obsession: The Fascinations of Running Dog' in Critical Essays on Don DeLillo, ed. by H. Ruppensburg and T. Engles (New York: G.K.Hall and Co., 2000), pp.135-156 (p.135).

⁴² Bill Mullen, 'No There There: Cultural Criticism as Lost Object in Don DeLillo's Players and Running Dog' in Powerless Fictions?: Ethics, Cultural Critique, and American Fiction in the Age of Postmodernism, ed. by Ricardo Miguel Alfonso (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), pp.113-139 (p.129).

the vestigial sense of self that Lyle retains has been expunged by his cognitive limitations. 'Who are you Selvy?', the question asked by his lover, the journalist Moll Robbins, produces only a dismissive gesture, by which he 'appeared to be dissociating himself from whatever significance the question by its nature ascribed to him' (p.110). It is a telling moment, mirrored by a later episode, when Mudger reveals ignorance of his most loyal agent, by responding 'Who's Selvy?' to a report about his commitment to the CIA (p.141). The correlation reveals Mudger's callous inhumanity and suggests that Selvy's abnegation of self has been encouraged by Mudger's regime at 'Radial Matrix'.

The analogies, in Running Dog, between Selvy and the computer systems at his workplace are, if anything, more explicit than in Players. Often, they contain a hint of anthropomorphism, implying humorously that the machines recognise Selvy as their ontological kin. During the rigours of training, 'They liked his style in the interviews. The computers approved' (p.184), while Selvy is chosen to infiltrate Senator Percival's office because his 'name popped out of the computer' (p.156). The stern inhumanity that this association suggests is reaffirmed by Selvy's identification with the camera, which extends into his most intimate moments. There is a telling 'edge of detachment' about his 'voice and manner' (p.17) and, when he is eventually murdered, it is with a 'Strong sense of something being played out. Memory, a film' (p.239). In his treatment of Selvy's limited cognition and emotion, DeLillo again employs an ascetically pared down prose and gives little indication of interior life through indirect discourse or interior monologue, so that Selvy's eventual violent death provokes little response in the reader. What might, for another character, be interior monologue becomes an alienated, stilted second-person mode of address, indicating the complete enervation of selfhood. In the course of self-satisfied

reflections on his professional abilities, Selvy asserts that 'The routine was how your mind had come to work; which areas you avoided, the person you'd become' (p.81). Stuart Johnson remarks of DeLillo's arid aesthetic in Running Dog that it excludes 'speculation that transcends immediately given contexts', a rigour he regards as analogous to that of Wittgensteinian positivism.⁴³ Rather than rejection of 'general principles', I argue that Selvy practices the same exclusion of reference as Lyle and Pammy in Players. DeLillo alerts the reader to this continuity, by echoing vocabulary from the earlier novel. For example, Selvy calls 'shaving' 'an emblem of rigor' (p.81), recalling Pammy's fatuous view of Jack's patch of white hair as 'the sign, the emblem of something mysterious' (p.19).

DeLillo stresses the self-imposed nature of Selvy's cognitive limitations. Some of these resemble what, in computer studies, are called heuristics. According to Margaret A. Boden, the term 'heuristics' refers to programming techniques employed to save time and increase efficiency, by instructing the computer to select relevant lines of enquiry, while ignoring others.⁴⁴ She asserts that they 'prune the search tree. That is they save the problem-solver from visiting every choice-point on the tree, by selectively ignoring parts of it' (pp.78-79). As DeLillo says of Selvy,

His routine was a mind set, all those mechanically performed operations of the mind that accompanied this line of work.

You made connection-A but allowed connection-B to elude

⁴³ Stuart Johnson, 'Extraphilosophical Instigations in Don DeLillo's Runnning Dog', in Contemporary Literature, 26 1985, 74-90 (p.75).

⁴⁴ Margaret A. Boden, The Creative Mind: Myths and Mechanisms (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990), pp.78-79.

you. You felt free to question phase-1 of a given operation but
deadened yourself to the implications of phase-2. (p.81)

This computational 'routine' permits Selvy to relate to himself in the second person, avoiding the troubling emotions of subjectivity, particularly death-anxiety. When Mudger threatens Selvy's life, this evasion of affect becomes comically explicit. DeLillo remarks of Selvy's mental discipline that 'It wasn't within Selvy's purview to meditate on additional links, even when they might pertain to his ultimate sustenance. Especially then. This was why the routine existed' (p.82). Like Lyle in Players, Selvy compensates for his self-abnegation by imagining himself able to construct a 'second self' (p.83), by careful study of cybernetics. On occasion, DeLillo implies Selvy is working systematically to replace his flesh with mechanical alternatives. When he refuses to consider Mudger's plainly homicidal intent, DeLillo notes that 'Where the routine prevented Selvy from seeking human links', it 'prompted him to study the interactions within mechanisms' (p.83).

The enervation of Selvy's subjectivity causes severe intellectual decline, rendering him incapable of intelligent debate and denying him the capacity to alter his viewpoint. It is an incapacity he shares with the computer, which, as Joseph F. Rychlak explains, is designed to operate 'entirely in terms of demonstrative reasoning' and lacks the Socratic or dialectical reason that would allow for discussion or simultaneous consideration of antithetical ideas.⁴⁵ Selvy's limitations, in this regard, again, become particularly apparent after Mudger's attempt to assassinate him. When he narrowly escapes death, his lover, the journalist Moll Robbins, asks 'What

⁴⁵ Joseph F. Rychlak, In Defence of Human Consciousness (Washington D.C: American Psychological Association, 1997), p.195.

would you do differently, knowing what you know now?', only to receive the perplexingly blank response 'What do I know now?' (p.110). Once Selvy has deemed Mudger trustworthy, his one-dimensional cognitive process prevents him altering his assessment in the light of new information. Selvy's mind is caught in a 'loop' of 'demonstrative' computational thought (Defence, p.195). As Penrose remarks, 'a truly intelligent system must have some way of breaking out of such loops' (p.196). If we accept this view, we must conclude that Selvy has ceased to be 'truly intelligent'.

Selvy's incapacity exemplifies the impotence endured, in Running Dog, by those who accept the mythologies of totalitarian regimes. DeLillo's use of Grail legend helps suggest the extent to which Mudger generates a seductive, obfuscatory mythology, which produces exactly these enervating effects. In combination with the prosaic conventions of the 'spy thriller', the weight of Arthurian mythology can strike the reader as incongruous, even bathetic. Yet, it serves a number of thematic functions, including questioning the fundamental value of the quests that underlie both the 'spy thriller' and the capitalist system that creates demand for the 'Hitler' film. As Moll remarks, in pursuing such chimeras, 'People came up against themselves in the end. Nothing but themselves' (p.224). Moll's sex, her profession, and her left-wing politics, which distance her somewhat from the corruption around her, added to the late stage at which her statement is delivered, all lend her verdict gravitas. Notably, the character who experiences something resembling contentment is Levi Blackwater, Selvy's former CIA colleague and meditation instructor, who eschews external quests for exactly this confrontation with mind and 'self'. He tells Selvy that, through strict spiritual discipline, he might apprehend his mind's Gnostic capacities and expand his notion of subjectivity. As Levi phrases it, Selvy should limit himself 'to the narrowest subject' in order to realise that 'you already know much

more than you imagined' (p.231). Given his serenity and his efforts to disseminate this state, in Grail mythology, Levi fits the traditional role of 'Healer', the one person able to assist the Fisher King, and who, according to Jesse L. Weston, is the 'Grail winner'.⁴⁶ Most significantly, in the context of Grail legend, the mystic occupies 'the barest stretch of desert', which recalls the 'Waste Land' of Arthurian myth, and renders it magically fertile with his restorative powers (p.230). Part of Levi's healing ability arises from something like the 'realist' view of consciousness that Dr Oh adopts in Americana. As in that text, this entails an augmented faith in perception, which DeLillo suggests by the heightened state of existence that objects attain, in proximity to Levi. In his vicinity, we learn, 'The power of storms to burnish and renew' 'had never been more clearly evident. The sky was flawless. Things existed. The day was scaled to the pure tones of being and sense' (p.244).

DeLillo makes explicit his use of Grail legend, by including well-known details of the genre. He makes ironic use of Arthurian names, whose inappropriate or grandiose nature indicates the widespread displacement of power from its legitimate agents that is apparent in Running Dog. One of Mudger's corrupt lieutenants is named Arthur Lomax, and Percival, although a Senator and named after a righteous questing knight, proves powerless when confronted by Mudger's ruthlessness. His attempts to investigate Radial Matrix's financial status are stymied, first with threats of sexual blackmail (p.92) and later by intimidation of magazine editor Grace Delaney, to whom Percival intends to leak incriminating information (p.134). Similarly, Osteen uses Selvy's association with birds, a characteristic of the mythical Perceval, to identify him as a postmodern version of the questing knight (p.26). Notably, to

⁴⁶ Jesse L. Weston, From Ritual to Romance (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor books, 1957), pp.106-8.

consider Selvy in the context of Grail legend vastly increases the significance of his unquestioning computational 'routine'. As Weston observes, in many Grail legends, it is the knight's failure to enquire about the nature of the Grail that renders it elusive and the 'Waste Land' infertile. In such tales, 'the failure of the predestined hero to ask concerning the office of the Grail is alone responsible for the illness of the King and the misfortunes of the country' (p.16). Selvy's quiescent mechanical mind-set may therefore be interpreted as pivotal in permitting the brutal profiteering that pervades the text, in which case, the unredeemed 'Waste Land' can only be the venal government agencies he serves and the capitalism that encourages their corruption. DeLillo appears to suggest that the excesses of capitalism are abetted by the docility of its victims.

As the novel's most influential character, Mudger may therefore represent a profoundly dark rendering of the 'Fisher King'. If so, his sicknesses are those of late capitalism: the propensity to fall 'in love with profits' (p.75) and a fascistic insistence on what Ernest Mandel calls 'a "regimented" society in which everyone has and keeps his place'.⁴⁷ The novel traces his sickness to Vietnam, where Mudger honed his skill in financial exploitation, establishing 'a feudal barony complete with loyal ARVN soldiers', as well as 'pimps and black marketeers' (p.84). DeLillo's treatment of the consequences of Vietnam is strikingly ambivalent. He makes quite clear that that conflict's lawlessness contributes to Mudger's corruption. Nevertheless, by witnessing destruction and employing the names of weapons as an apotropaic 'counterjargon to death', what O'Brien calls 'a hard vocabulary to contain the terrible softness' (p.32), Mudger overcomes the debilitating death-anxiety that DeLillo often suggests is deeply embedded in American culture (p.209). As O'Brien remarks of his

⁴⁷ Ernest Mandel, Late Capitalism, trans. by Joris De Bres (London: NLB, 1972), p.500.

own combat experience, 'proximity to death brings with it a corresponding life' (p.92). Moreover, by exploiting the local population, Mudger avoids what Tobey C. Herzog calls the 'treadmill-like existence' of Vietnam, which rendered recruits 'incapable of acting independently'.⁴⁸ In the context of a preponderance of Vietnam novels that portray 'soldiers as agents of a government's political, social, and economic problems', Mudger cuts an amoral, romantic figure, whose combat experience augments his strength and autonomy (p.6). By contrast, Selvy, who did not serve, remains comparatively weak and naive. As Cowart remarks, he 'retains an innocence that makes him the pawn of those who learned the war's dark lessons' (p.59). In this respect, the novel's cinematic counterpart is Francis Ford Coppola's Apocalypse Now, which was released in the same year.⁴⁹ The film is a version of Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness, set in the context of Vietnam. It portrays Conrad's Kurtz as a commander who has become psychopathic and who, like Mudger, accrues considerable personal power and acts in defiance of orders. Mudger's disdain for the average 'grunt' is paralleled by Kurtz's murderous treatment of dissenters and his contempt for his assassin Captain Willard, who he describes as no 'soldier', but a 'clerk' sent 'to collect a bill'. In spite of his 'sickness', therefore, Mudger's grim experience may contain an embryonic strategy for overcoming the lurking morbidity DeLillo perceives in U.S. culture, yet one that Mudger fails to capitalise upon, being more concerned to exploit the death-anxiety of others. Only Levi makes anything positive of his Vietnam experience, discovering an unsuspected strength and tranquility within his mind, which enables him to respond to torture (p.224) with gratitude for the opportunity to endure 'confinement, the machinery of self' (p.231). Unlike Selvy, Levi never fetishises mental or physical 'confinement',

⁴⁸ Tobey C. Herzog, Vietnam War Stories (London: Routledge, 1992), p.39.

but uses them to explore, through meditation, the full range of his mental capacities. The ability Levi develops as instructor and 'Healer' suggests that this meditative mode of thought enables him to forge a substantial subjectivity, which eschews both Selvy's subservience and Mudger's ravenous expropriation. He alone accepts that the quests in which these two participate demonstrate what Moll calls 'a meagerness of spirit' (p.224).

Yet, because Levi's qualities remain unremarked by all but Selvy, who is unable to respond to Levi's advice, it is the menace Mudger generates to assist his capitalist enterprises that informs the tone of the text. From the opening scene, in which Ludecke, the Hitler film's owner, is murdered by Mudger's agents for his refusal to part with the tape, DeLillo connects Mudger's operations with the totalitarianism of the Third Reich and what DeLillo hints is its inhumane cinematic aesthetic. The first line addresses the reader and creates a sinister, collusive tone typical of the cinema voiceover, asserting 'You won't find ordinary people here'. 'It's why you're here, obviously' (p.3). Like Selvy's second-person discourse, this narrative mode is totalitarian in its presumption of agreement, effectively 'compromising or interpellating' the reader, as Louis Althusser argues is the case with the 'ideological apparatuses' of the state.⁵⁰ The fascistic overtones are apposite, in view of Mudger's ruthless violence and Ludecke's recollections of Nazism prior to death. The scrawled graffiti 'Alles nach Gottes Willen', or 'All as God Wills it', recalls his childhood, when he observed the identical message 'engraved on a ceremonial halberd' (pp.3-4). The connection of this pious platitude with weaponry and death introduces a factitious 'religious' aesthetic that DeLillo suggests underpins

⁴⁹ Apocalypse Now. Dir. Francis Ford Coppola. Miramax Film Corporation. 1978.

⁵⁰ Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', in Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays, trans. by Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1977), pp.121-173 (p.161).

fascist and proto-fascist organisations like the Nazi party and Radial Matrix, serving to disguise the brutal exercise of power, by the dissemination of mystifying ideologies like 'fate' and 'destiny'. In his decadent mental state, Selvy is convinced by such pseudo-religious notions and, like the faithful 'running dog' of the title, believes himself fated to return to his training camp at 'Marathon Mines', where, as he predicts, he is murdered. When he tells Levi portentously that 'You know how it ends', Levi urges him against such self-destructive limitation of his thought, begging him not to imagine that 'you're about to arrive at some final truth'. 'Truth is a disappointment' (p.233). Ludecke's death parallels Selvy's, both being connected with factitious religious fervour and executed by Mudger's lieutenants with gruesome but comical kitsch. Cinema theorist Saul Friedlander considers this blend of kitsch and death typical of fascist thought, arguing that it 'represents the foundation of a certain religious aesthetic, and, in my opinion, the bedrock of Nazi aesthetics'.⁵¹ Selvy's death is brought about by his facile illusions about 'destiny' and his imagined spiritual progress, while Ludecke succumbs during a seedy evening cruising a deserted dock land, dressed in drag and worshipping the illusory 'God of Lipstick and Silk' (p.4). The resemblance between the killings is emphasised by the fact that they frame the narrative like bookends, suggesting Mudger's suffocating effect on the postmodern world of Running Dog. In spite of the ludicrous circumstances of these murders, Ludecke's response to Mudger's scrawled message in German betrays the sinister nature of the Radial Matrix ideology. His feeling that the words were 'familiar somehow, burning a hole in time' imply a direct connection between Mudger's methods and those of the Third Reich, suggesting that such CIA and government

⁵¹ Saul Friedlander, Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), p.27.

corruption may presage a Heideggerian recrudescence, or coming 'into bloom', of totalitarianism in contemporary America (p.4).⁵²

Mudger's use of religious aesthetics is most striking in his inculcation of subservience to technology among his employees. The strategy is exemplified by his reminder to Selvy, after Selvy disconnects a bugging device, that the 'feeling in this unit concerning devices of any kind is close to religious', a 'feeling' Mudger seeks to maintain by ordering the errant agent's assassination (p.105). For agents afflicted by death-anxiety, Mudger's infusion of technology with the spiritual offers spurious reassurance identical to that provided by Nazi ideology. In Selvy's addled mind, for example, technics become 'an inventory of personal worth' (p.82). Yet, Mudger's coolly analytical approach to machinery and contempt for Selvy's commitment to Radial Matrix demonstrates that his interest in the subject extends only to manipulating the awe it inspires in his subordinates. In response to the assertion that Selvy 'believes', meaning that he is dedicated to intelligence 'life', Mudger asks blankly 'Believes what?' (p.141), while, in conversation with Moll, he observes cynically 'Devices make us pliant'; 'When technology reaches a certain level, people begin to feel like criminals' (p.93). He understands instinctively that, in late capitalism, as Mandel puts it, 'Belief in the omnipotence of technology is the specific form of bourgeois ideology' (p.501), a dogma Mudger's expertise in 'production flow systems and automation' equips him to exploit (p.75). Mandel also remarks on the 'hybrid and bastardized combination of organization and anarchy' to which this ideology leads in contemporary society, a formulation highly appropriate to the blend of military precision and contempt for legality that characterises Mudger's work (p.502). Like DeLillo, Mandel believes late capitalist technocracy creates propitious

⁵² Martin Heidegger, The Question of Technology and other Essays, trans. by William W. Lovitt (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1997), p.11.

circumstances for totalitarianism, asserting that such ‘mechanical submission to “technological authority”’ creates ‘perilous preconditions for semi-fascist acceptance of inhuman order’ (p.505). Mudger’s encouragement of agents to identify with technology makes this metaphor of ‘mechanical submission’ disturbingly literal. To consolidate his hierarchical order, he pursues the thesis that ‘Personal relations work like machinery’, noting particularly the reduction in solidarity and moral inhibition that technology effects (p.168). As he tells Moll, ‘There’s a neat correlation between the complexity of the hardware and the lack of genuine attachments. Devices make everyone pliant’ (p.91). Zygmunt Bauman observes the same phenomenon in Nazism, remarking that ‘The technical-administrative success of the Holocaust was due in part to the skilful utilization of “moral sleeping pills” made available by modern technology’.⁵³ In pursuit of the ‘Hitler’ movie, Mudger increasingly resembles the fascists whose history he seeks to exploit.

Robert Stone’s Dog Soldiers presents the Vietnam War as similarly corrupting of human relationships.⁵⁴ It portrays two Veterans, Hicks and his relatively fragile counterpart Converse, who, unlike Selvy, challenges his subordinate position by mounting a raid on Hicks’ supply of illegal drugs. Like Mudger, Hicks finds that his transcendence of death-anxiety permits him to manipulate subordinates and the physical world. He was ‘at home in the world of objects. He believed that his close and respectful study of Japanese culture had enabled him to manipulate matter in a simple disciplined manner.’ ‘He believed it was all in your head’ (p.77). In the same way, Mudger’s manipulation of agents is made plain by the enviably sensual, creative relationship with technology he enjoys in private. DeLillo places particular emphasis

⁵³ Zygmunt Bauman, Modernity and the Holocaust (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p.26.

⁵⁴ Robert Stone, Dog Soldiers (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1974)

on the physical pleasure it affords him, suggesting that comfort with the body is crucial in maintaining autonomy in his relationship with technology. Conversely, Selvy's anxious, fetishistic relation to the machine is associated with a pathologically ascetic, dualistic retreat from the body. The CIA agent has a Spartan tendency to inhabit 'severely underfurnished' rooms (p.24) and uses his body in purely instrumental fashion, 'with a curious efficiency', as a way of denying its perishable, organic nature (p.35). By contrast, Mudger finds the process of sharpening his 'cutting edge with a coarse hone' 'mysteriously pleasing' (p.118), all the while, radiating a calm confidence DeLillo indicates by long repetitive sentences and soporific lists of implements (p.119, p.129). We read of the 'satisfactions of cutting along pencil lines, of measuring to the sheer edge of something and coming out right, of allowing for slight variations and coming out right, of mixing fluids and seeing the colours blend, a surface texture materializing out of brush striations' (p.119). Mudger enjoys the approach to machinery that Heidegger calls 'releasement towards things', or the refusal to be influenced by technology in one's 'real core' (p.54). In addition to its association with serenity and wealth, DeLillo suggests, less attractively, that this mindset may be compatible with the promulgation or tolerance of fascism, something true of Mudger and which proved to be the case in Heidegger's own life. Lightborne, the erotic art dealer who informs Mudger of the 'Hitler' movie's existence, is similarly unperturbed by both the somatic and the mechanical and evinces a nonchalant unconcern regarding the brutality of the Nazis and Radial Matrix. His calm response to the disrepair of his 'right shoe' and that of his gallery, where the 'end table leaned a little' (p.13), suggests an untroubled, if somewhat vapid, relationship with technology, while the sensuality that is the corollary of this

unruffled reaction is suggested partly by his interest in erotica, but also by several moments of unembarrassed carnal pleasure, including his consumption of the soaking 'brown ooze' of a dunked biscuit (p.19). He makes no moral judgement on Nazism, describing himself simply as a 'student of the period' and engaging in urbane analysis of the 'essential' value to the Nazis of films such as Leni Riefenstahl's 'The Triumph of the Will', which he believes lay in the creation of 'Myth, dreams, memory' (p.52). It is notable, then, that when he finally views the 'Hitler' footage, he is shocked to appreciate that 'It was all so real' 'Objects were what they seemed to be. History was true', raising the possibility that his placidity, hitherto, has not derived from indifference or amorality, but a near autistic withdrawal from reality (p.188).

DeLillo uses the contrast between Selvy's dualism and limited, computational cognition and Mudger's comparatively fertile thought and unified experience of mind and body to explore the psychological dynamics of fascism. Their relationship is lent a mediated, characteristically postmodern, quality by the fact they never actually meet and Mudger is unaware of Selvy's existence. Nevertheless, their predominant mode of 'interaction' is a form of reciprocal imitation. In a move that parallels his encouragement of his agents to identify with technology, Mudger exploits his employees' intellectual enervation, by systematically mimicking their behaviour and seeking, by this means, to coerce them into a reciprocal identification with him. Like Freud's father of pre-history, who, as Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen argues, inspires his sons with the sense that their mind and subjectivity are 'abyssal', Mudger undermines his agents' intellect and self-confidence, to the point where they believe they require an 'absolute Narcissus' with whom to identify.⁵⁵ Mudger's dissemination of attitudes to

⁵⁵ Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, The Freudian Subject, trans. by Catherine Porter (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), p.239.

technology that he does not share indicates a wish to anticipate and manipulate his subordinates' most intimate desires. DeLillo suggests that this is Mudger's habitual tactic, noting Moll's experience that she 'had noticed during their first meeting how he tried to establish prior rights to convictions and views he assumed she held' (p.170). It is striking, therefore, that 'Hitler's' behaviour in the sought after movie is closely comparable to Mudger's. Indeed, it may be read as an allegory of Mudger's habitual mimicry, implying that such tactics are typical of totalitarian leadership. 'Hitler' impersonates Charlie Chaplin's famous 'tramp' persona, wearing Chaplinesque 'Baggy pants' and adopting a 'screwy mechanical walk' (pp.234-5). The reference to Chaplin recalls the vacuous mechanical imitation with which his films are associated in Players and suggests that the same identification with technology underlies the totalitarian culture of Running Dog. Paul A. Cantor suggests that, in this scene, DeLillo intends the reader to conclude that 'Hitler' is imitating Chaplin's impersonation of him in The Great Dictator.⁵⁶ Yet, this is to miss the crucial parallel DeLillo draws between 'Hitler' and Mudger. DeLillo deliberately shows 'Hitler' imitating Chaplin's established routine, the 'tramp', just as Mudger consolidates power by mimicking views his interlocutors and employees already hold. Significantly, DeLillo draws attention to the high quality of 'Hitler's' imitations, implying that, as totalitarian leader, such mimicry has become habitual to him. Lightborne asserts that Hitler was 'a gifted mimic' and DeLillo confirms that the 'epicene, guilty little smile' the dictator borrows from Chaplin is 'An accurate reproduction' (p.236). It is an interpretation of Hitler's leadership borne out by Ian

⁵⁶ Paul A. Cantor, 'Adolf, We Hardly Knew You', in New Essays on White Noise, ed. by Frank Lentricchia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.39-62 (p.56).

Kershaw's analysis of the marketing of the real life Nazi dictator.⁵⁷ According to Kershaw, Hitler built his popularity on appearing to embody the aspirations of the Germans, of claiming that he 'came as destiny from the inner essence of a people'. In doing so, Kershaw suggests Hitler promoted 'pseudo-democratic notions of a relationship between leader and "following"', in which the leader represented in an authoritative way the will of the people without standing above and outside it' (p.19). In Running Dog, 'Hitler's' impersonation of Chaplin allegorises the way that dictators like Mudger promote such 'pseudo-democratic notions', by pre-empting the 'convictions and views' of others. DeLillo suggests that, to sustain the illusion of representative government, totalitarian regimes must study their 'following' with considerable care, a view that implies a disturbingly close relation between dictatorship and the strategies of contemporary democratic governments.

Selvy's continuing aspiration to embody the ethos of Radial Matrix confirms the success of Mudger's reciprocal imitation. With her usual perspicacity, Moll bears witness to Selvy's willing occupation of this secondary role. Significantly, she remarks upon it after watching Chaplin's The Great Dictator, a movie whose concern with fascism and mimicry foreshadows 'Hitler's' later impersonation of Chaplin (p.61). Famously, The Great Dictator is Chaplin's satire of Hitler and concludes with an impersonation of the eponymous 'dictator' by a young barber, after the genuine leader has disappeared, having gone 'duck hunting' and 'fallen out of his boat' (p.61). Both characters are played by Chaplin and are sufficiently ill suited to their position that they might be interpreted as engaged in mere imitation of their roles.

Consequently, Moll's pointed remark that 'you're engraved on the moviegoing part of my brain. You and Charlie forever linked' might suggest that he resembles either

⁵⁷ Ian Kershaw, The Hitler Myth: Image and Reality in the Third Reich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989)

character or both. Given Selvy's inferior status, however, Moll is more likely to conceive of him as resembling the young barber, whose speech DeLillo calls 'A burlesque, an impersonation of the absent dictator (p.61). Whatever her intention, her parallel between Selvy's identification with Mudger and the Chaplinesque mimicry on screen affirms that the mechanistic imitation of Players has, in Running Dog, been revealed as essential to the technocratic totalitarian politics of postmodernity.

In the novel's final scenes, it is clear that, although Selvy aspires to a larger experience of mind that includes its intuitive and spiritual capacities, his self-imposed cognitive restrictions have caused permanent damage, rendering irreversible his self-destructive identification with the machine and his totalitarian master. DeLillo emphasises the continuing mechanical and cinematic quality of Selvy's mental process, by juxtaposing these climactic scenes with Lightborne's screening of the 'Hitler' movie and remarking of Selvy's anticipation of death that he 'saw it as memory, as playback' (p.229). Selvy clearly yearns for spiritual experience, but consistently mistakes the narrow restrictions, or 'heuristics', of his computational mind-set for religious discipline. He misunderstands Levi's suggestion that he 'limit himself to the narrowest subject' in order to fully apprehend his mental abilities, believing mistakenly that the 'Tighter and tighter limits' he already employs fulfil his teacher's instruction (p.231). Selvy lacks the intellectual flexibility to consider objectivity as a mere epistemological tool and fixes upon it dogmatically as an ontological principle. Like many modern materialist philosophers, he jumps to the unwarranted conclusion that 'reality itself is objective' (Rediscovery, p.10). Rather comically, Selvy also comes to the unfounded conclusion that the Japanese are particularly spiritual, insisting that they communicate 'secretly, by inborn means'.

Yet, his use of the term 'apartness' to describe their 'challenging sense of calm' (p.187) is disturbing because it recalls the same word applied to Lyle's alienated state in Players, suggesting an inability to distinguish spirituality from affectless withdrawal (Players, p.72). Like Selvy's earlier use of the term 'emblem', it is a telling moment of intertextuality that indicates his wish to maintain the emotional desensitisation computational thought has brought him (p.81). Stone presents spiritual study as, at least, creating an opportunity to acquire worldly influence: he depicts the dominant Hicks as 'a student of Zen', with an informed knowledge of 'Japanese culture', who 'endeavored to maintain a spiritual life' (Soldiers, p.75). But, DeLillo's depiction of Selvy suggests a darker vision of American postmodernity, in which, for the victims of unbridled capitalism, the spiritual is a dubious consolation, sometimes sought out of a stifling sense of powerlessness. In Selvy's final scene, he vows adherence to Levi's spiritual doctrines, agreeing that 'Dying is an art in the East', yet articulates his supposed spiritual preparedness in the vocabulary of sterile machine action, which implies a wholly objective, third-person relation to his mind (p.233). 'I'm primed, Levi', he insists, 'I'm tuned, I'm ready' (p.232). Such repeated misunderstanding of Levi's advice eventually dulls the reader's sympathy with Selvy's spiritual quest and causes his death to come as something of a relief. After his murder by Mudger's agent, 'Augie the Mouse', Selvy is decapitated, parodying the dualistic treatment of mind and body that has accompanied his computational thought throughout. Since this mind-body split was first prompted by his dread of mortality, it seems highly appropriate that in death it becomes irrevocable.

Chapter 5

'The Art of Human Consciousness': the Construction of Selfhood in 'The Names' and 'White Noise'

Players (1977) and Running Dog (1978) focus on a highly abstract form of cognition that is based on computation and the severely attenuated model of self to which it leads.¹ In The Names (1982) and White Noise (1984), DeLillo continues his examination of noetic modes of thought, particularly objectivist materialism and linguistic formalism, and the difficulty of forging an adequate subjectivity that is invariably their correlative in DeLillo's oeuvre.² In their varying ways, these texts address the difficulty, present in DeLillo's work since Americana (1971), of creating a sustainable sense of self in the midst of what Leonard Wilcox calls the 'decentering forces' of postmodern culture.³ A number of DeLillo critics, including Wilcox, have suggested that the demise of modernist notions of subjectivity make this project impracticable. Yet, in both of these novels DeLillo portrays protagonists who come to reject the modernist idea of the self as stable and self-identical and to feel the need for a subjectivity that partakes of what Diane Elam has called postmodernism's 'concern with the persistence of excess'.⁴ For DeLillo's characters, this abundance manifests primarily as an increased respect for the ontological status of their mind and subjectivity, a belief that these categories exist in excess of the dazzling polyphony of signification, in The Names, and, in White Noise, the looming threat of mortality.

¹ Don DeLillo, Players (London: Vintage, 1991) and Running Dog (London: Vintage, 1992)

² Don DeLillo, The Names (London: Picador, 1989) and White Noise (London: Picador, 1989)

³ Don DeLillo, Americana (London: Penguin, 1990) and Leonard Wilcox, 'Baudrillard, DeLillo's White Noise, and the End of Heroic Narrative' in Don DeLillo's White Noise, ed. by Harold Bloom (Philadelphia, PA: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003), pp.97-115 (p.99).

⁴ Diane Elam, Romancing the Postmodern (London: Routledge, 1992), p.2.

DeLillo told Adam Begley that, beginning with The Names, he ‘tried to find a deeper level of seriousness’ in his work, a search for greater depth that, in these two novels, manifests in a closer examination of themes long implicit in his oeuvre.⁵ In White Noise, this takes the form of an extended treatment of the death-anxiety that pervades his work, in which DeLillo portrays a university lecturer Jack Gladney, his wife Babette, and their numerous children. The novel presents a far more detailed and elaborate exploration of this fear than earlier DeLillo novels such as Americana, concentrating particularly on the various means by which Jack and Babette seek to conquer their terror. DeLillo suggests that they eventually achieve a qualified rapprochement with mortality, first, by adopting a Buddhist notion of the self as equivalent to the nothingness of death and then by discovering in a psychological merger of self and death a model of mind and subjectivity in excess of its innate mortality.

In The Names, there is less focus on death and DeLillo’s more extended treatment of recurrent themes is apparent in his most detailed analysis so far of the exigencies of creating a sense of self. As in White Noise, this process depends upon attributing ontological worth to mind and subjectivity. Yet, because the novel’s primary theme is the relation between mind and language it engages with various forms of signification, including the languages of Greece, the Middle East, and India, where the novel’s action takes place. It rejects the notion that language constrains the mind, taking John Dewey’s position that ‘language is not thought’, and adopting a view similar to that of Walter Benjamin that mind exists in excess of the language that

⁵ Adam Begley, ‘Don DeLillo: The Art of Fiction CXXXV’, in Paris Review, 28 (1993), 275-306 (p. 284).

conveys its 'mental content'.⁶ Nevertheless, critics of The Names have seldom emphasised DeLillo's concern with mind and self, often preferring to treat his concern with language in isolation. Dennis A. Foster, for instance, argues that DeLillo presents language as paradigmatic of 'civilized systems' that produce 'terror, ecstasy, and death', while Paula Bryant depicts the novel as a 'labyrinthine trek through language itself'.⁷ Others have argued that the theme of language underpins an exploration of political issues. Matthew J. Morris suggests language 'serves' the theme of 'political and sexual oppression'.⁸ Mark Osteen makes the related point that the protagonist James Axton recognises language as 'the necessary ligature of filial and communal bonds' and argues that it is a necessary part of his journey 'towards commitment and community'.⁹ Osteen regards James' primary difficulty as his uneasy, near xenophobic, reaction to Greek culture. Yet, he does not remark on the awkward imperialist situation in which James lives, which presents moral difficulties, but more importantly, as we will see, an outmoded modernist model of subjectivity that discourages him from forming a sense of self.

The novel is set in the characteristically postmodern milieu of an American expatriate community, many of whose members work in finance and intelligence and are motivated by the movements of what Fredric Jameson calls 'multi-national

⁶ John Dewey, How We Think (New York: Prometheus books, 1991), p.170 and Walter Benjamin, 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man', in Selected Writings, Vol.II: 1913-26, trans. by Edmund Jephcott and ed. by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp.62-74 (p.64).

⁷ Dennis A. Foster, "'Alphabetic Pleasures': The Names", in Introducing Don DeLillo, ed. by Frank Lentricchia (Durham: Duke University Press 1991), pp.157-173 (p.172) and Paula Bryant, 'Discussing the Untellable: Don DeLillo's The Names', in Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction, 29 (1987), 16-29 (p.16).

⁸ Matthew J. Morris, 'Murdering Words: Language in Action in The Names', in Contemporary Literature, 30 (1989), 113-127 (p113).

⁹ Mark Osteen, American Magic and Dread: Don DeLillo's Dialogue with Culture (Philadelphia, PA: University of Philadelphia Press, 2000), p.118.

capital'.¹⁰ These characters, based largely in Athens, belong to an itinerant, wealthy group that Zygmunt Bauman would call 'globetrotters' or 'supra-national traders', whose existence is made possible by globalised capitalist-imperialism and Western military power.¹¹ The Names therefore pays close attention to postmodern manifestations of imperialism, especially those that emanate from the U.S., and studies their effects on oppressor and victim alike. For the latter, the most obvious consequence is the enervation of national identity. As Andreas Eliades, the Greek lover of diplomat's wife Ann Maitland, points out, 'The occupiers fail to see the people they control' (p.237). To serve U.S. Cold War strategy, Greece is treated as an adjunct of the Middle East, exploited for its strategic position, but always ranked second to 'the Turks', whose help is required in strengthening NATO and consolidating U.S. influence in the Middle East (p.59). On the Western side, the power and, to some degree, sense of responsibility of the imperialists, leads them to adopt an anachronistic subjectivity, based on modernist notions of self-identity, or what the archaeologist Owen Brademas calls the 'ideal balance' of the self (p.307). DeLillo implies that its logical accompaniment is the supposed equivalence of signifier and signified characteristic of modernist naturalism. This relationship between naturalism and imperialist 'balance' is comparable to what Walter Benn Michaels calls 'the logic of naturalism', which, he argues, prevailed in early twentieth-century literature and was the correlative of the 'gold standard'.¹² Michaels writes that in naturalist fiction characters were expected to prove their self-identity, to be 'equal' to their 'face value' and therefore, metaphorically, 'to become gold' (p.22).

¹⁰ Fredric Jameson, Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (London: Verso, 1993), p.49.

¹¹ Zygmunt Bauman, Liquid Love (Cambridge: The Polity Press, 2003), p. 142.

To convey the outmoded naturalism for which his characters strive, DeLillo employs the most naturalistic, seemingly transparent prose of his career thus far; an approach that contrasts strikingly with the mannered, elliptical style of his two previous novels. True to this naturalism, DeLillo demonstrates a concern for the accurate representation of nature, dwelling on what he calls the 'elemental landscapes' that impressed him while living in Greece in the late 1970s (Begley, p.284). As in End Zone and Ratner's Star, where the thinness of characters indicates the unreal quality of their perceptions, in DeLillo, form is often allegorical of thematics. In The Names, the supposed transparency of naturalism is appropriate to the Americans' simplistic assumptions of superiority, exemplified by their arrogant importation of what James calls 'our own model of democratic calm' (p.96). It combines with what DeLillo calls 'idealized café dialogue' (Begley, p.285) to help convey the claustrophobia and moral enervation that afflicts the Western community, which result in numerous adulteries and deceptions and the decadent ennui of characters like Del Nearing, lover of film director Frank Volterra, who spends time 'writing a postcard to her cat' (p.202). DeLillo reinforces these connections to modernism by providing clear parallels with the treatment of colonial peoples in the early twentieth-century novel. Del's remark that the Greek soldiers are 'no different from the Arabs and Turks. They're sloppy-looking aren't they?' (p.145) recalls numerous crude racist statements in modernist fiction, for example, Ronny Heaslop's in E.M. Forster's A Passage To India that Indians are 'Incredible, aren't they, even the best of them?', they 'all forget their back collar studs sooner or later'.¹³ Similarly, the English Peter Maitland's absurdly

¹² Walter Benn Michaels, The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism: American Literature at the Turn of the Century (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987)

¹³ E.M. Forster, A Passage to India (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p.93.

arrogant aside that the Middle East is 'second-rate' (p.163) and the 'curious outdatedness' of Peter's face suggests DeLillo is satirising the English colonial novel, in particular, and America's failure to outgrow its prejudices (p.165). The convivial but vapid atmosphere apparent of these exchanges is undermined by the characters' bigoted suspicion of the atavism of Greek and Middle Eastern culture, expressed in a sinister yet seductive tone reminiscent of Conrad. James wonders, for example, whether a Greek friendship he observes is determined by 'A blood recollection, a shared past' (p.64) and remarks portentously on his 'fear of things that come from the sea' in Greece and the equal terror of the 'silent inland presence' (p.73).

Their existential uniformity denies the novel's Western characters the self-reflexivity of postmodern selfhood, particularly its capacity for intelligent self-criticism. It also creates a local perception of Westerners as equivalent and interchangeable, something demonstrated by the repeated confusion of James with the banker David Keller, a mistake that eventually threatens his life, when local terrorists seek to assassinate the financier (pp.325-9). Keller is closely involved with the IMF and the U.S. Government and, on first meeting, Andreas lectures James on these subjects, only to be robbed of his 'moral force' on discovering his error (p.59). These moments of confusion convey the difficulty that the Westerners' anachronistic subjectivity creates for the oppressed in locating agency and responsibility within capitalist-imperialism. As we will see, the attempted assassination has particular significance for James' view of ontology: the fear it inspires helps convince him to embrace a more contemporary mode of subjectivity.

In the meantime, repelled by imperialist subjectivity and fearful of confronting his emotional life, James fails to forge anything he can recognise as a self. His belief that 'being a husband and father is a form of Hitlerism' (p.16) prevents him fulfilling

his familial responsibilities. In an imperialist context, the choice of the term 'Hitlerism' is highly charged and implies that James' failure to create an adequate subjectivity arises from a reluctance to be implicated in quasi-fascist U.S. aggression. DeLillo uses James' avoidance of the Parthenon as a metaphor for these anxieties. Osteen interprets this as James shunning 'involvement in Greek culture' (p.119). I suggest that James is 'daunted' by the temple's 'dignity, order and proportion' (p.3) partly because it contrasts with his own vacuity or 'inadequacy', but also because it symbolises imperialist subjectivity (p.5). Vincent J. Bruno remarks on the 'sheer intelligence and strength of the architectonic system' at work in the temple, which suggests the intimidating effect its impressive structure might have on James.¹⁴ More significantly, Thomas R. Martin mentions that the Parthenon's construction coincided with the apogee of Athenian imperial might, having being built to honour Athena as 'the divine champion of Athenian military power'; the temple is therefore an archetypal representation of the imperialist model of selfhood that repels him.¹⁵ This explains why James 'stayed away from the Acropolis' for most of the novel and why his eventual decision to visit is sufficiently significant that DeLillo chooses it to conclude the diegetic narrative (p.3). James' courage in making the trip indicates his growing self-assurance, a radical alteration in his approach to language, and the resolution of his relation to imperialism (p.330). Nevertheless, in the meantime, his distrust of interior experience causes him to adopt a rather wan parody of his peers' modernist subjectivity. According to the list of '27 depravities', which he writes and presents as an account of his archaeologist wife Kathryn's complaints about him, he

¹⁴ The Parthenon, ed. by Vincent J. Bruno (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996), p.67.

¹⁵ Thomas R. Martin, Ancient Greece: From Prehistoric to Hellenistic Times (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), p.119.

imitates the 'balanced' self by becoming 'politically neuter', pretending 'to be even-tempered', and denying himself 'the full pleasure of things' (pp.16-17). This leaves him infuriated by his own vacuity. He admits to becoming reliant on his wife's 'rigorous choices and fixed beliefs' (p.55) and asks, in anguish, 'What are my qualities?' (p.49). This despairing question implies a direct reference to Robert Musil's The Man Without Qualities and its protagonist's fruitless quest for selfhood.

¹⁶ By recalling this classic of modernist literature, DeLillo not only emphasises James' sense of hopelessness but emphasises the persistently enervating effect of outmoded modernist ideas in the novel's postmodern milieu.

For long periods, James is supported in his evasion of selfhood by his friend Owen Brademas, the leader of his wife's archaeological dig, who, in James' words, flees subjectivity because he has known the painful 'consequences of self discovery' (p.36). James expresses a wish to 'conceal' himself 'in Owen's unprotected pain' (p.205), an apotropaic use of a more powerful personality that foreshadows Jack Gladney's use of Hitler in White Noise to ameliorate his death-anxiety. Owen and James achieve their arid goal through the fetishisation of rationality. They pursue a formalism that is comparable to the computational epistemology adopted by Lyle and Pammy in Players, which excludes reference altogether and therefore the painful 'signified' of emotion. ¹⁷ James treated his previous work as a freelance writer as a purely formal exercise. He emphasised his lack of creativity and autonomy by calling himself a ghostwriter and admits that he recalls a book he produced on military strategy only as 'grammar and syntax' (p.242). Now, in Greece, he has foregone

¹⁶ Robert Musil, The Man Without Qualities, trans. by Sophie Wilkins and Burton Pike (London: Picador, 1997)

whatever small degree of fecundity his previous work offered. He earns money by analysing the risks of Middle Eastern terrorism for The Northeast Group; a job that 'doesn't involve writing anything but reports and memos' (p.197). The task depresses him and, according to Kathryn, makes him 'afraid' of the burgeoning creative talent of his son Tap, who is writing a novel about Owen's early life (p.127). Appropriately, the 'coded jargon' that Kathryn and Tap use to exclude James is known as 'Ob', a prefix signifying restriction or impediment and implying a wry reference to the emotional limitations implicit in James' intellectual austerity (p.10). Owen follows a similarly structuralist trajectory, gradually losing interest in 'earlier cultures' and analysing signifiers in isolation from their referents. By fetishistically perceiving a 'mysterious importance in the letters as such, the blocks of characters', Owen reduces his profession to playful observation of lexical coincidence (p.35). For example, he perceives unwarranted significance in the location of a site between 'Zarqa' and 'Azraq' (p.76), which are anagrams of one another. It is an approach whose shallowness is literalised in the pointed assertion of his colleague Anand Dass that Owen is 'the worst field director in my experience'. 'He digs like an amateur' (p.255). Owen's 'unsettling mental force' (p.17) and his enthusiasm for what he calls the 'mind's little infinite' (p.76) suggests that his fear of emotion causes him to emphasise mind at the expense of subjectivity. Indeed, Owen later admits that 'I only feel safe from myself', with an 'accidental pattern to observe in the physical world' (p.172). Owen's carefully limited cognition is shared by numerous Westerners in the novel and exemplified by Ann Maitland's son Peter, who visits Greece halfway through the novel and who practices 'Pure Mathematics', the discipline that DeLillo

¹⁷ John R. Searle, 'Minds, Brains, Programs', in *The Mind's I: Fantasies and Reflections on Self and Soul*, composed and arranged by Douglas R. Hofstadter and Daniel C. Dennett (Frome, Somerset: Penguin, 1981), pp. 353-73 (p.371).

satirises in Ratner's Star for its excessive concentration on rational thought. Like Owen and James, the young man obsessively avoids reference. He speaks with a 'self-referring note of complaint' (p.165) and, like Ratner's Star's scientists, produces 'no analogies from the real world that might help him explain' his academic work (p.163). This concern with the signifier leads to a modernist scepticism of selfhood and intuitive thought, comparable to that of C.S. Peirce. Peirce's contention that all thought is cognized 'in signs', which are arbitrary means that he sees each thought as 'determined by a previous one', which, by its nature, must be equally contingent.¹⁸ He concludes that 'a special intuitive faculty' is therefore unlikely to exist and what he terms 'Self-consciousness', or 'the recognition of my private self' (p.43) is merely a single 'sign' among many and of dubious validity (p.67). More than James, who eventually rejects such notions, Owen is seduced by the possibility of escaping what he calls the confrontation with 'death and oneself' (p.284). Until his death, he maintains that the self is an intellectual fiction and that he is 'No one' (p.292) or, in Peirce's terms, that 'man and the external sign are identical' and 'Thus my language is the sum total of myself; for the man is the thought' (p.84).

James' professional and personal position is replete with irony. Given his suspicion of empire, the incongruity of his working as a risk analyst seeking to safeguard the interests of a multi-national American corporation is painfully apparent and results in his evident alienation from the job. Moreover, despite rejecting the one-to-one correspondence of the self-identical imperial self, his abstract formalism enmeshes him in an abstruse, polyphonic textuality, which, rather than freeing him from linguistic reference, as he hopes, compels him to arid examination of reference between signifiers. Given his role as representative of American empire, his

¹⁸ Charles Sanders Peirce, Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotic (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), pp.49-50.

structuralism means that he risks replicating what Edward Said calls the 'textual' attitude that Western culture has taken to the East, constructing it as a mysterious document to be decoded.¹⁹ Said argues that this view of the East has, for its translators, manifested as 'a set of constraints upon and limitations of thought' (p.42) that have meant 'rising above immediacy, beyond self, into the foreign and distant' (p.32). The description aptly characterises James and Owen's evasions of subjectivity through linguistic formalism and the striking callousness that their intellectual position often entails. At one point, Owen admits to being impressed by a story of the explorer Rawlinson who forced a Kurdish boy to inch 'across a rock mass' to help 'decipher cuneiform writing'. On relating the tale, he remarks wonderingly on 'how far men will go to satisfy a pattern' and ignores the possibility that, in Kathryn's words, the story might be interpreted as 'a political allegory' (p.80). Owen sees the aggression implicit in the type of 'textual' attitude that Said questions but dismisses it as a consequence of writing's primary function of inscribing and constructing a self. He remarks on the double meaning of the term 'character' as both self and symbol and points out the harsh nature of its etymological roots in a 'Greek word' that means "to brand or sharpen" (p.10). Owen's discomfiting view of writing recalls the hyperbolic assessment of Claude Lévi-Strauss that 'the primary function of written communication is to facilitate slavery', as well as the more measured remarks of poststructuralist philosophers such as Jacques Derrida, who speaks of 'the original violence of discourse'.²⁰ It suggests Owen's flight from subjectivity, like James', is partly due to distaste for its inherent 'violence', especially in an imperialist context,

¹⁹ Edward Said, Orientalism (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p.80.

²⁰ Claude Lévi-Strauss, Tristes Tropique, trans. by John and Doreen Weightman (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973), p.299 and Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, trans. by Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2003), p.166.

where selfhood is often formed in aggressive opposition to a demonic, mysterious other. Coming from Owen, this reticence is particularly significant because, as an archaeologist, he is part of the intellectual apparatus Said would argue has created Orientalism as a 'Western style for dominating' and 'restructuring' the Orient (Said, p.3). Seen in this light, his incompetence as 'field director' may be a symptom of his declining enthusiasm for the imperialist project and signal a general desire among the colonisers to abandon their modernist interpretative hubris for a more self-critical methodology. He may recognise that, as M. Faruk Zein asserts, 'The academic interest of the West in the Orient has often been a prelude to practical application for the purpose of power and control over the Orient'.²¹ As Kathryn notes archly, 'Subdue and codify'. 'How many times have we seen it?' (p.80). The novel certainly takes seriously this nexus of power and knowledge: DeLillo depicts close contact between Western academics, business people, and intelligence agents, who subsist in an insular environment with little direct knowledge of their host culture. The academics' linguistic formalism has its close correlate in the noetic, even mechanical, thought pursued by corporate and intelligence personnel, while they engage in the 'construction' of 'oil' facilities (p.70) and research for the CIA. The intelligence operative George Rowser, for instance, is said to think according to the computational principle of 'On-off, one zero', a further example of the robotic nature of contemporary American cognition that DeLillo portrays in Players and Running Dog (p.97). Like those texts, The Names employs some of the conventions of the 'spy thriller' and associates intelligence work with self-abnegation and the loss of what Michael Denning calls 'human agency'.²² Late in the novel, DeLillo reveals that

²¹ M. Faruk Zein, Christianity, Islam and Orientalism (London: Saqi, 2003), p.165.

James' risk analyses for The Northeast Group has been passed to the CIA without his knowledge or consent (p.315). One is left to conclude that the abstract formalism of the American imperialist project leaves its participants with little more autonomy than its victims.

James' rejection of this limited mindset is catalysed by a series of killings committed by a mysterious cult. Initially, the victims appear to be selected for their mental or physical weakness, but Owen and James begin to suspect that they contain 'Pattern, order, some sort of unifying light'. As Owen puts it, 'The letters matched' (p.169). The organisation matches the victim's initials with those of the place in which they are murdered and inscribes them on the hammer or knife used to kill them. For example, 'Michaelis Kalliambetsos' is attacked in 'Mikro Kamini', and so on (p.168). Paula Bryant has seen this deadly lexical game as an attempt to bind 'symbol and object into one-to-one correspondence' (p.19). Yet, no meaningful relation is established between 'symbol' and 'object' and the killings seem irrelevant to such a purpose. It therefore seems more likely that the murders are calculated to demonstrate the unnecessary violence inherent in such literalism. In particular, they parody the correspondence of signifier and signified inherent in the 'balanced' naturalism of their Western masters and their 'textual' approach to the Orient. The empty but endlessly interpretable semiotic of the murders replicates and subverts the vacuous structures of imperialism and is, in Gayatri Spivak terms, an attempt at 'reversing, displacing and seizing the apparatus of value-coding'.²³ As Owen claims dispiritedly at the climax of the novel, 'These killings mock us. They mock our need to structure and classify, to

²² Michael Denning, Cover Stories: Narrative and Ideology in the British Spy Thriller (London: Routledge, 1987), p.14.

²³ Gayatri Spivak, 'Postcoloniality and Value' in Literary Theory Today, ed. by P. Collier and H. Gaya-Ryan (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), pp.219-44 (p.228).

build a system against the terror in our souls' (p.308). By voiding meaning, the cult seeks to do what Homi K. Bhaba calls 'speak "outside the sentence"' and replace it with the 'affective language of metaphor and the body'.²⁴ In Derridean terms, the cult fashions a text that 'exceeds the logos (of meaning, lordship, presence etc.)', in which its imperialist masters have so much invested (Derrida, p.338).

The cult's satiric intent extends to the ruthless practices of Western capitalism. By sacrificing only unproductive members of society, the 'feeble-minded' (p.75) or 'crippled' (p.87), who exist 'outside the accepted social structure' (p.171), the cult ironically mimics capitalist modernity, which, as Bauman notes, turns out 'huge volumes of human waste' (p.123). In the process of sacrifice, they may also seek to symbolically redeem their victim from what George Bataille calls the imprisonment of 'individual separateness' that capitalist-imperialism imposes and return them to 'continuity with all being'.²⁵ But, as Andreas tells James, 'power is blind in both eyes' (p.237) and the American protagonists' first reaction is to assume that the murders are motivated by the 'denial of our base reality' that, in DeLillo's work, motivates much of American abstract thought. James appeals to the idea of thought as computation, calling it 'A death by system, by machine-intellect' (p.175) Owen takes the same austere approach, missing the cult's parodic intention and insisting that, as in John R. Searle's account of computational epistemology, there is 'Nothing signified, nothing meant' (p.216). Their view of the cult as devotees of Western abstraction is briefly encouraged by the killers' apparent willingness to collaborate on a film version of their exploits with Frank Volterra, which he plans as an abstract 'essay on film, on what film is' (p.199). Volterra arrogantly assumes that because they are 'educated'

²⁴ Homi K. Bhaba, 'Postcolonial Authority and Postmodern Guilt', in *Cultural Studies*, ed. by Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp.56-68 (p.63).

²⁵ Georges Bataille, *Eroticism*, trans. by Mary Dalwood (London: Marion Boyars, 1998), p.90.

and 'reasonable' the cult will accept that 'what they do' is 'natural to film' (p.200), but their curt rejection of the offer suggests they never shared his cinematic sensibility and considered a movie only as a possible means of self-publicity. The cult's distrust of imperialism leads to what Volterra's contact Andahl calls a wish to 'define things' independently and, consequently, their approach to technology is highly detached and analytical. They conclude that, while a book 'throws a shadow', 'a film is a shadow', implying that Western film technology renders diffuse and insubstantial whatever it represents (p.212). As Jean Baudrillard notes of contemporary Islamist terrorism, their feat is to 'have adapted to the global network and technical protocols' but maintained their 'complicity "unto death"'.²⁶

James reacts to the killings by experiencing an unexpected expansion of mind and self: he feels 'A terrible elation. A knowledge bounded by emptiness and fear' (p.170). This Gnostic sense of wordless understanding is generally left unremarked by critics but it manifests an awareness of the excess of mind over the parodic signification and (non) meaning implicit in the cult murders. The cult's logic of excess inspires James to discover an analogous abundance in his experience of mind and self, giving him a revitalised and lasting sense of the ontological status of mind. When walking through the village used by the cult, the observation that 'All the buildings joined', forming 'one structure', causes him to speculate that the group's action may be the manifestation of a powerful unified mind, or what he calls 'One mind, one madness' (p.196). It is in this sense that I interpret DeLillo's remark to Maria Moss that the cult acts from an 'impetus of pure mind'.²⁷ The cult means to

²⁶ Jean Baudrillard, The Spirit of Terrorism and Requiem for the Twin Towers, trans. by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2002), p.22.

²⁷ Maria Moss, "'Writing as a Deeper Form of Concentration': An Interview with Don DeLillo", in Sources, 6 (1989), 82-97 (p.90).

overcome the wholly abstract Western view of consciousness and enlarge their oppressors' sense of mind to include intuitive and unconscious thought. Andahl tells James that they are 'working at a preverbal level', seeking a 'method' that 'finds a home in your unconscious mind' (p.208). Notably, the gnosis that the cult induces also causes an enlargement of James' sense of self. He wonders whether people 'make things to define the boundaries of the self?', implying a fresh sense of subjectivity as abundantly large and potentially excessive (p.133). James begins to separate agency and observation, in a way that implies abandonment of modernist self-identity. Significantly, the cult members' village catalyses this shift. Walking there, he feels 'strangely, self-consciously alone' and remarks that 'This place was returning to me a sense of my own motion through it' (p.196).

The impact of sacrificial murder on James' model of mind and self recalls the effect that this form of death has upon Abraham's sense of self in Soren's Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling.²⁸ In agreeing to the seemingly meaningless murder of his son Isaac, he gains 'an absolute relation to the absolute' (p.72). As Derrida argues, the call for sacrifice resonates in the 'absolute "me" or "self"': 'that structure of invisible interiority that is called, in Kierkegaard's sense, subjectivity'.²⁹ Sacrifice inescapably calls attention to the selfhood of the victim and selfhood as such. It is therefore a useful tool for the disruption of what Baudrillard, with reference to the terrorist tactics of Al-Qaeda, calls the Western 'system of generalised exchange' (p.9). For Baudrillard, the tactic of 'symbolic and sacrificial' death (p.17), their own or that of others, enables the terrorist to introduce an 'irreducible

²⁸ Soren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling and The Sickness Unto Death, trans. by Walter Lourié (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954).

²⁹ Jacques Derrida, The Gift of Death, trans. by David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.109.

singularity' (p.9). In this way, the cult inspires James to examine his internal experience. Like Abraham, whose knowledge of the absolute 'cannot be mediated' by ordinary ethics and who therefore 'cannot talk' (p.70), James withholds the cult's secrets from Frank and discovers that the knowledge 'confers a culthood of its own' (p.247). When the killings are publicised, Owen experiences a sudden awareness of what James calls an 'absoluteness' in the landscape, which, significantly, directs his attention inwards, towards questions of subjectivity: Owen calls it a 'mysterious absolute' that is 'tied up with self-perception' (p.113). This 'absolute' recalls the 'eternity' and 'infinity' that, in A Passage to India, the deluded Miss Quested discovers in the portentous "boum" of the Marabar caves (pp.147-48). In both novels, the 'absolute' or 'infinite' symbolises the vacuity of the colonial project and the protagonist's subjectivity. Unlike Forster's modernist protagonist, however, who is incapable of critical reflection, Owen's self-reflexive Derridean insight that the 'absolute' is related to 'self-perception' (p.113) suggests that the cult has inspired Owen and James to begin the transition to postmodern ideas of selfhood.

This impression is confirmed by James' growing dissatisfaction with linguistic formalism. With his increased interest in interiority comes an interest in the signified, a desire to 'know the names of things' (p.138), rather than the love of 'letters as such' that Owen helped engender (p.35). Perceiving mind and subjectivity as in excess of language and meaning, he no longer sees signification as harbouring the threat of an unwanted subjectivity. He even abandons any notion of a unitary self and begins 'to perceive solitude as a collection of things rather than an absence' (p.162). The corollary is a new pleasure in his son's fiction writing (p.311) and a craving to return for the relative creativity of his freelance work, which he wryly terms a 'higher

typing' (p.318). The discovery that The Northeast Group has used his risk analysis reports in a 'back-channel dialogue with the CIA' affirms and accelerates his rejection of formalism (p.315). He understands that his evasion of personal autonomy has rendered him liable to 'blind involvement' in the 'designs' of others and feels that this reality proves 'retroactively correct' every 'bitter grievance' of Kathryn's concerning his passivity and emotional detachment. As James remarks shrewdly, it shone 'a second light on anything and everything' (p.317). It causes one to re-examine earlier incidents; for example, his discovery that there is 'an Arabic letter called jim' (p.144) and Andahl's wry reference to him as 'Axstone' rather than Axton (p.212). Given the manipulation to which he has been subjected, these reveal themselves as metaphors for his own formalist reduction to an instrument of imperial power, in which role his subjectivity was little more than that of an alphabetic character or tool that carves the inscriptions of others.

In the final stages of the novel, James makes further strides towards combining his burgeoning subjectivity, which he calls 'private forms, outlines for a human figure', with a view of language as subservient to his mind and self (p.320). His former fetishisation of the signifier led him to accept the Heideggerian view that 'our speaking merely follows language constantly' and that language can 'transform us into itself'.³⁰ Now, he adopts Walter Benjamin's position that the human subject 'communicates his own mental being' 'by naming all other things', with the clear implication that 'mental being' exists in excess of any name employed to communicate its content (p.64). Tap's fiction writing plays a significant role in this transformation: while reading a draft of his novel 'The Prairie', James takes

³⁰ Martin Heidegger, On the Way to Language, trans. by Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp.73-4, p.75.

unexpected pleasure in Tap's 'spirited misspellings', savouring their restoration of human agency to language. Of these erroneous signifiers, James remarks that 'He'd made them new again, made me see how they worked'. 'They were ancient things, secret, reshapable' (p.313). Soon after reading these passages, James is inspired to resign his job and contemplates a more creative use of language in a 'return to the freelance life' (p.318). This expansive gesture prefigures the considerable sense of ownership he begins to demonstrate with regard to the Word, which is exemplified when, during his eventual visit to the Parthenon, he asserts boldly that 'Our offering is language' (p.330). DeLillo affirms the importance of Tap's writing by concluding The Names with a few pages of his work in progress. These follow James' climactic and cathartic visit to the Parthenon, which would have constituted a more conventional modernist ending to the novel. By doing so, DeLillo provides a distinctly postmodernist conclusion, which, in its seemingly excessive extension of the text, offers a formal parallel to the excess inherent in James' model of consciousness.

By contrast with James' embrace of postmodernist excess, the subject of Tap's writings, Owen finds it unbearable to contemplate the demise of his modernist formalism, which remains his sole bulwark against the otherwise 'unprotected pain' (p.205) of 'self discovery' (p.36). He misinterprets the cult as fellow formalists, telling James, with regard to the killings, that 'Nothing applies' (p.168) and 'I wouldn't look for meaning' (p. 170). His affinity for the organisation becomes obsession: he is 'gravitationally bound' to it (p.286). He pursues its members to India, where James visits his friend and finds him 'a little more than weary' (p.275). Owen is on the verge of death, a demise that appears to symbolise the failure of his structuralist epistemology. To acknowledge James' notion of the signifier as subordinate to the 'mental content' it conveys is anathema to Owen. However, like his

friend, he now feels a powerful impulse 'to learn the names of things' and construct a self. The difference is that, in Owen's case, the feeling is involuntary. It induces a morbid depression and a belief that 'the mystery of alphabets' leads inevitably to terrifying contact with what he calls 'death and oneself, one's other self' (p.284). Moreover, this desire for selfhood is juxtaposed menacingly with a flashback to his mother's unsympathetic instruction 'to be more impressive', which hints at the humiliation with which he associates the imperative to construct a self (p.286). Tap's concluding narrative contains similar traumatic recollections of Owen's youth, which go some way towards explaining his horror of excessive or unbalanced states of subjectivity. The story concerns a Pentecostal preacher, who demands of the youthful Owen that he participate in glossolalia. As he tells James, Owen's unease about the practice arises from his perception of it as 'a coming out of stasis' that disrupts the 'ideal balance' (p.307) of modernist selfhood. As Stephen H. Webb asserts, glossolalia involves 'an abundant divestiture of self that is reckless in its disregard for custom or calculation'.³¹ 'Tongue speaking' also exemplifies the excessive 'meaning' that Owen seeks assiduously to avoid; its practitioners speak a stream of apparent gibberish that provides scope for infinite interpretation. Yet, Tap's reference to glossolalia as 'Childs play' recalls the quasi-mystical status attributed to infant consciousness in Great Jones Street and Ratner's Star (p.335) and suggests that engagement with glossolalia might persuade Owen to attribute a more elevated status to mental content. Although keen to 'yeeld totally', as Tap puts it, the young Owen is paralysed by anxiety at the pressure placed upon him by the preacher (p.336). He flees the claustrophobia of the church, only to confront the 'nightmare of real things, the

³¹ Stephen H. Webb, Blessed Excess: Religion and the Hyperbolic Imagination (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), p.60.

fallen wonder of the world' (p.339). This horrified reference to 'real things' aptly captures Owen's terror of the 'content' of signification, which has long impelled him to seek protection in formalism. Owen's failure to overcome this childish fear result in a melancholy conclusion to his life, sitting 'Motionless' (p.308) and 'owl-eyed' in apparent despondency (p.309). James' reflection after their meeting that 'Whatever he'd lost in life-strength, this is what I'd won' seems less a carnivorous appropriation than an objective analysis of his ability to overcome the anxieties that still paralyse his friend (p.309). Accordingly, on his return to Greece, James evinces an ever more vigorous sense of self and claims to enjoy a 'second life', in which he is able 'to know' his friends 'in memory and language' and 'Through them myself' (p.329). This declaration articulates a sense of reciprocity of which self-identical modernist subjectivity would be incapable. Having overcome any sense of obligation to cultivate such a self, James becomes able to provide a more subtle analysis of the Parthenon: the dread imperialist structure he has avoided. Where he previously saw threatening 'order' and 'proportion' (p.3), architecture 'intact in its Doric order', his new postmodern perspective allows him to perceive the factitious nature of such outward harmony. Consequently, on his approach to the Acropolis, he is no longer awe-struck, but feels empathy for the 'mauled stones', which utter 'a cry for pity' in a 'voice we know as our own' (p.330).

White Noise

Like The Names, DeLillo's subsequent novel White Noise tackles difficulties implicit in his previous work, being concerned primarily with the crisis that attends the subjectivity of its male protagonist, the academic Jack Gladney, and, to a lesser

extent, that of his wife Babette, a teacher of posture and movement. Jack, like the Western imperialists in The Names, remains attached to modernist notions of the subject as self-identical and initially resists postmodern ideas of subjectivity that emphasise the notion of excess. However, as DeLillo remarks, this novel contains 'less language and more human dread' (Begley, p.286). Rather than the relationship between language and subjectivity that preoccupies its predecessor, uniquely in DeLillo's oeuvre, White Noise undertakes a sustained and explicit examination of the death-anxiety that haunts the whole of his fiction. Rather than language or meaning, therefore, the text takes mortality as the category against which subjectivity is to be measured, confronting Jack and Babette with the challenge of accepting what Heidegger calls 'Being-towards-death'. The novel is guided by this Heideggerian view that Being is inseparable from the 'anticipation of death' (p.307) or, in the words of Jack's colleague, the neurochemist Winnie Richards, that death is 'the boundary we need', providing a 'precious texture to life', 'a sense of definition' (p.228).³² Jack flees the confrontation with mortality, for much of the novel and, therefore, denies himself a sense of self that might be capable of withstanding the cultural changes of postmodernity. As we will see, like many DeLillo characters, he evades subjective 'definition' and attendant thoughts of death, by the paradoxical combination of adopting highly abstract modes of thought and a resolutely materialist view of mind. Together, these provide what Tolstoy, with reference to the terror-stricken Ivan Ilyich, calls 'a mental screen' that 'kept death out of sight'.³³

³² Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p.295.

³³ Leo Tolstoy, 'The Death of Ivan Ilyich', in The Death of Ivan Ilyich/The Cossacks/Happy Ever After, trans. by Rosemary Edmonds (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), pp.99-161 (p.138)

It is technology that forces Jack into facing his mortality; paradoxically, since he is presented as a technophobe. His exposure to a potentially lethal 'Airborne Toxic Event', caused by a chemical spill, and Babette's desperation to acquire the illegal drug Dylar, which she believes capable of curing death-anxiety, obliges Jack to reassess his longstanding repression of his fear (p.107). He appropriates a Buddhist belief that the nothingness of self is identical to the emptiness of mortality and can be merged with it, banishing terror through self-annihilation. Jack is inspired to this appropriation of Eastern epistemology by the eccentric visiting lecturer Murray Jay Siskind, who compares technologies of the postmodern supermarket with the rituals of The Tibetan Book of the Dead and speculates that contemporary shopping, with its 'code words and ceremonial phrases', 'recharges us spiritually' (pp.37-38). Jack begins by seeing in this Buddhist equivalence of self and death a one-to-one correspondence, which resembles the balanced, self-identical quality of modernist subjectivity. Over time, however, his quasi-Buddhist encounters with death augment his belief in mind and self and persuade him of a postmodern view of consciousness as inherently in excess of death. His suggestion that consciousness may be 'stronger than death' (p.268) and can 'leap free of everyday dying' (p.267), is close to that of W.Y. Evans-Wetz, who asserts that 'intellect', if 'rightly trained and rightly directed', is capable of 'mentally transcending' 'bodily suffering and infirmities'.³⁴

White Noise is often described as DeLillo's most popular novel and has attracted greater critical attention than his other works. Several critics have attempted to theorise the protagonists' death-anxiety. William G. Little, for example, characterises it as the ascetic desire to 'eliminate the virtual wastefulness of death's

³⁴ W.Y. Evans-Wetz, ed. The Tibetan Book of the Dead: Or The After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane, trans. by Lama Kazi Dawa Samdup (London: Oxford University Press, 1971-2), p. xv.

absent meaning'.³⁵ The theme of 'human dread' pervades the text, sometimes explicitly, at other moments in the form of comic one-liners, which employ depth as a metaphor for the protagonists' unease. Jack notes wryly that his house lies 'in what was once a wooded area with deep ravines', indicating the precipitous horror underlying his existence, literally and metaphorically (p.4). He also confesses, deadpan, that 'We believed something lived in the basement' (p.27), which recalls Bachelard's assertion that cellars and basements are 'the dark entity of the house, the one that partakes of subterranean forces'.³⁶ Beneath this black humour lurks a vertiginous terror, which imparts an 'inbred desolation' to Jack's son Wilder, who sometimes weeps for hours without apparent cause (p.78). Critics rarely remark it, but Jack's fears often demonstrate a modernist nostalgia for a relation to death that is more coherently conceptualised and grounded in communal ritual. When a fire at the local insane asylum claims casualties, Jack complains that the fumes from synthetic 'polystyrene' insulation compromise the 'ancient, spacious and terrible drama' of mortality, replacing 'real' death with a contemporary 'synthetic' form. Those who fight the lethal blaze are said to embody 'a labor that seemed as old and lost as cathedral building' (p.240). By contrast, Jack sees those who discover and distribute Dylar as sinister in their postmodern determination to artificially 'engineer us out of our fear'. He envisages such men with a highly diffuse, and disgusting, postmodern (non) identity and pronounces them 'A little like extra terrestrials' 'selfless, sexless', 'blending' and 'fusing' with one another (p.241).

Many critics concentrate on the shallow image-culture that fuels the factitious consumer society of White Noise. Cowart remarks on its 'vacuousness', while Osteen

³⁵ William G. Little, The Waste Fix: Seizures of the Sacred from Upton Sinclair to The Sopranos (New York: New York University Press, 2002), p.95.

argues that the novel revolves around forms of synthetic packaging, whether ‘intellectual’, ‘commercial’ or ‘linguistic’ (p.167).³⁷ Generally, these phenomena are analysed without noting their connection to what DeLillo suggests is a disintegration of faith in the status of mind in postmodernity, which creates favourable conditions for the dissemination of simulacra through contemporary media. DeLillo presents contempt for mind as both cause and effect of this prevalence of simulation and implies that the media, by weakening the audience’s faltering sense of a dependable reality, deepen their own hegemony and that of capitalism. Mark Conroy emphasises the instability of parental authority in White Noise, for which he blames various ‘acids of modernity’, but overlooks the crisis in subjectivity that underlies these familial difficulties.³⁸ In the first scene, Jack’s fragile subjectivity contrasts with the confidence generated among his students’ relatives by ‘massive insurance coverage’ and ownership of consumer ‘objects’ (p.3). With wry detachment, DeLillo describes this mainly Protestant crowd as a ‘collection of the like-minded and the spiritually akin, a people, a nation’ (p.4), a formulation that recalls his Catholic-Italian roots, which, he has remarked, give him ‘an idea of what it’s like to be an outsider in this society’.³⁹ The college chancellor’s brutal remark on Jack’s ‘tendency to make a feeble presentation of self’ confirms his difficulty in forging a strong subjectivity. Jack himself confesses the failure of his attempt to ““grow out”” into’ the ‘significance’ and ‘prestige’ of his role as department head and remains unconvinced

³⁶ Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, trans. by Maria Jolas (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1994), p.18.

³⁷ David Cowart, The Physics of Language (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2002), p.76.

³⁸ Mark Conroy, ‘From Tombstone to Tabloid; Authority Figured in White Noise’, in Critique, 35 (1994), 96-110 (p.98).

³⁹ Anthony De Curtis, ““An Outsider in This Society””: An Interview with Don DeLillo’, in Introducing Don DeLillo, ed. by Frank Lentricchia (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), pp.43-66 (p.50).

of his own ontological worth (p.17). He overeats to gain 'an air of unhealthy excess', before donning a 'black' 'medieval robe' and dark glasses (p.9) but, in his own eyes, remains only 'the false character that follows the name around' (p.17). The line paraphrases William Gaddis' description of the artist, 'when the work's done', as 'the human shambles that follows it around', an allusion to authorship that makes clear the degree of autonomy and creativity of which DeLillo believes his protagonist and, by extension, the human subject, to be capable.⁴⁰ Few critics focus directly on the questions of mind and selfhood that preoccupy Jack. Leonard Wilcox is an exception, remarking on the incongruity of Jack's search for 'authentic selfhood' (p.100) in a postmodern text concerned with the 'pure, empty seriality' of an 'information society' (p.99). Wilcox rightly suggests Jack's difficulties are exacerbated by the collapse of modernist notions of selfhood as self-identical, but is pessimistic about the possibility of a postmodern subjectivity, claiming that the 'dissolution of a modernist subjectivity in the mire of contemporary media' (p.99) destroys 'creative forms of consciousness' (p.99) and 'authentic selfhood' (p.100). By contrast, I suggest that, rather than accepting this lamentable selfless state as inevitable, Jack struggles courageously to construct something that resembles subjectivity within a typically postmodern American milieu. The high degree of self-awareness that Jack demonstrates, including the characteristically postmodern capacity to recognise his fictional status, something Wilcox might indeed count as a 'creative form of consciousness' suggests that he might be capable of this feat (p.99). This metafictional element is surprising, since as Noel King notes, White Noise is 'a quite traditional novel', being a linear narrative with a single first-person narrator, whose sententiousness and limited self-knowledge

⁴⁰ William Gaddis, The Recognitions (New York: Penguin, 1983), p.96.

sometimes recall the eighteenth century narrators of Sterne and Goldsmith.⁴¹ Yet, Jack's unexpected declaration to his class that 'All plots tend to move deathward' (p.26) indicates a dim unease that, as a character, he might become involved in such a destructive narrative movement. His stated love of 'aimless days' and corresponding fear of 'some deft acceleration' seems a wry reference to authorial omnipotence in plot construction (p.18). This is no gratuitous demonstration of technique but a further example of the, often, allegorical relation between form and thematics in DeLillo: Jack's fear of authorial manipulation is a metaphor for his habitual lack of autonomy experiences but also a portent of the characteristically postmodern subjectivity he will later create. It is therefore significant that, once Jack accepts the benefits of plotting for his personal autonomy, he responds enthusiastically. As so often, Murray persuades Jack of postmodern ideas, pointing out a connection between plotting and the construction of subjectivity. He asserts that 'To plot is to affirm life, to seek shape and control'. 'This is how we advance the art of human consciousness' (p.292). Jack welcomes the idea of enhancing his 'consciousness' by his wresting control of White Noise. Indeed, Murray's insistence on the benefits of being a 'killer' rather than a 'dier' (p.292) persuades him to plot to kill Willie Mink, Babette's Dylar distributor, with whom she sleeps in exchange for the drug (p.311). Before shooting Mink, Jack emphasises the deliberate act of self-construction it implies, asking 'What was I here for if not to define, fix in my sights, take aim at?' (p.306). As we will see, in spite of its traumatic violence, the shooting offers Jack an incipient sense of self, the feeling that 'I knew who I was in the network of meanings' (p.312).

DeLillo situates Jack's academic life in America's influential Protestant tradition. He created and runs the department of 'Hitler Studies', at the local 'College-

⁴¹ Noel King, 'Reading White Noise: Floating Remarks', in Critical Quarterly, 33 (1991), 66-83 (p.68).

on-the-Hill' (p.4), a title that paraphrases seventeenth-century Puritan John Winthrop, who asserted that his community must consider itself 'as a Citty vpon a Hill', for 'the eies of all people are vpon us'.⁴² The reference to the foundation of the U.S. suggests the college represents all of American culture. This quotation is also apposite to the novel's concern with death-anxiety. As David E. Stannard explains, although orthodox theology dictated that mortality be regarded as a 'relief for the earth-bound soul' 'the Puritans were gripped individually and collectively by an intense and unremitting fear of death'.⁴³ Puritanism is also appropriate to the text's concern with subjectivity: the doctrine of predestination necessitated a personal relationship with God, which demanded obsessive self-cultivation. In Americana, DeLillo expands upon Max Weber's association of Puritanism with an ascetic work ethic by linking such diligence with imperialistic, even fascistic, tendencies in U.S. culture.⁴⁴ It may therefore be significant that 'College-on-the-Hill' serves as the fictional birthplace of 'Hitler studies' (p.4), especially given the typically Puritan fear of death that motivates Jack's Hitler obsession. Hitler attracts him because he is 'larger than death' (p.287) and the symbol of that 'whole huge nameless thing' (p.288), an unrepresentable real, in which he can 'conceal' himself (p.287). This submerging of identity in that of an iconic figure is another example of the Rankian 'double' as a protective 'symbol of eternal life', which recurs throughout DeLillo's oeuvre.⁴⁵ As in Americana, identification is focussed on images of the subject, a selection of which

⁴² John Winthrop, 'A Modell of Christian Charity', in The Winthrop Papers 1623-1630 Vol. II ([n.p.]: Plimpton Press, 1931), p.295.

⁴³ David E. Stannard, The Puritan Way of Death: A Study in Religion, Culture and Social Change (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p.79.

⁴⁴ Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, trans. by Talcott Parsons (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1978), p.169.

⁴⁵ Otto Rank, Beyond Psychology (New York: Dover Publications, 1958), p.76.

Jack edits into an 'impressionistic documentary', which he screens every semester (p.25).

DeLillo makes clear that Jack's interests are resolutely modernist. The name 'College-on the-Hill' suggests determined resistance to contemporary culture, while its hometown 'Blacksmith', connotes an early modernist preference for manual over automated production. Jack's research emphasises the first half of the twentieth century, while his teaching methods emphasise cinema at the expense of the more postmodern form of television documentary: his screenings of 'background footage' for 'Advanced Nazism' consist entirely of Nazi 'propaganda films' (p.25). Jack also evinces maidenly shock at Murray's rather commonplace postmodernist views. At 'THE MOST PHOTOGRAPHED BARN IN AMERICA', when Murray asserts that 'collective perception' has replaced individual experience, to the extent that 'No one sees the barn' but feels only the 'nameless energies' of mass experience, Jack's 'extended silence' suggests an ambivalent reaction (p.12). Murray's views sometimes resemble a parody of the postmodern objectivism DeLillo distrusts: Murray even questions whether death-anxiety can even be confronted, since 'modern death' has developed 'a life independent of us' (p.150). Murray's celebratory postmodernist attitude to television arouses Jack's passionate opposition. Where Murray calls the medium 'A great and humbling experience' (p.51), Jack discourages his children from watching, organising 'one night a week' of communal viewing to 'de-glamorize the medium in their eyes' (p.16). He refers to its 'eerie diseased brain-sucking power', implying that its sterile vampirism contributes to distrust of consciousness in postmodernity (p.16). DeLillo appears sympathetic to this view, but, as in Americana, wrestles with the paradox that television promotes what he has called 'third-person'

‘consciousness’ (Americana, p.271) by, in McLuhan’s words, demanding subjective ‘participation’. ‘It engages you. You have to be with it’. ⁴⁶ As Murray observes, it’s ‘like something we know in a dream-like and preconscious way’ (p.51). DeLillo sometimes presents this oneiric quality as insidious: he satirises its infiltration of the unconscious, when Jack’s youngest daughter Steffie enunciates the words ‘Toyota Celica’ in her sleep, as though they were ‘a verbal spell or ecstatic chant’ (p.155). In interview, DeLillo calls this phrase an example of ‘computer mysticism’, ‘words that are computer generated’ for their supposed aesthetic value and for which manufacturers have then to ‘find an object’: in this case, a Japanese car (Begley, p.291). The scene therefore extends DeLillo’s exploration of the impact of computerisation on contemporary consciousness and suggests television promotes this pernicious influence. But television also permeates waking life in White Noise, giving rise to random advertising slogans such as ‘Mastercard, Visa, American Express’, which appear in the text unannounced and unexplained (p.100). Such moments imply that, like the ‘white noise’ of the title, which is a blend of ‘all the different frequencies of sound’, television may reduce public consciousness to banal homogeneity. ⁴⁷ Like ‘white noise’, which is designed to ‘mask other sounds’ ([howstuffworks.com](http://www.home.howstuffworks.com)), it also obscures what Susan Sontag calls ‘the injuries of class, race, and sex’, which ‘a culture based on images’ can help to ‘anesthetize’ (p.161). Television’s entropic influence on the mind recurs in DeLillo’s next major work, the play The Day Room. ⁴⁸ The stage directions for Act Two state that ‘an actor in a straitjacket functions as the

⁴⁶ Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media (London: Routledge, 2001), p.340.

⁴⁷ ‘white noise’. <[http:// www.home.howstuffworks.com](http://www.home.howstuffworks.com)>, last accessed 7th July 2004.

⁴⁸ Don DeLillo, The Day Room (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989)

TV set', a nightmarish fusion of mind and machine that surpasses even White Noise in its depiction of consciousness debased by the cathode ray tube (p.58).

Jack's developing relation to this most contemporary medium proves exemplary of his gradual shift towards appreciation of postmodern technology, culture, and subjectivity. His tendency to displace death-anxiety onto contemporary technologies is clear from his melodramatic reference to them as 'the daily seeping false-hearted death' and his eventual reconciliation to their pervasive role in American culture occurs only after he appreciates their capacity to ameliorate this mortal terror (p.22). The first hint of technology's cathartic properties comes with Babette's appearance on a minor television channel. Her televised image calms his fear by allowing him to envisage her as immortal: 'a walker in the mists of the dead', projecting an electronic image of her 'spirit' or 'secret self' (p.104). Afterwards, Jack's viewing increases noticeably, particularly of programs containing injury and death. With Heinrich, he observes a report of 'two bodies' found in a backyard, with the expectation of 'twenty' or 'thirty' to come. When none emerge, rather than relief, the 'dream-like' experience of television immunises him to horror and he feels 'dejection, a sorry gloom' (p.222).

Within the Gladney household, the tension between modernist and postmodernist ideas often emerges in debates with his son Heinrich about human consciousness, which are often prompted by contemporary developments in philosophy and neuroscience. Jack is concerned by postmodernity's apparent contempt for perception and emotional response, but Heinrich is sceptical of their value. Asked whether it is raining, Heinrich pedantically refuses to say, since 'Our senses are wrong a lot more often than they're right. This has been proved in the laboratory'. Asked for his subjective view, he holds to a rigid objectivism, demanding

‘What good is my truth? My truth means nothing’ (p.23). Like Daniel Dennett, he justifies his scepticism about consciousness by appealing to the heterogeneity of subjective perceptions.⁴⁹ What, wonders Heinrich, would a truthful reply entail were his interlocutor ‘traveling at almost the speed of light’ or were ‘in orbit around a neutron star?’ (p.23). Similarly, Dennett remarks acerbically on the ‘long-standing philosophical tradition’ that ‘we all agree on what we find when we look inside’ (p.66), before committing himself to a ‘Heterophenomenology’, which assumes that fundamental differences exist between the mental experience of individuals (p.72). By deft sophistry, Dennett uses these differences to justify his position that human subjects are mere ‘creators of fiction’ (p.94). As he puts it, they are ‘not authoritative about what is happening in’ them, ‘but only about what seems to be happening’, contending, by implication, that a third-person observer would attain privileged access to the ‘truth’ of consciousness (p.96). DeLillo never dismisses scientific thought, but always appears sceptical of objectivist philosophy. It is therefore no surprise that these statements are lent an air of immaturity by their attribution to a neurotic adolescent, who Jack, elsewhere, calls ‘evasive’ (p.22) and a ‘teeth grinding and erratic sleeper’ (p.147). DeLillo also suggests Heinrich’s objectivism may imply a dangerous moral relativism. Heinrich uses neurochemistry to justify the actions of Tommy Roy Foster, a multiple murderer with whom he plays a notably postmodern game of chess, which takes place entirely by post. Heinrich, rather comically, justifies Tommy’s murder of five strangers by his being ‘under pressure’ (p.44) and answers Jack’s bewilderment concerning Foster’s motive, by dismissing motivation as simply ‘brain chemistry, signals going back and forth’ (p.45). Given the novel’s preoccupation with consumer culture and postmodern technology, the introduction of

⁴⁹ Daniel C. Dennett, Consciousness Explained (London: Penguin, 1992), pp.66-72.

a serial killer is particularly apposite. As Mark Seltzer remarks, the 'seriality' of multiple killings replicates the 'styles of production and reproduction that make up machine culture' and the tendency towards 'collection' that is 'conspicuous in consumer society'.⁵⁰ Although Heinrich's friendship with Foster demonstrates his humanity, it also associates Heinrich's objectivism with Foster's violent 'seriality' and hints that both are the alienated product of 'machine culture'. Nevertheless, Jack finds comfort in the possibility that objectivism may be a philosophically respectable strategy. After listening to Heinrich, he visits a cash machine and becomes convinced that the bland abstraction of 'The figure on the screen' is an affirmation of his subjectivity. For the brief moment of the transaction, he feels that 'something of deep personal value' 'had been authenticated and confirmed'. 'The system had blessed my life' (p.46).

Ontological insecurity persuades other family members, especially Babette, to accept Heinrich's views. In spite of being blessed with what Betty G. Farrell calls the 'intimate relationships' that are increasingly necessary 'against the backdrop of the impersonal, bureaucratized world of modern society', the Gladneys remain riven by anxiety.⁵¹ Jack's daughter Denise emulates her father's sartorial strategy, by compulsively sporting 'a green visor' in order to experience 'wholeness and identity' (p.37). Babette's death-anxiety causes her to embrace a certain scientism. She seeks to banish terror with the rationalistic belief that 'everything is correctible' once reduced to 'its simplest parts', to 'charts and graphs' (p.191). Jack is disturbed by this and tells Babette half-seriously that he 'can't forgive her' for not being 'the woman I believed

⁵⁰ Mark Seltzer 'Serial Killers (1)', in Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies, 5 (1993), 92-128 (p.92, p.94).

⁵¹ Betty G. Farrell, Family: The Making of an Idea, an Institution, and a Controversy in American Culture (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), p.3.

you were' (p.197). This extreme reaction is best explained by his need for a partner who counteracts his own excessively abstract cognition. His previous wives were 'high-strung', like himself, 'with ties to the intelligence community', which, in DeLillo's work, is always metonymic of sterile objectivism (p.6). Because Babette is 'ample' 'disheveled and lacking in 'guile' he believed she would ground him in the material world, which terrifies him (p.5). His disappointment has enormous ramifications: it reveals to Jack that he must construct a self, without assistance, that is capable of confronting death.

Jack adopts numerous strategies to this end, but repeatedly encounters the obstacle of his ingrained modernist ideas. Initially, he attempts to embrace postmodern consumer culture, discovering a 'fullness of being' in the 'sheer plenitude' of his 'crowded bags' (p.20), what Celia Lury describes as the contemporary tendency to experience possessions as necessary 'aspects of the self'.⁵² Indeed, while Christmas shopping, Jack believes he has grown 'in value and self-regard' and 'found new aspects of myself' (p.84), a factitious experience that may be read as a consequence of what Grant McCracken calls the contemporary North American practice of leaving 'a great deal of the individual undefined'.⁵³ On this expedition, Jack senses something of the excessive selfhood he will later embrace, declaring ecstatically of his lavish spending that 'I was bigger than these sums', they 'poured off my skin like rain' (p.84). Yet, the success of this strategy is short-lived. As the frequency and intensity of his confrontations with death increase, Jack's modernist association of selfhood with mortality causes him to connect the possessions that bolster his subjectivity with its ultimate annihilation. Consequently,

⁵² Celia Lury, Consumer Culture (Cambridge: The Polity Press, 1997), p.7.

⁵³ Grant McCracken, Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1988), p.88.

he painstakingly undoes his joyous accumulation, discarding possessions that represent to him 'an overburdening weight, a connection, a mortality' (p.262) and that have 'dragged me down, made escape impossible' (p.295).

Jack also seeks to forge his subjectivity through identification with powerful leaders like Hitler and Attila the Hun, a strategy that seems anachronistically modernist because it recalls the fascist veneration of heroic individuals. He repeatedly compares himself to Attila (p.100, p.171), hoping, as with his attempt to 'conceal' himself in Hitler, that imagining himself 'the Scourge of God' will prove an effective defence against intolerable fear (p.100). Jack speculates on the possible nobility of Attila's death, idealising him as a man with the courage to 'accept death as an experience that flows naturally from life' (p.100), but the historical record suggests that DeLillo may be engaging in irony at Jack's expense. Attila actually died ingloriously in bed, having 'bled heavily through the nose' and 'been suffocated in his sleep', a fact Jack never discovers, but which suggests that the iconoclastic nature of postmodernity has made such naive identification with heroic figures increasingly difficult to sustain.⁵⁴ Notably, in part three, 'Dylarama', Jack abandons hero worship in favour of doppelgangers, or second selves, a concern that seems postmodern in its self-reflexivity and concern with the doubling of identity. The first of these is Heinrich's friend Orest Mercator, whose willingness to 'sit in a cage full of deadly snakes' for a world record time suggests an immunity from death-anxiety that inspires and impresses Jack (p.207). The young man's name indicates his significance. It is likely to be short for Orestes, which connotes Greek Tragedy; but, more importantly, it is directly related to Jack's interest in Attila the Hun. E.A. Thompson describes an historical Orestes, who was Roman and became one of 'Attila's most trusted

⁵⁴ E.A. Thompson, A History of Attila and the Huns (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), p.149.

lieutenants', before being appointed a 'patrician'.⁵⁵ DeLillo appears to make wry reference to this Roman connection, when Jack remarks on Orest's attempt to build 'an imperial self out of some tabloid aspiration' (p.268). Jack's identification with Attila suggests that the Hun's lieutenant Orestes might serve as confidant and second self, an entity that, in his study of the device, C.F. Keppler calls an 'instrument of self-exploration'.⁵⁶ Certainly, the apparently involuntary passion of Jack's declaration to Orest that the snakes 'will bite you and you will die', an assertion he claims to have 'found myself' making, indicates that the boy's efforts may call to mind Jack's own fear (p.208).

Jack's admiration for Orest's 'purpose' increases rapidly, borne of a sense that his direct confrontation with death permits him to construct a self inherently in excess of mortality. Jack believes that Orest is able to 'occupy the self more fully', that such people, in 'building toward a danger', 'escape it in some deeper sense' and 'dwell in some angelic scan, able to leap free of every day dying' (p.267). In Jack's view, Orest gains what Evans-Wetz calls 'the power to control consciously the process of death and regeneration' (p.xiv). Indeed, to overcome death-anxiety, Orest advocates what Tibetan Buddhist Gouinda calls 'a knowing in which the knower is one with the known' (Lxii); 'Be a snake', asserts Orest 'and you'll know the stillness of a snake' (p.267). Throughout the novel, Jack demonstrates an embryonic interest in this Buddhist search for unity in object relations, responding to Wilder's 'Ululation' of 'inbred desolation', by attempting to fall 'into it, letting it enfold and cover me' (p.78). Early on, he strains to hear Murray's monologue about The Tibetan Book of

⁵⁵ E.A. Thompson, Romans and Barbarians: The Decline of the Western Empire (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), p.61.

⁵⁶ C.F. Keppler, The Literature of the Second Self (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1972), p.208.

the Dead (p.38) and, later, longs to believe in a comforting vision of death as 'just another surface one inhabits for a time', 'A zoom down Bright Angel Trail' (p.243). His interest in Buddhism is doubly significant: it will help to ameliorate his death-anxiety, but also discourage him from accepting objectivist or materialist accounts of the world, with which he instinctively disagrees. As Evans-Wetz observes, 'The Buddhist universe is alive through and through; it has no room for inert matter and mere mechanism' (Lvii).

Yet, the notion of merging 'knower' with 'known' presents Jack with a problem: it suggests that the self must become death, a notion that appears to defeat his wish to 'leap free of everyday dying' (p.267). As Jack asks himself, 'If the self is death, how can it also be stronger than death?' (p.268). Such an exact equation of 'knower' with 'known' too closely resembles the outmoded self-identity of modernist subjectivity and may forestall creation of the excessive postmodern subjectivity that Jack seeks. Paradoxically, given his former techno-phobia, the difficulty is resolved pragmatically, through encounters with technologies that are intimately related to mortality. These allow Jack to experience what Lacan calls the 'subjective bringing to realization of being-for-death', a traumatic but cathartic union with mortality that convinces him of the relative strength of mind and selfhood.⁵⁷ The most dramatic and literal of these confrontations entails Jack's contamination by the 'airborne toxic event' (p.117), a leak of 'Nyodene Derivative' that produces a 'black billowing cloud' (p.113), permanently planting what Jack calls 'a death in my body' (p.150). Before evacuating his family, Jack prevaricates comically, protesting that such catastrophes ought to affect only 'the poor and the uneducated' (p.114), clearly demonstrating the

⁵⁷ Jacques Lacan, 'The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis', trans. by Anthony Wilden, in The Language of the Self, ed. by Anthony Wilden (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp.3-87 (p.42).

point made by Pierre Bourdieu that 'Economic power is first and foremost a power to keep economic necessity at arm's length'.⁵⁸ Notably, this subjective experience of 'death' persuades him of the importance of first-person experience and leads to an outright rejection of objectivism. When examined by a formidable array of medical technologies, he finds an 'alien logic' in their graphic readouts (p.142), seeming to feel that their supposedly authoritative objectivity robs him of the subjective experience of death; the 'ownmost possibility' of Dasein (Being, p.304). As Jack remarks dolefully, 'a network of symbols has been introduced' and 'it makes you feel like a stranger in your own dying' (p.142). As so frequently happens in DeLillo, the rejection of objectivist thought after a productive encounter with mortality leads immediately to the emergence of more intuitive modes of cognition; in this case, those that question the linear 'nature of time' (p.116). As in Ratner's Star, rapprochement with mortality catalyses a dramatic quasi-Heideggerian collapse in the distinction between past and future.⁵⁹ First, the deadly Nyodene arouses a sense of 'déjà vu' in the whole family (p.126), an example of what Heidegger calls Dasein coming 'toward itself futurally', which occurs as the result of 'anticipatory resoluteness' towards death (Being, pp.372-3). Conversely, Jack imagines the disaster as the re-emergence into present time of the primeval 'Mesozoic' period (p.118) or medieval 'Norse legend' (p.127), a temporal movement comparable to the 'Bringing forth' into 'unconcealment' by which Heidegger argues that the inventions of the Scientific Revolution have burst 'into bloom' in modernity.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste, trans. by Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1984), p.55.

⁵⁹ Don DeLillo, Ratner's Star (London: Vintage, 1991)

⁶⁰ Martin Heidegger, The Question of Technology and other Essays, trans. by William W. Lovitt (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1997), p.11.

In the novel's final stages, Jack's dealings with technology escalate in risk and intensity. First, he acquires a handgun from his father-in-law Vernon Dickie, a 'German' 'Zumwalt automatic', which, in Jack's eyes, like all things Teutonic, possesses a decisive power over death (p.253). He then uses the weapon to confront and shoot Willie Mink, supplier of the sophisticated drug Dylar, and concludes what DeLillo calls the 'trite adultery plot' that dominates part three of the novel (Begley, p.298). Like his contamination with Nyodene, Jack's acquisition of the gun is a moment of cathartic fusion with mortality. DeLillo presents the gun's original owner, Vernon, as a Hadean messenger, a role DeLillo introduces with grim humour, when Jack mistakes him at dawn for 'Death' or 'Death's errand-runner' (p.243). Although Jack's paranoia is clearly being mocked here, the dramatic effect of Vernon's visit upon him suggests that his father-in-law is indeed functioning as a messenger of 'Death' and that part of DeLillo's irony is aimed at his own use of the archaic device of personification. Vernon's handing over of the weapon is treated with comic heavy-handedness, which nonetheless makes clear the plutonic transformation Jack is undergoing. The gun changes hands in 'the dark car', while Jack wonders whether his father-in-law was 'Death's dark messenger after all' (p.253).

Jack feels that this psychic merger with death lends 'shapeliness' and 'fresh design' (p.253) to his existence, which help him to construct the sense of self he lacks. He calls the weapon 'a spell' and, significantly, 'a plot' (p.254), something he and Murray have agreed is essential to autonomy and selfhood, or what Murray names the 'art of human consciousness' (p.292). Jack's decision to follow Murray's advice and become a 'killer' (p.292) both reinforces his new sense of autonomy and reaffirms his embryonic rapprochement with death, by transforming him into what DeLillo earlier

called 'Death's errand runner' (p.292). The result is a rapturous and cathartic confrontation during which he experiences an epiphanic unification of subjective perception and objective materialist thought. His subjective experience intensifies, allowing him to see rain as 'elongated orbs' of water, while his objective knowledge is augmented by his sudden comprehension of 'the neurochemistry of my brain' (p.310). This combination of abilities permits a true merger of 'knower' and known, which allows him to escape Heinrich's objectivism by appreciating 'what rain really was' (p.310) and to know 'red', not only as an immediate perception but also 'in terms of dominant wavelength, luminance, purity' (p.312). The fusion of subjective and objective thought clearly enhances Jack's sense of subjectivity, something he implies by stating, though somewhat maniacally, that he continued to 'advance in consciousness' (p.310). Indeed, the preternatural clarity of perception and intensity of emotion Jack experiences in this melodramatic scene embodies exactly the excessive model of mind and subjectivity to which he aspires. Mink appears to be another, less attractive, doppelganger for Jack, representing the information-saturated form of postmodern consciousness that he despises and fears adopting, but which, in the words of The Tibetan Book of the Dead, he must learn to 'recognize' as among 'the reflections of' his 'own consciousness' (p.103). When Jack encounters Mink in his motel room, his adversary is watching 'TV without the sound' (p.306), while ludicrously repeating remembered sound bites out of context such as 'I will thicken the paint on my palette' (p.309). The impression that Mink is a second self of Jack's is reinforced by Mink's modernist epistemology, which emphasises the kind of naïve one-to-one correspondence Jack has begun to distrust. Where Jack insists ecstatically that 'I saw beyond words' (p.312), large doses of Dylar have induced in Mink an extreme form of naturalism, indicated by his repeated use of the word 'literally'

(p.308, p.315) and his conflation of signifiers such as “Hail of bullets” with an actual lethal attack (p.311). Jack’s compassion for Mink after they are both shot is a further indication of the close connection between them. Moreover, Mink appears uncannily capable of predicting his assailant’s emotional reaction. After Jack receives a wound to the wrist, Mink voices the hilariously appropriate sound bite ‘And this could represent the leading edge of some warmer air’, moments before Jack begins to feel ‘Compassion, remorse, mercy’ for his opponent (p.313). Throughout the scene, DeLillo frequently repeats phrases like ‘blast him three times’ and ‘maximum efficiency of pain’, a technique that is reminiscent of Gertrude Stein and other modernists and helps emphasise, for the informed reader, the battle between modernist and postmodernist ideas in which Jack is engaged (p.307). Notably, however, rather than Stein’s depiction of static modernist character types, at the end of White Noise, these repetitions are employed to represent a characteristically postmodern psychological process: they convey the intense, even maniacal, state of mind that makes possible Jack’s considerable psychological transformation.

In spite of the assistance Jack derives from religious, particularly Buddhist, ideas in his effort to create a postmodern subjectivity, he finds that they are unable to offer him reliable truths or the immortality he craves. The realisation is confirmed in a much remarked scene, which takes place after Jack has taken pity on Mink and driven him to a clinic, staffed partly by nuns. Jack engages in conversation with Sister Hermann Marie, who, to his astonishment, hotly denies holding any religious belief and indignantly informs Jack that her life is an elaborate ‘pretense’, staged to reassure the faithless that there will ‘always be believers’ (p.319). Critics have argued that the scene is dispiriting and robs Jack of any remaining hope of overcoming death-anxiety. Yet, I suggest that religious ideas, in the form of Buddhist epistemology, have already

helped Jack to achieve a qualified rapprochement with mortality and his conversation with the Sister merely confirms his own sceptical view of the truth-value of religion. Certainly, the elegiac tone of the text's final lines, which paraphrase Joyce in referring to 'The cults of the famous and the dead' that fill the supermarket tabloids, suggest that, in spite of his increased courage, Jack is unwilling to deceive himself with factitious religious notions (p.326). The final chapter is replete with indications of Jack's renewed stoicism and respect for subjective experience and selfhood. This ontological shift is exemplified by his uncharacteristic assertion that he and the crowd who watch the Nyodene-enhanced sunsets at the local overpass are able to return afterwards to 'our separate and defensible selves'. Although Jack has not wholly overcome his fear of death, he now utterly eschews the 'computerized pulse' of the 'imaging block' and the purely objective nature of what it 'knows about me' (p.325). The novel's final chapter opens with Wilder's riding his tricycle onto the 'expressway', an incident symbolic of the significantly altered atmosphere in the Gladney household (p.322). The extreme daring of the escapade is the converse of the 'inbred desolation' that afflicts the toddler earlier in the novel and may therefore be read as metonymic of his stepfather's burgeoning courage (p.78). Like Ratner's Star, the novel concludes with a child peddling maniacally, an emblem of the possibility of reconciliation with mortality. The 'murky shallows' of the 'embankment' into which Wilder careens before being rescued by a 'passing motorist' recall the hole to which think tank leader Rob Softly flees in panic. In light of this, Wilder's glorious escape from the ditch, held 'aloft for the clamoring elders to see', may symbolise the Gladneys' rejection of the objectivist thought that Rob embraces (p.324). Nevertheless, in contrast to the consoling 'cry' with which The Names concludes, the child 'profoundly howling' in the 'mud and water' remains a haunting, near Blakean,

image and a powerful reminder of the 'human dread' with which the protagonists have struggled (p.325).

Chapter 6

The Capitalist Schizophrenic: Postmodern Consciousness in 'Libra', 'Mao II', and 'Underworld'

In The Names (1982) and White Noise (1984), DeLillo examines the difficulty of defining and constructing a form of selfhood that is appropriate to a postmodern milieu.² In his three subsequent novels, Libra (1988), Mao II (1991), and Underworld (1997), he examines cultural forces that have caused radical shifts in the forms of consciousness and subjectivity that prevail in postmodern culture.² Libra is a fictional account of the assassination of John F. Kennedy, an event surrounded by such uncertainty that DeLillo calls it a 'natural disaster in the heartland of the real' and suggests it alerted Americans to the difficulty of locating a reliable sense of reality within postmodernity.³ Consequently, the novel is informed by a concern with the nature of this 'real' in American postmodernity, both in the culture at large and in the construction of a functioning mind and self. Lee Harvey Oswald, the text's main protagonist, is portrayed in a manner comparable to that of the characters in Ratner's Star, adopting a series of schizophrenic 'false selves' that render him subordinate to the highly abstract systems of thought that prevail in his environment. Yet, in Libra, this psychosis is not the outcome of obsessive death-anxiety but extreme sensitivity to the demands of capitalism, which creates severe difficulties for Oswald in forging a sustainable subjectivity and provokes him to the self-destructive, schizophrenic desire to merge with the forces of history.

² Don DeLillo, The Names (London: Picador, 1989) and White Noise (London: Picador, 1989)

² Don DeLillo, Libra (London: Penguin, 1989), Mao II (London: Vintage, 1992), and Underworld (London: Picador, 1997)

Mao II examines a later phase of postmodernity, in which the influence of such schizophrenic disorientation has grown considerably, and focuses on the last months in the life of a reclusive novelist named Bill Gray. The novel examines the unifying psychological forces of postmodern culture and contains DeLillo's most explicit examination of the challenge this milieu, with its emergent notion of a unified mind, poses to the construction of a discrete, autonomous modernist subjectivity. In particular, it explores the reluctance to relinquish modernism that underlies Bill Gray's difficulties in this area. In his aesthetic and personal lives, Bill Gray strives unsuccessfully to sustain his attraction to characteristically modernist modes of selfhood and novelistic form, which increasingly fail to satisfy him. Simultaneously, he finds himself attracted to the postmodern schizophrenia of his assistants Karen and Scott, whose engagement with postmodernist culture alerts him to the fact that the postmodernism he loathes has emerged from the internal logic of the modernism he prizes. In Underworld, DeLillo's largest and most highly praised novel, he takes the notion of the unifying psychological forces at work in postmodernity and makes it the thematic and aesthetic organising principle of the text. In particular, the novel is concerned with the way that a model of consciousness unconstrained by individual selfhood might ease the racial tension endemic to American society and promote ideas of cultural and psychological unity in its place. Yet, such equilibrium is not gained easily: it emerges from a vast, dialectical struggle between what DeLillo suggests is the entrenched paranoia of modernist subjectivity and a more communal postmodern mode of thought, which brings with it the perceptual disorientation and psychological instability of schizophrenia.

³ Don DeLillo, 'American Blood: A Journey Through the Labyrinth of Dallas and JFK', in Rolling Stone Magazine, 8th December 1983, pp.21-22, p.24, pp.27-28 and p.74 (p.22).

Many historians and journalists argue that important evidence in the assassination of President Kennedy was ignored or manipulated, most of them suggesting that such maleficence was practiced for political reasons, often the CIA's wish to justify a second American invasion of Cuba, after the abortive 'Bay of Pigs' attempt in 1961. Howard Roffman is typical of these indignant authors, claiming that, after 22nd November 1963, 'the Warren Commission' 'engaged in a cover-up of the truth'.⁴ By misrepresenting 'almost every relevant fact about the crime' (p.9), Roffman asserts, the commission 'falsified history' (p.40). In his ninth novel, Libra, rather than merely providing a fictional analysis of the mysteries that remain concerning this controversial occurrence, DeLillo examines the postmodern models of consciousness and selfhood that may have given rise to a killing that, DeLillo told De Curtis, robbed Americans of 'a manageable sense of reality'.⁵ It is a sense of unreality also articulated by some among his literary contemporaries, for example, J.G. Ballard, who has a character remark that he is planning to 'kill Kennedy again' but this time 'in a way that makes sense'.⁶ By examining such a dramatic dislocation of reality, DeLillo produces an historical novel that David Cowart would classify as a 'Turning Point' text, one that seeks, in his words, to locate 'the precise historical moment when the modern age or some prominent feature of it came into existence'.⁷ In treating the question of reality in postmodernity through a fictionalized historical narrative, DeLillo unavoidably raises the question of whether any historical discourse and, in particular, a fictionalized narrative can connect with its supposed 'real' object

⁴ Howard Roffman, Presumed Guilty (South Brunswick, NJ: A.S. Barnes and Co., 1976), p.9.

⁵ Anthony De Curtis, "'An Outsider in This Society'": An Interview with Don DeLillo', in Introducing Don DeLillo, ed. by Frank Lentricchia (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), pp.43-66 (p.48).

⁶ J.G. Ballard, The Atrocity Exhibition (San Francisco: V/Search, 1990), p.34.

⁷ David Cowart, History and the Contemporary Novel (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), p.8.

of enquiry. In postmodernity, historical writing is required to answer the accusation of thinkers like Roland Barthes that, although history 'claims to let the referent speak for itself', 'historical narration' now concerns 'not so much the real as the intelligible'.⁸

As we have seen, in the context of the Kennedy assassination, DeLillo is as sceptical as Barthes about the possibility of rediscovering the historical 'real'. Indeed, he admits to experiencing even the imperative to provide intelligibility as something of a burden, informing De Curtis that, in writing Libra, the pressure of the 'official record' forced him to try 'harder to connect motivation with action' (p.62). DeLillo's difficulty in conforming to a record of real events arises from his habit of depicting characters who are unsure of the ontological status of their mind and subjectivity and therefore uncertain of their own motives. Yet, in Libra, DeLillo partially ameliorates this problem by exploring the historical genesis of the postmodern sense of unreality with which his novels are so frequently concerned, allowing him to forego any full-blown realist representation of mind or self. In doing so, he, again, concerns himself with characters whose sense of personal motivation is confused or compromised by the sense that their perception and selfhood are largely illusory. Nevertheless, DeLillo remains confronted by the difficulty that all discourse that deals with history demands a certain attempt, however problematic, to match one's narrative with 'reality'. As Hayden White argues, such attempts are fraught with epistemological questions concerning the relation between human systems of meaning and the nature of 'real' events. White suggests that, in the production of historical writing, 'the system of meaning production peculiar to a certain culture' 'is tested against the capacity of any set of "real" events to yield to such systems' and, consequently, that 'any narrative

⁸ Roland Barthes, 'The Discourse of History', in The Rustle of Language, trans. by Richard Howard (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), pp.127-40 (p.132, p.138).

account is always a figurative account, an allegory'.⁹ In Libra, the 'system' in question is not conventional history but fictionalized historical narrative, a form whose capacity to convey the historical 'real' might be regarded with even greater scepticism than that of traditional history. However, one might take John F. Kennedy and Lee Harvey Oswald's production of such narrative accounts of their own lives, what White would call 'figural accounts' and 'allegories', which exercised considerable influence on their thoughts and actions, as justification for DeLillo's fictional account. Indeed, their obsession with storytelling may make it the most appropriate means of representing their lives. Jacqueline Kennedy spoke of 'the narrative impulse that drove her husband's self-presentation' and the 'myth' and 'legend', particularly that of Camelot, which obsessed him.¹⁰ Lee Harvey Oswald demonstrated a similar interest in narrative, both as author and subject. He expressed an interest in writing stories about 'contemporary American life' (p.160), a form that DeLillo suggests Oswald saw as 'the only way to imagine' his acquaintances' experience (p.37). Oswald also kept an 'Historic Diary', in which, at least in DeLillo's account, he imagines himself as a legendary figure like Trotsky, who would wait for 'history' to 'surge through the walls' (p.34). Therefore, the 'system of meaning production' that DeLillo employs is similar to the one that inspired and motivated his real-life subjects, a fact that must enhance his chances of producing a narrative that, if not accurate in every detail, is well suited to capturing the spirit of their lives.

⁹ Hayden White, The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p.44, p.48.

¹⁰ John Hellman, The Kennedy Obsession (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p.ix.

Critics often focus on the questions of postmodern selfhood and media representation that pervade Libra. Frank Lentricchia remarks on the replacement of the 'social environment' of naturalism by the 'charismatic environment of the image' and asserts that subjectivity is obliterated by the 'determinative power' of the 'system'.¹¹ Similarly, Paul Civello sees in Libra a world 'in which there is no distinction between subject and object', while Joseph Kronick notes what he sees as Oswald's discovery that he cannot exchange a 'fictional self' for 'an actual self'.¹² The power of American capitalism is indeed acutely apparent in Libra, yet critics have overlooked the persistent anxiety that it creates regarding the veracity of thought and perception, as well as the effect of this perceptual disorientation on the characters' ability to create a tolerable subjectivity. It gives rise, in Oswald's case, to a near psychotic loss of individual identity, exemplified by his numerous aliases and desperate desire to 'merge' with 'history' to escape 'the dark night of the isolated self' (p.101). Much of the 'religious dimension' Cowart finds in the novel and what Glen Thomas calls the 'transcendental unity or oneness' craved by Oswald is DeLillo's representation of Oswald's schizophrenic delusions, which lead him to believe he has been appointed by history or destiny to a messianic role.¹³ In this context, it is notable that DeLillo compares Libra to Ratner's Star 'because it attempts to provide a hint of order in the midst of all the randomness' (De Curtis, p.56). The comparison is especially apt because in the obsessive quest for order in that text is also associated with a schizophrenic sense of unreality. In Ratner's Star, DeLillo portrays rationalistic

¹¹ Frank Lentricchia, 'Libra as Postmodern Critique', in *Introducing Don DeLillo*, ed. by Frank Lentricchia (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), pp.193-215 (p.195, p.202).

¹² Paul Civello, 'Undoing the Naturalistic Novel: Don DeLillo's Libra', in Arizona Quarterly, 48 (1992), 33-56 (p.48) and Joseph Kronick, 'Libra and the Assassination of JFK: A Textbook Operation', in Arizona Quarterly, 50 (1994), 109-32 (p.113).

scientists and mathematicians constructing 'false selves', which exclude the body and cause psychological and emotional disorientation. In Libra, the object of DeLillo's critique is more often capitalism's ceaseless and irrational demands for production and consumption. These give rise to what, in their analysis of capitalist pathology, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari call 'schizophrenia', or 'the process of the production of desire and desiring machines', which they argue is characteristic of the capitalist subject and which they insist is the 'product of the capitalist machine'.¹⁴ As the young Oswald remarks, 'First you produce profits for the system that exploits you', before adding 'Then they're always trying to sell you something...If you can't buy what they're selling, you're a zero in the system' (p.40). Although DeLillo does not suggest that Oswald's personality is wholly determined by capitalism, in conjunction with the neglect and bullying that he suffers as a 'fatherless boy' and a Southerner transplanted to New York, the system's contradictions help cause the severe dislocation of selfhood that he experiences (p.4). Early in the novel, DeLillo hints at Oswald's schizophrenic tendencies, quoting Oswald's 'social worker', who reports his feeling that 'there is a veil between him and other people through which they cannot reach him' (p.12). It is an indication reinforced by Gerald Posner's explicit reference to a psychiatrist's view that Oswald possessed 'schizoid features and passive-aggressive tendencies'.¹⁵ Other postmodern thinkers such as Baudrillard have seen contemporary schizophrenia purely as the result of 'over-proximity' to reality, yet, Deleuze and Guattari see such a capitalist subject as paradoxically 'cut off

¹³ David Cowart, The Physics of Language (Athens GA: University of Georgia Press, 2002), p.92 and Glen Thomas, 'History, Biography and Narrative in Don DeLillo's Libra', in Twentieth Century Literature, 43 (1999), 107-24 (p.113).

¹⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seers, and Helen R. Lane (London: Athlone Press, 1984), p.24, p.33.

¹⁵ Gerald Posner, Case Closed: Lee Harvey Oswald and the Assassination of JFK (New York: Random House, 1993), p.13.

from reality' (p.23), while also merging with the world and becoming one with 'the process of production' (p.13).¹⁶ Indeed, they argue that this fusion means 'the self and the non-self, the outside and the inside no longer have any meaning whatsoever' (p.2). This dynamic closely resembles Oswald's characteristically 'Libran' oscillation between his neurotic and isolated fantasy life, what he calls the 'real life' that his family 'did not touch' (p.37) and the sense of being able to 'climb out of your own skin' into history that he finds so inspiring (p.101). It is a sense of psychological discontinuity that DeLillo conveys by what he calls 'a kind of abrupt, broken rhythm that I equate with Oswald's inner life'.¹⁷ In treating Oswald, DeLillo represents his rejection of the logical sequences of capitalism by a prose that juxtaposes unconnected information, in which statements such as 'An Italian was murdered in a candy store' are followed immediately by the fact that 'His mother sold stockings in Manhattan' (p.12). The effect is to suggest that Oswald lacks any settled identity that might assist in organizing his thoughts and that his subjectivity is laid open to contemporary capitalist history, which, as Cowart asserts, 'unfolds with the queer jumpiness' of 'early newsreels' (History, p.2).

DeLillo's emphasis on a remark attributed to an acquaintance of Oswald that he was 'an actor in real life' is typical of DeLillo's presentation of Oswald as burdened by his fragmented subjectivity and disorientated by a sense of his perceptions as unreal (De Curtis, p.51). In Libra, Oswald's craving for a credible reality is emphasized repeatedly. Like Deleuze and Guattari's schizophrenic, who imagines themselves to be 'a body without organs' (p.8), Oswald feels removed from

¹⁶ Jean Baudrillard, The Ecstasy of Communication, trans. by Bernard and Caroline Schutze (New York: Semiotext (e), 1988), p.27.

¹⁷ Ann Arensberg, "'Seven Seconds': An Interview with Don DeLillo", in Vogue (New York), August 1988, pp.337-39, p.390 (p.339).

his physicality. In the opening pages, his determination to 'absorb' the 'noise' of the subway car as 'a personal test' suggests a desire to confirm, and reify, his own physical existence (p.3), while his later exuberance at meeting John Wayne is the result of his feeling that Wayne's faithful repetition of his 'screen laugh' makes him 'doubly real' (p.93). Wayne's conformity with the supposed 'reality' of his screen self seems miraculous to Oswald who, like the schizophrenic, has 'long since ceased to believe' in the 'ego' and is always 'somewhere else, beyond or behind or below these problems' (Anti-Oedipus, p.23). This dislocation of self prompts him to adopt numerous aliases, for example, the name of his fellow marine 'Hidell', which he believes will assist him in living 'forever in history, outside ego and id' (p.101). It is the suspicion that his self and the world may be artificial entities that, in Libra, make him particularly vulnerable to a CIA plot, organized by a veteran of the 'Bay of Pigs' debacle named Win Everett, which aims to manufacture a fictional assassin for their own purposes. As Everett phrases it, they intend to 'put someone together', around whom they will 'build an identity, a skein of persuasion and habit, ever so subtle' (p.78). Similarly, the attack on Kennedy that this 'someone' will carry out is originally designed as a simulation, with the gunman intended to perform 'a spectacular miss' (p.51) and then to be revealed as a Castro sympathizer, something the conspirators believe will provoke a retaliatory U.S. invasion of Cuba. In this scheme, Oswald is useful strictly as a cipher, to provide the conspirators with 'a name, a face, a bodily frame they might use to extend their fiction into the world' (p.50). DeLillo makes clear that the conspirators have long experience of such factitious activity, having served in the CIA-inspired coup in Guatemala, the 'false battle reports' and 'meaningless codes' of which had been 'like a class project in the

structure of reality' (p.125). Their painstaking construction of a notional assassin resembles the strict formalism practiced by James and Owen in The Names and reaffirms DeLillo's connection of intelligence work with strictly noetic forms of thought. Like Owen, Everett reduces identity to an interrelation of signifiers, suggesting that they 'script a person or persons out of ordinary pocket litter', 'Mail-order forms, change of address cards, photographs'. Similarly, Everett's self-congratulatory assertion that 'I know what scientists mean when they talk about elegant solutions', once more, links intelligence work with Ratner's Star's mathematicians and suggests the two disciplines share a desperate, pathological quest for order (p.28).

DeLillo suggests that, being dyslexic, Oswald is particularly ill equipped to deal with this emphasis on pure symbols. In contrast to Norman Mailer, who throughout Oswald's Tale: An American Mystery corrects his subject's spelling, 'in fairness to Oswald's ideas', DeLillo stresses Oswald's learning difficulty because of the light it sheds on his inability to cope with the noetic strategies of the American establishment.¹⁸ In spite of Oswald's story-telling ambitions, DeLillo shows he is hampered by his inability to 'find order in the field of little symbols' and that, consequently, 'Things slipped through his perception. He could not get a grip on the runaway world' (p.211). DeLillo emphasizes the abstract cognition that perplexes Oswald by framing the scenes that present the CIA plot as a product of the computer-based research of Nicholas Branch, a CIA man hired to write the history of the assassination. It is Branch's entry of the date '17th April 1963' into his 'home computer' (p.15) that apparently conjures into life 'Walter Everett Jr.' and fellow conspirators and Bay of Pigs veterans such as Laurence Parmenter and T.J. Mackey,

¹⁸ Norman Mailer, Oswald's Tale: An American Mystery (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1995), p.xxiii in 'Notes'.

suggesting the proximity of their thought to the limited mechanical cognition DeLillo portrays in Players and Running Dog. In DeLillo's version, this formalism renders the case insoluble, persuading Branch he cannot conclude his investigation because 'It is impossible to stop assembling data' (p.59), a difficulty that recalls Lévi-Strauss's remark that the attempt to write 'a truly total history', like that of Branch, must simply 'cancel itself out'.¹⁹ As the novel goes on, Branch begins to suffer the erosion of identity that DeLillo associates with such abstract formalism and asks himself, 'Is he one of them now?', 'self-watching' and 'looking for a means of connection', having suffered the 'mind-spatter' of examining 'lives muddied and dripping in language', during his interminable research (p.181). DeLillo suggests that Everett's manipulative activities stem from a schizophrenic fear that reality might overwhelm him, a sense of the 'outside world' as 'eerie and real' (p.17), that prompts what R.D. Laing would call 'a denial of being in order to preserve being'.²⁰ This 'denial' manifests in a refusal to attribute meaningful status to mind or subjectivity, which is particularly apparent in his insistence that Oswald is a mere 'fiction' and in persistent anxiety concerning the veracity of his own existence (p.50). His obsession with the formal aspects of plotting resembles Deleuze and Guattari's description of the capitalist schizophrenic's 'ability to rearrange fragments continually in new and different patterns and configurations'. They argue that this leads to a relative 'indifference toward the act of producing' and 'over-all result to be achieved', something that manifests in Everett's eventual willingness to cede authority over his plans to T. J. Mackey (p.7). In the past, this sceptical formalist approach to selfhood has manifested in Everett's life as a

¹⁹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, The Savage Mind (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), p.257.

²⁰ R.D. Laing, The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness (London: Penguin, 1990), p.150.

pathological withdrawal from reality, 'motivational exhaustion' (p.17), and eventual 'nervous collapse' (p.30). Notably, while stressing Everett's catastrophic dissolution of subjectivity, DeLillo omits even to mention the 'nervous breakdown' that Oswald suffered 'while on guard duty' in Japan, suggesting that he may wish to imply that the schizophrenic Oswald possesses no sense of identity to be shattered in this way (Case Closed, p.32). By contrast, DeLillo presents Everett as psychologically devastated, being left with a pathological need for secret plans, like the one involving Oswald, to assure himself of his own existence. As Everett puts it, such intrigues are a 'way of arresting motion, stopping the world so we can see ourselves in it' (p.26). Oswald is therefore represented as a pathological mirror image of the intelligence and corporate establishment, which conspires remorselessly against him. Indeed, just as he does in The Names, DeLillo stresses that intelligence agencies and American capitalism form a single system and work to enhance one another's power. Laurence Parmenter remarks on the 'natural kinship between business and intelligence work', even claiming that he finds it difficult to perceive precisely 'where the Agency left off and the corporations began' (p.126). Consequently, DeLillo shows that, although apparently unconnected, Oswald's victimization by American intelligence is ultimately inseparable from the bewildering effect of the postmodern capitalist system on his mind.

The similarity in the pathology of Oswald and the CIA conspirators is made particularly apparent in the religious attitude they share towards power and the conspiracies connected to it. Although Deleuze and Guattari are clear that the schizophrenic 'is not God', they argue that 'the energy that sweeps through it is divine, when it attracts to itself the whole process of production and serves as its

miraculate, enchanted surface' (p.13). Branch senses this 'divine' energy in the information he surveys, remarking early on 'a strangeness' 'that is almost holy' (p.15). In Oswald's case, this religious sense focuses upon his projected historical role in what he repeatedly calls the 'world inside the world' (p.47), the historical real he regards as coextensive with the 'true life inside him' (p.46). As Deleuze and Guattari argue, 'No one has ever been as deeply involved in history as the schizo', comparing him or her to the 'Nietzschean subject who passes through a series of states and identifies these states with the names of history' (p.21). Among these 'states' of mind may be counted his belief that he is President Kennedy's double. This notion, which he bases upon slender coincidences such as their both having 'brothers named Robert' and 'wives pregnant at the same time', grows throughout the novel and helps convince him that he is destined to assassinate the President. CIA agents such as David Ferrie encourage his grandiose delusions, instructing him that his inner life has 'an effect on independent events' and that he 'can make things happen' (p.330). As in some earlier novels, DeLillo appears to make a connection between the pathologies of capitalism and the Puritan religious fervour of right-wing American culture. By the time of the assassination, Oswald has begun comparing his life to episodes from the New Testament, reflecting, for example, that 'Three times he had asked' his wife 'to live with him in Dallas. Three times she'd said no' (p.390), while even those watching on television, like Laurence Parmenter's wife Beryl, sense something Christ-like in his eventual murder by Jack Ruby, feeling that he 'knew who we are and how we feel' and, consequently, 'he has made us part of his dying' (p.447). By contrast, the intelligence agents direct their spiritual urges towards the upper echelons of power, particularly the presidency, an office that, in their eagerness to protect their political masters from unnecessary knowledge, they mystically term 'a summit of unknowing'

(p.22), while referring to themselves as the 'ungodly' (p.24). This elevation of their superiors resembles the factitious religious aesthetic adopted by the CIA hierarchy in Running Dog and entails a comparable, absolutist disregard for the lives of its operatives. Indeed, when Oswald seeks to become a Soviet citizen, he is referred to by a KGB officer, Kirilenko, as 'a Chaplinesque figure, skating along the edges of vast and dangerous events', a reference that connects Oswald directly to Glen Selvy in that novel, as a similarly powerless, disorientated character and hapless victim of CIA conspiracy (p.124). Notably, Sydney Verba suggests that this religious quality is typical of Americans' relation to their President and, in particular, of their reaction to the assassination of Kennedy, a view that indicates the widespread dissemination of the establishment's religious approach to power and history in U.S. culture.²¹ Verba notes, for example, that many responded to Kennedy's death with 'prayer or attendance at special church services' and concludes that the event 'illustrates the close meshing of the sacred and secular in the top institutions of a political system' (p.352).

In spite of the quasi-religious satisfaction Oswald gains from his schizophrenic sense of a direct relation to the historical real, again, as the 'Libra' of DeLillo's title, he oscillates between such feelings of plentitude and a dim realization that they may be mere illusion. Indeed, on occasion, he reflects that he and his family may in reality represent 'a zero in the system' (p.40) and be 'locked into a process' by a capitalist economy that 'diminished their human worth every day, as if by scientific law' (p.41). In light of this, DeLillo presents Oswald's attempt to gain Soviet citizenship, which he pursues after his discharge from the marines, as an effort to discover a more stable,

²¹ Sydney Verba, 'The Kennedy Assassination and the Nature of Political Commitment', in The Kennedy Assassination and the American Public: Social Communication in Crisis, ed. by Bradley S. Greenberg and Edwin B. Parker (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1965), pp.348-360.

egalitarian reality, one where he can be 'a man in history' (p.149), but escape the unpredictable 'desiring machine' of capitalism (Anti-Oedipus, p.9). Oswald envisages the comparative reliability of the Soviet system as something like the one-to-one correspondence of modernist naturalism that is craved by James in The Names. The KGB officer, Kirilenko, who he encounters in Moscow, meets his expectations precisely. He informs him that 'We are here to clarify the themes of your life' (p.162) and discourses with Oswald about the naturalist author Ernest Hemingway, whose 'style', claims Kirilenko, always arouses his 'appetite'. Significantly, the mention of Hemingway inspires Oswald to communicate his ambition to 'write short stories on contemporary American life', when he is 'settled here and studying', an admission that indicates his association of the Soviet Union with naturalism and escape from postmodernity's threatening ambiguities (p.160). Although superficially welcoming, Kirilenko shrewdly recognises the shallowness of Oswald's attachment to the Soviet Union. He sees that the young American is psychologically unstable, remarking that 'This boy played Ping-Pong in his head' (p.167) and deduces that his defection is prompted by a craving for a 'second and safer identity', which Kirilenko calls a desire to 'live' 'as someone else' (p.166). Being accustomed to the anarchic energies of capitalism, Oswald experiences difficulty in adopting the more straightforward naturalistic relation to reality that he craves. This is symbolized by his failure to learn Russian, and hence to master Soviet reality, his rating on his 'foreign-language qualification test' being 'P for poor throughout' (p.163). He also resents the personal equivalence to which naturalism often appears to lead. At the passport office, he notes that 'No one could distinguish him from anyone else' (p.151) and expresses dissatisfaction that 'Everything is the same. Everything tastes the same' (p.198). Consequently, he relapses into his compulsive capitalist-schizophrenic 'production' of

reality (Anti-Oedipus, p.4), adopting new aliases in a way that resembles what Deleuze and Guattari call the attempt to scramble 'all the codes', 'never invoking the same genealogy' 'from one day to the next' (p.15). He adopts his KGB interrogator's name, 'Alek', an act that prefigures the quasi-religious desire for contact with the representatives of state power that prompts his later paranoid belief that Jack Kennedy is his double (p.199). The sense that he misses the distinctively religious quality that attaches to power and history in American culture is reaffirmed by his response to the Soviet capture of the U-2 spy pilot, Francis Gary Powers, which eventually catalyzes Oswald's desire to return to the U.S. He considers the downing of the plane a 'heart-shaking event' for its historical significance and its bearing on American state secrecy and power (p.190). During service in the marines, Oswald worked with U-2 planes as a radar operator and, consequently, the Russian authorities question him concerning the plane and its mission. Although he cannot offer them reliable information, during interrogation, he becomes intoxicated with the place Powers has achieved in the historical imaginary, through contact with the fantastic plans of the State. As he notes, foreshadowing his own fame as Lee Harvey Oswald, 'Once you did something notorious, they tagged you with an extra name, a middle name that was never ordinarily used'; 'it already sounded historic'. With obvious envy, he remarks that Powers is 'officially marked, a chapter in the imagination of the state', a formulation that indicates Oswald's willingness to surrender autonomy for a role as one of this state's quasi-religious fictions (p.198).

After leaving Russia, in the second half of the novel, Oswald reengages with the schizophrenic 'divine' energy of the American religious aesthetic and comes to understand that its obverse lies in its disturbing obsession with death. As Jean Baudrillard argues, for capitalist societies, this concern is a return of the repressed,

since such cultures institute a 'prohibition on death and the dead' as 'the primary source of social control'.²² Indeed, for Baudrillard, all the 'abstractions of political economy', by which he means capitalism, (p.130) are based on the artificial 'separation of life and death', which determines that life is designated as 'a positive value' and death is relegated to the status of an 'ever-present phantasm' (p.133). In this context, one might view Oswald's eventual assassination of Kennedy as an attempt symbolically to undo this sequestration of mortality and permit the free flow of what Baudrillard calls the 'circuit of life and death' (p.132). Yet, in spite of what I will suggest may be the radical impact of Oswald's action, in agreeing to the killing, he also serves the tendency to manipulate the death-anxiety of the population that is inherent within the capitalist establishment and which is represented by Everett's more aggressive colleague T.J. Mackey. In DeLillo's conceptual scheme, Mackey and Everett represent opposite and complementary poles of the American political and cultural system and together form a pattern familiar from the relationship between Mudger and Selvy in Running Dog. Everett is the purveyor of noetic cognition, whose ability to 'think economically' causes an inability to form a functioning subjectivity, while Mackey epitomizes the frequently homicidal use of widespread death-phobia and concomitant pursuit of political dominance that are firmly repressed by the American establishment, but which remain integral to its efficient function (p.219). When T.J. Mackey takes over the mission, he dispenses with what he considers Everett's 'anxious, self-absorbed' formalism, instituting an alternate course of action that carries what he calls the 'full heat of feeling' and which will end in President Kennedy's death (p.219). As in his portrayal of Mudger, DeLillo stresses Mackey's independence and sense of self, as well as his tendency toward violence, referring

²² Jean Baudrillard, Symbolic Exchange and Death, trans. by Iain Hamilton Grant (London: SAGE Publications, 1995), p.130.

repeatedly to his unwillingness to 'trust' colleagues such as Guy Banister and Wayne Elko (p.225). In functioning as obverse sides of a single unit, Mackey and Everett possess intuitive understanding of one another's methods. Mackey gives Everett's plan 'every credit', even as he rejects it, noting appreciatively that it is 'original, spare and clean' (p.219). Similarly, Everett understands subconsciously that, in Mackey's hands, his plot will 'move toward death'. As DeLillo puts it, 'he had a foreboding that the plan would move to a limit, develop a logical end', an instinctive realization which suggests that Kennedy's murder may always have been implicit in Everett's plan (p.221). Consequently, although, by killing the President, Oswald exceeds the limitations of the 'spare and clean' formalism that DeLillo often sees in capitalist thought, the system has allowed for this 'excess' and therefore, paradoxically, Oswald acts on behalf of a more threatening, sinister branch of the system; what one might call its unconscious. As the capitalist schizophrenic, Oswald discovers what Deleuze and Guattari call 'the very limit of capitalism: he is its very inherent tendency brought to fulfillment, its surplus product, its proletariat, and its exterminating angel' (p.35). This sense of the assassination as exploring the limits of capitalist thought and aesthetics is strikingly shared by Fredric Jameson, who suggests that the murder and, in particular, its television coverage were 'a prodigious new display of synchronicity', which 'amounted to a dialectical leap over anything hitherto suspected'.²³

Consequently, he believes, Kennedy's death offered America a 'Utopian glimpse into some collective communicational "festival" whose ultimate logic and promise is incompatible with our mode of production' (p.355). Where DeLillo sees the killing as ultimately contained within a capitalist system that has foreseen such murderous acts as part of its own internal logic, Jameson envisages the 'collective

²³ Fredric Jameson, Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Capitalism (London: Verso, 1991), p.355.

experience of reception' that marked the assassination as a revolutionary event that may presage capitalism's ultimate demise.

DeLillo makes the American obsession with the 'ever-present phantasm' of death central to the novel's form. To some degree, this is unavoidable, since Libra is necessarily defined by the eventual deaths of President Kennedy and Lee Harvey Oswald. Hence, what Everett calls the 'tendency of plots to move toward death' (p.221) and Peter Brooks names the 'logic of the discourse of mortality' that is inherent in any 'plot' is inevitably heightened.²⁴ More than in most texts, one therefore reads in anticipation of a cataclysmic conclusion, conscious of the truth of Walter Benjamin's remark that 'Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death'.²⁵ Nevertheless, DeLillo adopts strategies that intensify the reader's sense of foreboding. By alternating episodes of Oswald's life, such as 'In The Bronx' (p.3) or 'In Moscow (p.149), with chapters detailing the progress of the CIA plot in the months prior to 22nd November 1963, DeLillo creates a near deterministic sense that Oswald's life led ineluctably to what DeLillo calls the 'seven seconds that broke the back of the American century' (p.181). DeLillo repeatedly interrupts the narrative with proleptic renderings of the deaths of CIA conspirators in the years following the assassination (p.58, p.183, p.378). These reports often follow scenes in which the deceased agent plays a major role, creating a sense of approaching mortality, even at more tranquil moments. Likewise, the thought and speech of Oswald's mother Marguerite often appear in the form of transcribed judicial testimony, a mode that calls to mind Oswald's eventual crimes and violent

²⁴ Peter Brooks, Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p.22.

²⁵ Walter Benjamin, Illuminations, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Fontana Press, 1992), p.93.

death and her subsequent defence of him before the Presidential enquiry. As DeLillo points out, he does not translate 'spoken speech as much as the printed speech of the people who testified before the Warren Commission' (De Curtis, p.62). Early in the novel, for example, Marguerite speaks comparatively little to Oswald but is quoted telling an unnamed judge that 'He is advanced, your honor. I have said from early childhood he liked histories and maps' (p.10), protestations that prefigure her eventual testimony to Earl Warren after Kennedy's death that 'This boy bought gifts for his mother. He was lonesome to read' (p.455).

Although Libra is organized around his eventual death, John Kennedy makes only one appearance in the novel. This is partly because, for many of the novel's characters, Kennedy functions as an imaginary object of desire that resembles the Lacanian objet petit a, a role that depends on his remaining aloof, even somewhat occult.²⁶ As Norman Mailer puts it, America sees in Kennedy a 'romantic dream of itself', 'the image in the mirror of its unconscious'.²⁷ The strategy also has a more pragmatic motive, since, as Cowart points out, in the historical novel, 'the good novelist is careful not to put major historical figures at the center of the historical stage' for fear that they will 'overwhelm the novelist's art' (History, p.120). Certainly, numerous real life sources bear witness to Kennedy possessing personal charisma that might dominate a fictional text. Mailer was moved to remark that 'I knew if he became President, it would be an existential event: he would touch depths in the American psyche which were uncharted' (Presidential, p.26). In DeLillo's depiction of Kennedy's appearance in Dallas, he lives up to this extraordinary billing, embodying a transcendent quality that recalls the CIA's view of him as the religious

²⁶ Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton Company, 1998), p.62.

²⁷ Norman Mailer, The Presidential Papers (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1963), p.59.

'real' or 'summit of unknowing'. Yet, DeLillo suggests that the charisma he projects is largely reliant on the simulations of postmodern image culture, noting that much of the effect is achieved simply because 'He looked like himself, like photographs', adding wryly that he smiled 'famously into the wall of open mouths' 'white teeth shining' (p.392). The moment recalls Oswald's meeting with the 'doubly real' John Wayne and reaffirms that many postmodern Americans share Oswald's schizophrenic anxiety about the reality of perceptions and subjectivity and his eagerness to bolster his subjectivity by identification with celebrities.

The Kennedy DeLillo portrays in Libra is another of the iconic, apparently immortal figures who, throughout DeLillo's oeuvre, serve as apotropaic Rankian doubles in the struggle to ward off death. As Mailer again points out, Kennedy's credentials as a war hero lend him a symbolic status in American culture as a conqueror of mortality, an image as 'a man who senses death within him and gambles that he can cure it by risking his life' (Presidential, p.48). The logical correlative of this protective role is that the icon becomes irremediably associated with death and, indeed, in Libra, DeLillo has Kennedy represent the American repression of mortality and also the ultimate return of this repressed matter. DeLillo emphasizes the secrecy around Kennedy's 'degenerating discs' and his 'Addison's disease', which threatened his life, as well as his youthful image (p.392), facts that bear out Baudrillard's view that, under capitalism, 'the price we pay' for our high valuation of life is the systematic exclusion of death (p.133). By contrasting Kennedy's role as representative of youthful immortality with the reality of his chronic illnesses and eventual violent death, DeLillo hints that his killing may emerge from a collective return of the repressed in the American psyche. In line with this, he often presents the

conspirators' motives as darkly irrational. One of Mackey's marksmen, Frank Vasquez admits that 'Something in his heart longed for this murder, even though he knew it was a sin' (p.298), while Mackey wonders idly whether Kennedy was 'just too pretty to live' (p.365). Oswald himself is swayed by David Ferrie's contention that, rather than relations of 'cause and effect', he is driven to kill by elements of his unconscious mind, what Ferrie calls 'the deepest levels of the self' with 'no history we can recognize or understand' (p.339). Ultimately, therefore, Oswald undertakes the task without a coherent conscious motive, exemplifying Baudrillard's view that, in a capitalist system founded upon the 'need to survive at any cost', 'death becomes a useless luxury, and the only alternative' (p.156). Yet, as we have seen, the assassination is ultimately productive, serving symbolically to question what Deleuze and Guattari call the 'limit' of 'capitalism', in particular, its rigid division between life and death and to suggest its replacement with the 'symbolic reality of exchange' between the categories (Baudrillard, p.132). For Baudrillard, the public deaths of powerful figures like Kennedy, especially, may be seen as sacrificial, because they maintain 'within the group's reciprocal movements' qualities such as 'wealth' or 'status' that might otherwise 'accumulate and become fixed on the King's person' (p.138). Indeed, he argues that a 'totally undeserved' death, like Kennedy's, effectively undermines the division between life and death because 'the officiating priest or 'criminal' is expected to die in return, according to the rules of a symbolic exchange' (p.165).

As this symbolic 'priest', Oswald dies at the hand of nightclub owner Jack Ruby, who shoots him in police custody two days after Kennedy's assassination, yet, in the intervening time, he appears to gain in self-esteem from having played this crucial social and historical role. Indeed, DeLillo portrays Oswald, in his prison cell,

as beginning to forge the kind of robust subjectivity that eluded him in American society, remarking that 'There was strength for him here'. 'He didn't fear a thing'. Having achieved the symbolic victories over capitalism implicit in the (non) logic of the assassination, Oswald grows in confidence, even regaining his self-image as anti-capitalist hero and planning to instruct the police that the assassination was executed 'to advance the Marxist cause into the heart of the American Empire' (p.426). His final act in the novel is to glance 'at the camera', in the moments 'before he was shot', a moment that critics often interpret as symbolic of Oswald's impotent entrapment within postmodern media life. Yet, Beryl Parmenter remarks on his intriguingly gnomic appearance in this shot, suggesting that he seems to know 'who we are and how we feel' (p.447). Oswald's insight may be borne of his understanding that the assassination succeeded in revealing part of the capitalist unconscious and creating, momentarily, what Jameson calls a subversive 'communicational 'festival''. By participating in an event of this magnitude, Oswald gains fresh understanding of his environment and his compatriots, which enables him, in Beryl's words, to bring 'our interpretations and perceptions into his sense of the crime' and to remain, in some sense, 'outside the moment, watching with the rest of us' (p.447).

Mao II

In Mao II, DeLillo explores the effect of the schizophrenic postmodern sense of unreality on religious and aesthetic life in the U.S, concentrating particularly on reclusive novelist Bill Gray and one of his assistants, a former member of the Unification Church named Karen. DeLillo continues to present this perceptual disorientation as largely the effect of contemporary capitalism and its media outlets, whose influence Guy Debord famously, if somewhat expansively, described as having

reduced 'All that was directly lived' to 'mere representation'.²⁸ In Mao II, however, the influence of this mode of thought spreads beyond the intelligence services and alienated revolutionaries, to be confronted by all sections of society, from influential artists to the young and middle class, of which Karen and her lover Scott are representative. DeLillo's portrayal of the erstwhile Moonie offers a sustained examination of the religious life of the capitalist schizophrenic, which, in this novel, entails an uncanny intuitive relationship with postmodern technologies and an obsession with isolated objects or signifiers as metonymic symbols of an incipient unity of mind. By contrast, Bill Gray functions as the novel's chief proponent of a view close to that of Debord and, like Jack in White Noise, begins with a fierce rejection of postmodernism and an anachronistically modernist view of subjectivity as discrete and autonomous. Although Bill is, aesthetically, a modernist and, politically, a democratic individualist, he feels increasingly drawn to postmodern culture, particularly its more collective model of consciousness and its concomitant concentration on visual images and global politics. He appears persuaded by the postmodern world that 'The future belongs to crowds' and even comes to acknowledge contemporary postmodernism as the logical outgrowth of his modernist viewpoint (p.16). This shift is indicated partly through involvement in contemporary culture, through a concerted attempt to free a Swiss writer abducted in Beirut, but also by his eventual exchange of fiction for writing that directly addresses contemporary politics.

The theme of a burgeoning mass or global consciousness in postmodernity is alluded to periodically by the insertion of set pieces taken from contemporary events (p.1, p.32, p.176, p.188). These involve large crowds intoxicated and sometimes

²⁸ Guy Debord, The Society of the Spectacle (New York: Zone Books, 2002), p.12.

destroyed by the awesome forces of what Freud called the 'primitive mental activity' of the 'horde', which he believes is unleashed by individuals giving up their 'ego ideal' and replacing it with the 'group ideal'.²⁹ The groups DeLillo chooses, which range from participants in a mass wedding to murdered democracy activists in Beijing's Tiannenmen square, tend to be the object of our horror or pity, a fact that forcibly conveys Bill's revulsion for mass consciousness and the threat he perceives to individualized mind and subjectivity from media representations of such events. Yet, DeLillo also presents each episode as either seen or experienced by Karen, who represents the unreality of postmodern schizophrenia, but also the possible benefits of the globally unified consciousness DeLillo hints may be latent in postmodern culture. Such doubled mediation of these episodes renders the novel what DeLillo calls an 'argument about the future',³⁰ offering Bill's view of contemporary mind and subjectivity in conjunction with Karen's, apparently, diametrically opposed position.

Bill's initial view of selfhood as autonomous and unitary is inextricable from his traditional approach to the novel and practice as a novelist, which, in the manner of Hemingway, is both modernist and naturalist. DeLillo hints at this relation to Hemingway, by repeated imitation of the novelist's well-known repetitive use of the word 'and', but the resemblance is particularly striking in the sections purportedly written by Bill about the experience of the Swiss poet in Beirut. In an extended passage, which begins part two of the novel, Bill writes:

they would take him to a secret place and recite their

²⁹ Sigmund Freud, 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Individual Ego', in Vol. xviii: 1920-22, ed. by Lytton Strachey with Anna Freud (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), pp.67-144 (p.122, p.129).

³⁰ Adam Begley, 'Don DeLillo: The Art of Fiction CXXXV', in *Paris Review*, 28 (1993), 275-306 (p. 296).

questions in the same voice he heard on the instruction tape and he would impress the authorities with his recall of detail and his analysis of facets and aspects and they would quickly determine the location of the building and the identity of the group that held him (p.108)

This sentence typifies what DeLillo told David Remnick is ‘what makes Hemingway’, ‘the simple connective -- the word “and” that strings together the segments of a long Hemingway sentence’ (Remnick, p.47). The style is allegorical of Bill’s comfort with modernist, and romantic, ideas, particularly the sense that characters may be partially autonomous, and a concomitant refusal of the self-consciousness of modern and postmodern authorship. Bill tells the Maoist academic George Haddard that he appreciates the novel form partly because ‘characters deny my efforts to own them completely’ and because, he contends, any ‘desperado’ can ‘find his voice’ and write ‘a great novel’ (p.159). Bill extends this preference for, at least relative, autonomy in subjectivity to the consumers of mass media culture, expressing disquiet at the opportunity television news affords terrorists to ‘make raids on human consciousness’ and reduce the viewers’ intellectual independence. In particular, he resents the fact that violent political groups have usurped the role formerly occupied by novelists as shapers of the mind and self, diminishing their ability ‘to alter the inner life of the culture’ (p.41).

Some elements of Bill’s view of fiction writing, in particular, its intimate relation to the author’s selfhood, are close to those articulated by DeLillo, making it difficult to avoid reading Mao II as, in part, an exploration of DeLillo’s own anxieties

about the place of the author in postmodern society. Bill's feeling that 'The language of my books has shaped me as a man' (p.48) echoes DeLillo's sense that 'it's possible for a writer to shape himself as a human being through the language he uses'.³¹

DeLillo's public letter to Jonathan Franzen demonstrates that he also shares Bill's belief that the novel counteracts the corrosive effects of mass culture. According to DeLillo, the form 'frees us from' 'mass identity' and, moreover, is inextricable from 'the thing we're talking about when we use the word "identity"'.³² It is a view of

fiction writing that DeLillo has indicated had a strong bearing on his production of

Mao II. He told Gordon Burn that Ayatollah Khomeini's Fatwa against Salman

Rushdie 'accelerated my way into what became Mao II' and inspired him to write

about 'the novelist as a rigorous champion of the self; as a defender of the self'.³³

Indeed, the description of the mass Unification Church wedding, with which the novel

begins, contains a reply to the question Rushdie poses at the beginning of The Satanic

Verses: 'How does newness come into the world? How is it born?'.³⁴ DeLillo notes

that the Moonies 'take a time-honoured event and repeat it, repeat it, repeat it, until

something new enters the world' (p.4), implying that, in the late capitalist

environment Mark Seltzer calls 'machine-culture', originality is generated only

through mysteriously productive forms of repetition.³⁵ This allusion to Rushdie raises

the question that plagues Bill, of whether the 'compulsive seriality' of postmodern

³¹ Tom LeClair and Larry McCaffery, eds. Anything Can Happen: Interviews with Contemporary American Novelists (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1983), p.82.

³² David Remnick, 'Exile on Main Street: Don DeLillo's Undisclosed Underworld', in 'The New Yorker', 15th September 1997, pp.42-48 (p.48).

³³ Gordon Burn, 'Wired Up and Whacked Out', in The Sunday Times Magazine, 25th August 1991, pp.36-39 (p.39).

³⁴ Salman Rushdie, The Satanic Verses (London: Viking, 1988), p.8

³⁵ Mark Seltzer, Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture (New York: Routledge, 1998), p.62.

culture renders individual creativity unattainable and the novelist superfluous (Seltzer, p.70). DeLillo pursues these issues but also goes on to examine whether this mechanized and media-dominated postmodern culture creates the 'apocalyptic sense of things' (Remnick, p.48) and schizophrenic craving for order and 'the end of human history' that afflict a number of the novel's central characters (Mao II, p.6).

DeLillo's interest in notions of repetition and originality has persuaded many critics to emphasize the issue of the status of the postmodern novelist in Mao II. Richard Levesque comments on the 'loss or de-centering' of the writer's 'authority', while Mark Osteen regards the novel as heralding the final triumph of 'spectacular discourse' over literary culture.³⁶ Bill is indeed concerned with the diminishing prestige of the author, which he attributes to writers being 'incorporated' (p.41) and their work increasingly commodified in 'mass-market' bookstores, which present texts in 'lacquered and gilded' covers (p.19). Bill's paralyzing anxiety on this subject is symbolized by his inability to complete his current novel after twenty-three years (p.41). Indicative of his declining status is his assistants' frequent use of the phrase 'Quoting Bill', which, particularly when used in his company, seems less respectful than an acknowledgement of his dissolution as a substantial historical presence and his emergence as one of numerous iterable media texts (p.72, p.80, p.224). Other critics have examined the question of subjectivity in more general terms. Laura Barrell argues that the 'unfamiliar territory' of postmodern culture 'compromises notions of subjectivity' and that the former 'Moonie' Karen is the 'quintessential

³⁶ Richard Levesque, 'Telling Postmodern Tales: Absent Authority in Didion's Democracy and DeLillo's Mao II', in Arizona Quarterly, 54 (1998), 69-87 (p.71) and Mark Osteen American Magic and Dread: Don DeLillo's Dialogue with Culture (Philadelphia, PA: University of Philadelphia Press, 2000), p.193.

decentred subject' of this disorientating milieu.³⁷ Adam Begley, by contrast, argues that Karen is 'the vital center of the novel', who, by surrendering her ego to religious belief, paradoxically, 'absorbs and transcends threats to selfhood' that she encounters in contemporary culture.³⁸ The novel's central, but largely ignored, concern is DeLillo's exploration of the schizophrenic sense of unreality pervading postmodern culture and its influence on U.S. aesthetics and religion. In particular, DeLillo focuses on the power of these cultural manifestations of schizophrenic consciousness to disrupt discrete and unitary models of selfhood, which it threatens to displace with a form of subjectivity that is at once more fragmentary, yet unified on a mass or even global scale. This theme is introduced during the mass wedding portrayed in the novel's prologue, which occurs in Yankee Stadium and is organized by 'Reverend Moon', to whom Karen refers by various respectful titles, including 'true father' and 'Master' (p.6). Karen's immediate appearance in the text emphasizes the thematic significance of her schizophrenic reaction to American capitalism, while also delaying Bill's arrival until the second chapter, a deferral that helps establish him as the sequestered and semi-mythical figure he has become. DeLillo conveys Karen's rapturous schizophrenia by a free indirect style he describes as a 'non-sequitur ramble' (Begley, p.294), in which statements are linked by vague association rather than the sequentiality of capitalist machine-culture. For example, the fact that 'Reverend Moon' is of 'chunky build' directly precedes his unrelated sighting of 'Jesus on a mountainside' (p.6). This prose is mimetic of Karen's exceptionally intuitive thought-process, which, as with Oswald, is combined with a dangerous

³⁷ Laura Barrell, "'Here But Also There': Subjectivity and Postmodern Space in *Mao II*", in *Modern Fiction Studies*, 45 (1999), 788-810 (p.789).

³⁸ Adam Begley, 'Don DeLillo: *Americana*, *Mao II*, and *Underworld*', in *South West Review*, 82 (1997), 478-505 (p.493, p.496).

credulity in pursuit of the religious real. As Scott, Bill's senior assistant, puts it, she is 'thin-boundaried', 'She took it all in, she believed it all' (p.119). She also possesses Oswald's mania for contact with history, at one point, talking excitedly of 'Reverend Moon's' 'power to alter history' (p.172). In her state of spiritual longing, she believes herself to possess preternatural insight. In a way comparable to the temporarily unbalanced Jack at the climax of White Noise, she believes she knows Moon 'at molecular level. He lives in them like chains of matter that determine who they are' (p.6). Such fervid concentration on the microscopic is congruent with Deleuze and Guattari's view of the capitalist schizophrenic. In contrast to 'the paranoiac', like Moon, who 'engineers masses' and controls the 'large molar aggregates', characteristic of capitalist organization (p.279), Deleuze and Guattari argue that the schizophrenic focuses on the 'molecular order' (p.286), the realm of 'microphysics, of molecules insofar as they no longer obey the statistical laws' (p.280). Karen's religious mania leads her to believe she has direct access to the constituent parts of her own and others', including 'Reverend Moon's', physical and spiritual being.

Unlike Oswald's temporary escape to the Soviet Union, Karen's flight from mainstream American culture merely exposes her to more of the capitalist pressures that have conditioned her as a Deleuzian 'desiring-machine'. The 'Moonies' determinedly pursue funds, 'chanting their monetary goal' and repeating the unsettlingly materialistic mantra 'We're the greatest there's no doubt; heavenly father, we'll sell out' (p.13). As Eileen Barker notes, in spite of his youthful poverty and message of universal equality and love, the real life Reverend Moon embraced the inequalities of Western capitalism, living 'in splendour, while his followers lived in forced penury'.³⁹ DeLillo also emphasizes the Moonies' maniacal quest for order,

³⁹ Eileen Barker, The Making of a Moonie: Choice or Brainwashing (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), p.121.

portraying a cult that sees the world as chaotic and, like Ratner's Star's, craves the comfort of reliable intellectual structure. Karen speaks of a 'World in pieces' (p.9) as the result of a 'consciousness' become 'corrupt' (p.16). In a conference address, Moon articulated his sense that the modern world is wracked by a 'confusion and contradiction' of different philosophies and 'epistemologies' in need of unification into an orderly 'absolute truth'.⁴⁰ As David G. Bromley and Anson D. Shupe, Jr. point out, this aspiration is evident in the personal relationships that the Unification Church encourages, which are restricted to those that can 'be handled in highly ritualized (i.e. impersonal) ways', including marriage to partners carefully selected by Moon.⁴¹ Such weddings demonstrate what Deleuze and Guattari call the schizophrenic's rejection of the 'existing social code' (p.14), including the conventional genealogy of 'daddy-mommy' (p.92), something they argue is pursued with the intention of claiming defiantly that 'I am not your kind, I belong eternally to the inferior race' (p.277). This alienation from normative familial structures is consistent with Karen's apparent lack of a 'last name' (Mao II, p.166) and her contemptuous observation that 'our true father is a foreigner and nonwhite. How they silently despise' (p.9). Karen's emphasis on the destructive and transformative power of the Word is also consonant with Freud's view of schizophrenia, which emphasizes the psychotic's concentration on individual words, and creates a fear of linguistic reference comparable to Win Everett's schizophrenic formalism in Libra.⁴² She mentions things Moon must 'leave unsaid, words whose planetary impact no one

⁴⁰ Sun Myung Moon, Science and Absolute Values: 10 Addresses by Sun Myung Moon (New York: International Cultural Foundation Press, 1982), p.46.

⁴¹ David G. Bromley and Anson D. Shupe, Jr., Moonies in America: Cult, Church, and Crusade (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1979), p.183.

⁴² Sigmund Freud, 'The Unconscious', in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, ed. by James Strachey with Anna Freud, Vol. xiv: 1914-1916, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957). pp.159-215.

could bear' (p.7) and chants for 'one word, for the time when names are lost' (p.16). Karen's desire accords with Freud's view that the schizophrenic emphasizes the 'abstract' over the 'concrete' (p.204) and seeks to alight on a 'single word', which 'on account of its numerous connections, takes over the representation of a whole train of human thought' (p.199). Such reduction to an isolated signifier resembles the process of 'condensation' that Freud describes in The Interpretation of Dreams and may hint at the specifically oneiric quality of the unreality Karen experiences.⁴³ It is a metonymic tendency to mistake part for whole that recurs in Karen's behaviour, when she detaches 'a food-crusting spoon' (p.173) from an art exhibit, which she fetishistically considers symbolic of the mental unity she craves, insisting irrationally that 'the spoon and food were one' (p.179). Overall, the scene in the ballpark is notable for the overt emotionalism of the participants, depicted as 'happy', after giving up 'independent thought' (p.7), a portrayal that again recalls Freud's work on 'Group Psychology'. Freud remarks on the 'dwindling of the conscious individual personality' and 'the predominance of the affective side of the mind and of unconscious psychical life' among group members with strong libidinal ties (p.122). Freud's analysis is directly replicated in the techniques the Moonies employ to assist group integration, the primary aim of which, as Bromley and Anson make clear, is to encourage new members not to 'react on the cognitive but on the affective level' (p.183).

Although DeLillo presents Karen's response to contemporary culture as bordering on the pathological, it is never condemned or dismissed. Indeed, the Moonies' ideas persist powerfully throughout the novel and are often reproduced in

⁴³ Sigmund Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, trans. and ed. by James Strachey (New York: Avon, 1965), p.313.

inverted form, by mainstream society. This phenomenon resembles what Žižek calls the 'mutual misrecognition' that allows one to 'receive from the other' one's 'own message in the inverse form', implying that the Moonies' supposedly alien schizophrenic logic may be latent in the unconscious of the culture.⁴⁴ Bill's responses seem the mirror image of the Moonies' emphasis on collectivity and universal love and to be motivated by a similar distrust of the fractured selfhood created by the postmodern media. Bill's caustic remark that 'News of disaster' has become a psychological necessity and 'the last addiction before-what?' (p.42) is comparable to Moon's view of contemporary consciousness as 'confused' or 'corrupt'. Moreover, his admission that his retreat into isolation has 'a powerful inner logic' that is comparable to 'the way religion takes over a life' (p.45) indicates a sense of 'kinship' with Karen, like the one DeLillo has admitted to feeling himself (Begley, p.294). When Karen's father kidnaps her from the Moonies, the so-called deprogramming techniques he inflicts on her are indistinguishable from the religious ritual she has escaped, involving mantras about the Unification Church's supposed brainwashing such as 'Made me a drone, made me a drone' (p.82). By choosing to view his first photo-shoot in decades as the 'announcement of my dying', (p.43) Bill also imitates what he takes to be the Moonies' belief that an 'image-bound' culture is 'more anxious' and 'prone to hurrying its own transformation' (p.80). The statement appears melodramatic, but, in fact, precedes a fundamental self-transformation that entails a profound reengagement with media and political culture and his eventual death, while travelling to Beirut (p.43).

Recurrent in the novel is the notion that the Moonie ideals of what Chun Hwan Kwak, in his introduction to Moon's lectures, calls a 'revolution of human

⁴⁴ Slavoj Žižek, The Sublime Object of Ideology (London: Verso, 1989), p.62.

consciousness', involving something resembling global unity of mind may be achievable, partly through the use of electronic technologies (Science, p.vii). The theme recalls the semi-mystical notion of creating a 'single planetary mind', which pervades Ratner's Star as an intriguing but unresolved possibility (p.65). The Maoist academic George Haddard also advocates this idea, telling Bill that, in postmodernity, 'thought' 'bleeds out into the world'; 'there's no longer a moral or spatial distinction between thinking and acting' (p.132). After meeting Karen at Bill's rural house, the photographer Brita Nilsson becomes similarly enthused by this notion. When she describes a 'man and woman' walking the 'Great Wall of China' in opposite directions and how 'Every time I think of them, I see them from above' (p.70), she prompts Scott's striking response that technology provides ways of 'seeing people new', as if 'from space, where gender or features don't matter'. 'As if from the moon, even. We're all Moonies, or should learn to be', a remark notable for its indication that he aspires to Karen's postmodern schizophrenia, but remains trapped by the same defunct modernism as his literary hero, Bill (p.89). Although Brita initially dismisses this idealism, she herself later explores the idea of a unified global consciousness. Significantly, she considers such matters while utilizing a characteristically postmodern technology: the jet airliner. After musing that recently 'everything that came into her mind' 'seemed at once to enter the culture', whether as 'a painting or a photograph' (p.165), she concludes, that, although she was 'five miles aloft', 'the world was so intimate that she was everywhere in it' (p.167).

This association of the proliferation of technologies in postmodernity with the Moonie notion of collective consciousness is exemplified by Karen's intuitive relationship with technology. Her uncanny prophetic abilities in this area are frequently filtered through Bill's pragmatic modernist consciousness, who treats

Karen's abilities as confirmation of her comfort with communal notions of consciousness and, therefore, of his thesis that she comes 'from the future' (p.85). He remarks incredulously on her eerie habit of watching television and knowing 'what people are going to say next. Not only gets it right but does the voices' 'with a trueness that's startling' (pp.65-6). His mediation accentuates Karen's role as a mysterious, noumenous being, but also alerts the reader to Bill's growing interest in her schizophrenic outlook. In conjunction with the revelation of their sexual relationship, his curiosity about these matters suggests she may even be his second self, as Orest is Jack's in White Noise (pp.84-6). When Scott first meets Karen, DeLillo hints that Karen's schizophrenic thought process may be latent in Bill's aesthetic practice. DeLillo notes Karen's appearance near a 'sign', which 'juted from the front of the general store with a mysterious word on it', recalling Karen's schizophrenic attachment to isolated signifiers in the prologue (p.76). Scott emphasizes this 'mysterious' word, insisting that 'the whole picture' 'flows into the strange word on that sign' (p.83) and connecting Karen's word fetishism to Bill's thought, asserting that the single mysterious 'word' was a 'Bill Gray touch' (p.83). In spite of these apparently intimate physical and intellectual connections, Karen's ease with popular culture causes Bill to remain ambivalent about her sensibility. In particular, since he regards TV as the medium via which totalitarian groups make 'raids on human consciousness' (p.41), her uncanny intimacy with it intensifies his feeling that the obverse of her attachment to 'Moon's' 'single family' may be her Korean master's disturbingly absolutist 'single vision' (p.193). George Gilder has argued that 'television is at its heart a totalitarian medium', originating from 'a single station' and being 'delivered top-down to the masses' and that this is the reason

'tyrants everywhere push TV sets onto their people'.⁴⁵ Bill expresses a similar feeling that TV provides an absolutist view of the world, telling Brita that news is now 'the only narrative people need' (p.42). His view of the postmodern mass media and the subjectivity it creates is notably close to that of Niklas Luhmann, who asserts that the media 'generate a transcendental illusion', which cancels reference to reality and gives rise to a disorientated, quasi-religious state of mind.⁴⁶ Bill tells Scott that the television news has replaced the novel as the 'secular transcendence' of its time, eradicating the need for real events with 'reports and predictions and warnings' that satisfy the millenarian 'desperation' of 'our search for meaning' (p.72).

Pop art, particularly the views and aesthetic of Andy Warhol, becomes similarly symbolic in Mao II of the threat to traditional notions of selfhood and creativity that Bill perceives in postmodern culture. Throughout the novel, Warhol's work is presented as exemplary of the image-obsessed culture that Bill argues undermines his role as a modernist literary craftsman; what he calls 'a sentence maker, like a donut-maker only slower' (p.162). As Stephen Koch notes, Warhol had 'one true idea', which is the 'visual power' the image is 'capable of exerting over the mind'.⁴⁷ Although this is DeLillo's first treatment of Warhol, he has long pursued an interest in the 'power of images' that is parallel to Warhol's and which suggests a perverse form of artistic kinship between them (Anything, p.85). Unlike Warhol, though, but like Bill, he seems ambivalent about the impact of image-culture, remarking in interview that 'There's something in the image that seems to collide with the very idea of individual identity', a view that suggests he sees rational

⁴⁵ George Gilder, Life After Television: The Coming Transformation of Media and American Life (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1994), p.46.

⁴⁶ Niklas Luhmann, The Reality of the Mass Media, trans. by Kathleen Cross (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), p.4.

grounds for Bill's anxieties on the subject.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, Mao II implicitly acknowledges the centrality of images to postmodernity, offering several photographs scattered through the text, including a mass wedding, dying Liverpool fans at the Hillsborough soccer disaster, and the funeral of Ayatollah Khomeini (p.1, p.17, p.105). Notably, it is Karen who introduces a Warhol print into the house, the 'reproduction of a pencil drawing called Mao II', which gives the novel its title, further confirming her alignment with the postmodern media culture Bill fears (p.62). Likewise, Scott's visit to a Warhol retrospective in New York before meeting Brita indicates his sympathy for the pop art that scandalizes Bill's modernist sensibility. Indeed, although some critics argue that Scott relentlessly emphasizes commerce, his advice that Bill forego 'a king's whatever, multimillions' (p.52) and refuse to publish because 'the withheld work of art is the only eloquence left' indicates enthusiasm for a postmodern conceptual aesthetic, at the expense of financial considerations (p.67).

Given that Mao II is structured largely as an intellectual 'argument about the future', Warhol's importance in the text may be due partly to his well-known views on the media and the creative process, which conflict dramatically with Bill's. His blithe statements that television anaesthetized him to the point where people's 'problems' 'didn't really affect me anymore' and his conclusion that 'existence itself is nothing' (p.15) support Bill's opinion that the 'transcendental illusion' of the postmodern media corrodes respect for the individual.⁴⁹ Warhol's view that 'every painting should be the same size and the same colour so they're all interchangeable' also demonstrates his contempt for the kind of inspired, even romantic, individual

⁴⁷ Stephen Koch, Stargazer: The Life, World and Films of Andy Warhol (London: Marion Boyars, 1991), p.xii.

⁴⁸ Maria Nadotti, 'An Interview with Don DeLillo', in Salmagundi, 100 (1993), 86-97 (p.88).

creativity Bill espouses (p134). Indeed, Warhol rejects the notion of artistic originality as outdated to the extent that he believes ‘everybody should be a “machine”’.⁵⁰ As well as uncongenial to Bill, this view is unlikely to satisfy DeLillo, who has stated his opinion that the writer should be considered the ‘champion of the self’ and always treats the notion of mind and self as machine as an object of some anxiety. Bill is also unlikely to approve of the disconnection from history that characterizes Warhol’s work. As an artist who wishes to alter the ‘inner life of the culture’ (p.41), Bill would regard as anathema Warhol’s ‘silk screens’ of Mao Zedong, in which the image, as Scott puts it, by ‘floating nearly free of its photographic source’ appears to become ‘unwitting of history’ (p.21). By contrast, Bill affirms his attraction to the ‘photographic source’, opting to seek publicity through photography, which emerged in modernity, rather than taking the more postmodern option of ‘talking’ ‘on TV’ that Karen humorously suggests (p.71). Photography is indeed highly apposite as a vehicle for Bill’s public emergence, being the visual equivalent of the modernist naturalism he practices. As Barthes argues, the photograph conveys the sense of a perfect ‘denotation’ of its object that makes its image the ‘perfect analogon’ of reality, rendering it less susceptible to assimilation into the sensational media ‘narrative’ Bill abhors.⁵¹ Consequently, the violence of Bill’s response to Scott’s Warholian suggestion that he use the absence of a book ‘to define an idea, a principle’ may be provoked by the ineluctable association of such ideas with Warhol’s well-known nihilism and anti-historicism (p.67). So angry is he that he reaches for ‘the butter dish, backhanding it across the table’ (p.74), while protesting unconvincingly that ‘The

⁴⁹ Andy Warhol, The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: From A to B and Back Again (London: Picador, 1979), p.30, p.32.

⁵⁰ Patrick S. Smith, Andy Warhol’s Art and Films (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Research Press, 1986), p.107.

book appears'. 'Sooner than anyone thinks' (p.73). Yet, paradoxically, as in the case of his unspoken sympathy with Karen's postmodern schizophrenia, in spite of apparent hostility to conceptual art, Bill's behaviour demonstrates notable affinities with Warhol's opinions and persona, which hint at the implicit presence of postmodernist, even Warholian, ideas within Bill's apparently modernist stance. Like Warhol, whose studio 'The Factory' became highly fashionable in New York during the 1960s, Bill has benefited from a shallow postmodern cult of personality that allowed him to acquire 'celebrity by doing nothing' in the twenty-three years since he has published (p.52). Similarly, his voluntary 'concealment' or 'seclusion' (p.45) resembles the postmodernist schizophrenia of what Smith calls Warhol's 'conscious identification' with 'self-absorbed consciousness' (Smith, p.11). Moreover, Koch argues that Warhol's use of ready-made images represents 'a new immediacy' that 'renewed for our time' 'the romantic tradition', an assessment that suggests that his aesthetic may justifiably be placed in historical continuity with Bill's emphasis on originality and individualism (Koch, p.iv-v).

Bill's increasing sympathy with Karen's postmodern worldview is further demonstrated by the degeneration of his working life into a schizophrenic formalism, like that which informs Win Everett's plot-making in Libra. Like Everett's intelligence work, Bill's writing process fits Deleuze and Guattari's description of the capitalist schizophrenic's rearrangement of 'fragments continually in new and different patterns and configurations' and concomitant 'indifference toward the act of producing' (p.7). He labours obsessively on his work in progress; as Scott says, he 'picks it up, smells it, weighs it, rewrites it' (p.51) but, after two decades, remains reluctant to accept Scott's assertion that 'the book is finished' (p.72). In spite of his

⁵¹ Roland Barthes, Image Music Text, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1990), pp.17-18.

burgeoning attraction to postmodern culture, he refuses to adapt to what he sees as the contemporary commodification of writers and the consequent diminution of their status. As he tells Brita, 'the more books they publish, the weaker we become' (p.47), a situation he resists by refusing to produce a finished product, while claiming unconvincingly to a prospective publisher that 'I'm fixing the punctuation' (p.127). Rather than a finished work of art, therefore, Bill produces a vault full of 'old handwritten manuscripts, printer's typescripts' and 'master galleys', which Scott tends and shows to the occasional visitor. As with Everett, this vapid formalism is related to a profound crisis of subjectivity, a feeling that he needs a 'saint' to cure 'the whole man, body, soul and self' (p.168), which, in his work, manifests as the realization that 'I no longer see myself in the language' (p.48). It is this despair that eventually prompts his departure for the Middle East, with the aim of constructing a less discrete self, through participation in international politics. Yet, the trip leads eventually to his death from injuries sustained in a car accident. Like Owen in The Names, his apparent decision to accept death, rather than seek medical attention, arises from an inability to adapt to postmodernity and a concomitant wish to escape an outmoded modernist subjectivity, which he experiences as a 'cosmology of pain' (p.45). His physical decline is also accompanied, like Owen's, by the analeptic return of forbidding childhood memories, particularly of his father, who is quoted informing him darkly that 'We need to have a confab junior' and complaining that 'I keep telling you and telling you and telling you' (p.216). Bill's flight from his loveless childhood is emphasized by Scott's discovery that, seeking to eradicate this paternal influence, Bill changed his name from William Skansey Jr. (p.144). This eschewal of his father's name is comparable to Karen's schizophrenic wish to reject 'daddy-mommy' (p.92), in favour of her 'true father' and provides another hint that schizophrenic

disorientation like hers is latent within Bill's modernism. Similarly, the absence of Bill's birth certificate, with a note that a 'record of birth' exists in a 'state office' in 'Des Moines', demonstrates Bill's use of schizophrenic formalism, to evade the difficulties of striving for autonomous selfhood (p.144). Scott actively encourages this formalism, motivated by a desire to emulate Karen's schizophrenia and escape his own frustratingly discrete subjectivity. DeLillo notes that Scott himself takes 'pleasure in lists', finding in them 'a form of contentment' and 'a way of working toward a new reality' (p.139), hinting that these bureaucratic tasks help him escape his identity as 'a luckless boy' (p.58). When Bill disappears, Scott's first anxious response is to suggest that they 'need to do lists', indicating the psychological comfort he gains from these administrative duties (p.118). Similarly, while helping Bill to obscure his former identity, his feeling that it would 'sustain and expand' him to 'keep absolutely silent' suggests a vicarious satisfaction, which arises from a powerful desire to transform his own subjectivity (p.185).

It may be fear of losing such opportunities that causes Scott to dread Brita's arrival. Although, given their sympathy with contemporary media culture, it is ironic that Karen and Scott should perceive Brita's publicity photos as threatening, Bill's willingness to be photographed strikes them as a symbolic 'fissure', an indication that he is willing to disturb his 'carefully balanced' life (p.57). Bill takes a more dour view of the photographs' symbolism, asserting half-seriously that they are the 'announcement of my dying' (p.43), before explaining that he views image-production as 'a morbid business' that creates 'a sentimental past' for the viewer (p.42). Notably, this viewpoint is the obverse of DeLillo's familiar Rankian interpretation of contemporary images as apotropaia against death-anxiety, hinting

that Bill may prefer death to the difficulties of adapting to postmodernity.⁵² Pierre Bourdieu accounts for photography's popularity by its ability to produce an apparently "faithful reproduction", which will fulfil the expectations of popular naturalism'.⁵³ Although Bill does not view photography as wholly naturalistic, remarking, for example, on the subtle ways in which being photographed is 'changing me' (p.43), by comparison with the distortions of mass market television, it is sympathetic to his Hemingwayesque project of a modernist naturalist aesthetic. In Brita, he appears to find a partner for this endeavour, a woman of comparable age who values literature sufficiently to spend her life photographing 'Only writers' (p.25) and bitterly resents the erection of postmodern 'towers' to replace the 'brownish tones' of old New York (p.39). Yet, their fellowship develops in an unexpected direction, as their covert sympathy with the schizophrenic culture of postmodernity becomes increasingly apparent. Like him, she develops an unlikely affinity with Karen, which extends to entrusting 'her home, her work, her wine and her cat' (p.167) to her, while she travels to 'take pictures of writers' (p.147). Elements of her behaviour also resemble that of Karen. In particular, she experiences a productive and dynamic psychical relationship with technologies, which DeLillo conveys by remarking on the 'pure will that the camera uncovered in her, the will to see deeply' (p.37). The formulation notably recalls Susan Sontag's view that the use of the camera as 'a tool of power' and 'a predatory weapon' is widespread in contemporary America and prefigures the analogy DeLillo draws between photography and gunfire at the end of the novel.⁵⁴ By the end of the text, her trajectory becomes synchronous

⁵² Otto Rank, Beyond Psychology (New York: Dover Publications, 1958), p.76.

⁵³ Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Social Definition of Photography', in Photography: A Middle Brow Art (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), pp.73-98 (pp. 78-79).

⁵⁴ Susan Sontag, On Photography (London: Penguin, 2002), p.8, p.14.

with Bill's. She undergoes the same partial conversion to postmodernism and mirrors his abandonment of fiction by bringing her project of photographing writers to 'a quiet end' (p.230). Then, finally, like her subject, she travels to Beirut to confront the terrorists that he believes dominate contemporary culture (p.230).

Bill's inability to forsake his Heminwayesque modernism entirely is accentuated by the resemblance between his death and that of the protagonist of Hemingway's tale The Snows of Kilimanjaro.⁵⁵ The parallel not only reaffirms the lasting intensity of Bill's feelings for modernism, but hints that his residual passion for the exhausted movement is hastening his death. Hemingway's central character is a similarly disillusioned writer, who allows himself to die from a minor wound that could have been salved with iodine (p.13). After Bill leaves Scott and Karen and flies to London, in his attempt to free the Swiss poet, he is hit by a car and suffers a 'Lacerated liver', for which he, like Hemingway's depressive writer, refuses to seek medical treatment (p.208). In a comical restaurant scene, Bill quizzes Veterinarians about the injury, under the guise of seeking material for a book. They advise him that it would be 'Completely and totally implausible' (p.209) for his 'character' (p.207) to undertake the 'ocean voyage' to Beirut that Bill is considering (p.209). Bill's disregard of their advice concerning this notional fictional character indicates a desire to dispose of literature and make direct contact with historical reality, in the way craved by Oswald and Karen. His writing about the hostage serves similar purposes. He is driven by increasing suspicion of the 'pure game of making up' (p.46) and intrigued by a form of writing that will involve him in contemporary political culture and which might permit him to embrace a more collective form of consciousness.

⁵⁵ Ernest Hemingway, 'The Snows of Kilimanjaro', in The Snows of Kilimanjaro and Other Stories (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1961), pp.3-29.

This literary task constitutes an attempt to provide an authentic, and realistic, counter-narrative to the 'plots and fictions' of terrorists, which he believes seek, in totalitarian fashion, to erect 'a separate mental state' and 'empty the world of meaning' (p.200).

Yet, his involvement with Middle Eastern politics, which extends to offering to take the hostage's place, is finally subverted by his inability to shed an attachment to modernist notions of mind and self as discrete, foreclosing any possibility of merging with history or playing a meaningful political role. Even in his political writing, Bill clings to his modernist dogma that subjectivity can be created through the writing process, declaring that, for the hostage, 'The only way to be in the world was to write himself there' (p.204).

Bill's oscillation between emphasizing individual selfhood and objective historical forces is remarkably apposite to his search for Maoist terrorists in Beirut. As Stuart Schram observes, although nominally a Marxist and a student of 'the productive forces', Mao laid 'consistent stress on the importance of conscious activity, subjective forces and the superstructure', which has provoked considerable criticism in China since his death.⁵⁶ Indeed, before Bill's journey, George Haddard insists that his individualistic philosophy resembles Maoism and that, like Mao's totalitarian adherents, Bill 'would have seen the need for an absolute being' like Mao Tse-Tung (p.163). DeLillo extends the analogy between Mao and Bill by having Scott compare Bill's use of photographs to that of the Chinese communist leader, who periodically staged 'messianic returns', which were heralded by fresh images (p.141). DeLillo may have been aware that in 1988, the year before he began Mao II, 'graven images' of Mao were destroyed in China, which suggests that the postmodern cult of personality that created Bill's celebrity may be passing into history (Thought, p.201).

⁵⁶ Stuart Schram, The Thought of Mao Tse-Tung (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.5.

Later, Scott sings a 'bit of old Beatles, a line about carrying pictures of Chairman Mao' (p.223). Although the song, 'Revolution 1', with its advice to 'free your mind instead', might seem to support Bill's resolute opposition to totalitarianism of Mao's kind, the numerous connections do raise the question, half-seriously, of whether Bill might be the 'Mao II' of the title.⁵⁷ Yet, far from having the sense of self to run a revolution or emulate what Schram calls Mao's cultivation of the 'cult of his own personality' (p.202), Bill ultimately lacks even the will to live. After his death, a looter gives his passport to 'militia in Beirut', symbolically transferring his identity to the forces he holds responsible for diminishing his artistic influence (p.217). His death at sea, while halfway to Beirut, symbolizes his ambivalent response to the media culture of postmodernity and his ultimate inability to adapt to it. Although political writing offers him the excitement of 'something at stake' (p.167) and, perhaps, as he suggests of the hostage, 'words' that could once again 'tell him who he was', (p.204) the difficulty of transforming his private 'cosmology of pain' (p.45) into a more postmodern subjectivity proves too great.

Unlike the great majority of DeLillo's previous novels, Mao II does not conclude by focusing on the crisis of subjectivity endured by its male protagonist. Rather, in an epilogue entitled 'In Beirut', it follows Brita on her less dramatic but equally paradoxical journey to Lebanon, where she meets and photographs the Maoist terrorist chief Abu Rashid, for whom Bill was searching when he died. The section provides further examples of postmodernist culture's tendency to undermine traditional notions of individual identity. It focuses in particular on Rashid's child acolytes, many of whom wear Rashid's 'picture on their shirts' (p.232) or 'a long

⁵⁷ <<http://www.musicsonglyrics.com/B/Beatles/Beatles%20-%20Revolution%201%201lyr>>, last accessed 6/9/2004.

hood' (p.233) to demonstrate their allegiance to this Maoist 'absolute being' (p.163). Like Bill, Brita ends caught between individual and communal modes of being, assailed equally by her burgeoning sense that the solipsism of the writers she photographed has become outmoded and her horror at the austere impersonal 'identity' and 'purpose' of Rashid's followers. Her 'crazy idea' that the 'intensely red' signs for 'a new soft drink Coke II' resemble communist flags and may 'herald the presence of the Maoist group' in Beirut reverses the Warholian reduction of politics to pop art and demonstrates her yearning for contact with historical reality (p.230). On the other hand, her impulsive decision, during the photo-shoot, to walk 'over to the boy at the door' and remove 'his hood' (p.236) indicates a latent hostility to contemporary mass consciousness and a fundamental disagreement with Mao's view that events attain 'significance' 'only collectively'.⁵⁸ Although this tension is left unresolved, it is ameliorated by a momentary epiphany, when Brita witnesses a symbol of collective military strength employed for personal fulfillment. From her balcony, she sees a 'Soviet T-34' tank (p.239) serving as transport for a wedding party, a fusion of the communal and individual with such redemptive power that she feels she might 'walk along in her pajama shirt and panties all the way to heaven' (p.240). It is followed immediately by a similar moment, when she mistakes the 'flash unit' of a camera across the city for 'automatic weapons fire' (p.241). The error recalls the latent violence of the 'pure will' photography aroused in her. This 'will' implies a fierce individualism, which is qualified and ameliorated seconds later, when the novel ends with her recognition that the 'bursts of relentless light' are the work of a fellow photographer, reminding her of the paradox that, in her work at least, she belongs to a global community of individualists like herself.

⁵⁸ Mao-Tse-Tung, The Poetry of Mao-Tse-Tung, trans. by Hua-ling Wieh Engle and Paul Engle (London: Wildwood House, 1973), p.10.

Underworld: 'The Deep Mind of the Culture'

In his eleventh novel Underworld (1997), DeLillo employs the notion of a unified collective mind as the thematic and aesthetic organising principle of his text. He explores the ethical possibilities of a model of mind that is vastly expanded and unrestricted by space or the limitations of individual subjectivity, particularly the opportunity it may provide of ameliorating the racial strife that dogs American society. DeLillo also delineates the formidable challenge such schizophrenic mental synthesis confronts in what Patrick O'Donnell aptly terms the 'cultural paranoia' embedded in the U.S. psyche, which DeLillo often associates with a defunct modernism.⁵⁹ Throughout the novel, the schizophrenic drive towards psychological unity is in conflict with this isolating and deeply ingrained paranoia and DeLillo often presents American culture as existing in a disorientating state of oscillation between these two troubling alternatives. Yet, in spite of the seemingly widespread isolation paranoia causes, DeLillo is persuaded of the existence of what, in 'The Power of History', published concurrently with Underworld, he calls 'the deep mind of the culture', a notion that is one important implication of the novel's polysemous title.⁶⁰ In Underworld, DeLillo often approaches this 'deep mind' through close examination of the complex technologies of the post-war world, particularly the Internet and the atomic bomb, and interprets these systems as causal factors in, and a series of metaphors for, its rapid development. In his emphasis on the myriad interconnections

⁵⁹ Patrick O'Donnell, Latent Destinies: Cultural Paranoia and Contemporary U.S. Narrative (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000)

⁶⁰ Don DeLillo, 'The Power of History' in The New York Times, 7th September 1997, pp.60-63 (p.62).

of technological systems, far too complex for any individual to design or envisage, DeLillo investigates the implication of the notion that, in the words of James Surowiecki, 'our collective intelligence is often excellent' because 'the crowd is holding a nearly complete picture of the world in its collective brain'.⁶¹ DeLillo's use of the phrase 'deep mind' arises in a discussion of postmodern technology as a phenomenon that subsists within, or 'flows through' communal consciousness, confirming one's impression that it denotes a specifically contemporary form of collective thought, which relies on sophisticated technologies for its existence (p.62). The expression recurs in the novel, in its 1970s section 'Cocksucker Blues'. When conceptual artist Klara Sax attends the first public showing of the Zapruder film of the Kennedy assassination, she speculates on whether this murder had emerged from the 'streamy debris of the deep mind'. Klara also suggests that such technologies bear the spectral imprint of the consciousness it records and are therefore capable of disseminating a model of mind throughout American culture. For Klara, the infamous tape seemed to contain 'some trick of film emulsion that showed the ghost of consciousness', thus enabling it to represent and transmit 'some crude living likeness of the mind's own technology' (p.496). In the numerous expositions of collective technological experience that punctuate Underworld, DeLillo often employs a generalised second person 'you', which alludes to the more communal model of mind they help to generate. When Matt views footage of the so-called 'Texas Highway Killer' shooting a victim, DeLillo uses numerous such locutions, as in the statement 'There's something here that speaks to you directly', to imply technology's ability to provoke a collective reaction among seemingly isolated individuals (p.157). DeLillo's

⁶¹ James Surowiecki, The Wisdom of Crowds: Why The Many Are Smarter Than The Few And How Collective Wisdom Shapes Economies, Societies, And Nations (New York: Doubleday, 2004), p.xiv, p.11.

claim that, in video footage, 'serial murder has found its medium, or vice versa-an act of shadow technology' confirms that, as in Mao II, technology acts as a conduit for the expansion of all mental experience, even the blatantly pathological, into an increasingly collective public sphere (p.159).

The novel is structured around the search for the baseball with which Bobby Thomson hit his famous 'homer' at the World Series play-off between the New York Giants and the Brooklyn Dodgers, on 3rd October 1951, and the more difficult task of finding the ball's original owner. Waste managers Brian Glassic and Nick Shay, the novel's protagonist and the only character to narrate parts of the text in the first person, undertake the first part of this quest and eventually purchase the ball, many years after the game. Meanwhile, the collector from whom they acquire it, Marvin Lundy, labours obsessively to carry out the second. To reflect this, the novel becomes a journey into the past, with parts one to six describing a retroactive movement from 1992 to 1951, the year of the original game. As Marvin observes, he is 'compiling a record of the object's recent forward motion while simultaneously tracking it backwards to the distant past', a paradoxical union of past and future which recalls the Heideggerian treatment of time apparent in some of DeLillo's earlier novels (p.318).

⁶² Considerable debate has therefore focused on the meaning of the baseball in question. Jesse Kavadlo has called it 'a kind of American Holy Grail' and the 'primary expression of the restless religious impulse evident in Mao II' (Balance, p.102). Timothy L. Parrish argues that for Nick, who buys it many years after the game, the ball functions as the symbol of an antediluvian, peaceful age, so that 'Recovering the ball becomes a way of refusing both history and one's involvement in

⁶² Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp.372-73.

it'.⁶³ Parrish's argument is based partly on the fact that the game represents a traumatic shift in Nick's life: it closely precedes his, apparently unintentional, shooting of his friend George Manza, of whose manslaughter he is convicted. As Nick says, the ball represents 'Bad luck', 'The moment that makes the life' (p.132). In his connection of baseball with the idea of American culture as characterised by unity and simplicity, what, in Mao II, he calls the game's 'sense of shared heart and untranslatable lore', DeLillo follows in a considerable tradition of literary thought (p.9). Walt Whitman remarked that the game was 'the emblem and enactment of straightforwardness' and, according to Ed Folsom, 'came to see baseball as an essential metaphor for America'.⁶⁴ In Philip Roth's American Pastoral, baseball is played by the legend of Newark, 'Swede Levov', whose athletic performances provide a 'delusionary kind of sustenance' and 'a repository of all their hopes', for those enduring the absence of loved ones in World War Two.⁶⁵ Similarly, John Cheever, in his journals, appears to view baseball as a panacea for all anxiety and complexity, ending an angst-ridden meditation on the 'labyrinthine' difficulties of his closeted homosexuality with the declaration 'Play a little baseball and the Gordian knot crumbles into dust'.⁶⁶ Cheever may have influenced DeLillo in his connection of the baseball crowd with the notion of a unified 'deep mind'. While writing Underworld, DeLillo gave an interview, in which he quoted Cheever speaking of the 'migratory vastness' of the baseball crowd (Nadotti, p.88).⁶⁷ In DeLillo's words,

⁶³ Timothy L. Parrish, 'From Hoover's FBI to Eisenstein's Unterwelt: DeLillo Directs the Postmodern Novel', in Modern Fiction Studies, 45 (1999), 696-723 (p.701).

⁶⁴ The Gathering of the Forces, ed. by Cleveland Rodgers and John Black (New York: Putnam, 1920), p.51 and Walt Whitman's Native Representations, ed. by Ed Folsom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.35.

⁶⁵ Philip Roth, American Pastoral (London: Vintage, 1998), p.4.

⁶⁶ John Cheever, The Journals (London: Jonathan Cape, 1991), p.8.

Cheever asserts that 'the job of the writer' is to understand the 'forty people trying to get the baseball', after a home run, and 'the other ten or twenty thousand who leave the stadium when the game is over' (p.88). This view seems likely to have inspired the prologue of Underworld, in which DeLillo describes the psychological dynamic of the 'assembling crowd' (p.11) and the African American Cotter Martin's successful capture of the baseball from a belligerent crowd with his 'ladling hand' (p.48).

DeLillo uses the baseball simultaneously to question the mythical unity of American culture and affirm the existence of the emergent unified 'deep mind' of postmodernity. He emphasizes the absence of the original African American owners of the ball from Marvin's records, which symbolises the systematic oppression and exclusion suffered by American non-whites. Yet, by reconstructing the ball's journey, DeLillo shows that, in Nick's words, the baseball goes 'back awhile, connecting many things' (p.131). Rather than the ball symbolising the 'antediluvian' or a flight from history, the growing unity of the contemporary 'deep mind' is aptly represented by an object cherished by numerous owners, both black and white.

Where critics examine Underworld's concern with unity, it is usually in the context of DeLillo's presentation of multiple interconnections within economic and technological systems and language, rather than his concern with mind. Kavadlo argues that DeLillo rescues the linguistic, playing the role of 'waste manager', and 'reusing, reappropriating', 'and ultimately redeeming language'.⁶⁸ Parrish remarks on DeLillo's 'engagement with the interconnected systems of meaning-making that define the postmodern era', while Robert McMinn unravels the complex interconnections between the novel's 'multiple plot threads' and concludes shrewdly

⁶⁷ The quotation that DeLillo paraphrases here can be found on p.185 of Cheever's journals.

⁶⁸ Jesse Kavadlo, 'Recycling Authority: Don DeLillo's Waste Management', in Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction, 42 (2001), 384-401, (p.385).

that Underworld is about 'connection more than it is about anything else'.⁶⁹ In addressing the 'connections' that form the 'deep mind' of his nation, DeLillo's subject is nothing less than the entire post-war culture of the U.S., from the early 1950s to an unspecified point in the mid 1990s. Indeed, much criticism of Underworld stresses the book's immense scope, both in the context of DeLillo's oeuvre and American postmodernity. Kavadlo remarks that, in this novel, 'the overarching themes of DeLillo's corpus coalesce', acknowledging that Underworld attempts to examine the entire cultural milieu in which his fiction is embedded.⁷⁰ Consequently, Underworld is a large book, both in terms of its 827 pages, and its extraordinary historical range and detail, which may be unparalleled in post-war American literature. Like Libra, Underworld is a historical novel and contains numerous non-fictional characters, including DeLillo's portrayals of J. Edgar Hoover, Frank Sinatra, and Lenny Bruce. This blend of historical and invented characters recalls E.L. Doctorow's classic novel Ragtime, whose influence DeLillo comes close to acknowledging in 'The Power of History', when he remarks that, in Doctorow's novel, 'history and mock history' 'form a kind of syncopated reality'.⁷¹ Libra is, to employ Cowart's vocabulary, a 'Turning Point' text: it examines the genealogy of a historical phenomenon, the pervasive sense of unreality that afflicts American postmodernity. Underworld, on the other hand, is not restricted by a single set of events, or by focusing on a narrowly defined period. It can therefore cover a wide range of historical subject matter and contains significant elements of the 'Way It

⁶⁹ Timothy L. Parrish, 'Pynchon and DeLillo', in Underwords: Perspectives on Don DeLillo's Underworld, ed. by Joseph Dewey et al (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2002), pp.79-92 (p. 79) and Robert McMinn, 'Underworld: Sin and Atonement', in Underwords: Perspectives on Don DeLillo's Underworld, ed. by Joseph Dewey et al (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2002), pp.37-49 (p.37).

⁷⁰ Jesse Kavadlo, Don DeLillo: Balance at the Edge of Belief (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), p.102.

Was' novel, which emphasises 'historical verisimilitude' (History, p.8). DeLillo strives mightily to portray the atmosphere of post-war urban America, often through extensive use of the 'jostling argot of the street' (p.107). This is particularly so in the sections set in his native Bronx, which provide a powerful sense of the atmosphere of Italian American culture, especially that of the 1950s, by dwelling on the intricate connotations of expressions like 'See what you're gonna do' and 'Who's better than me?' (p.700). Yet, DeLillo does not merely seek accurate reproduction, but insight into the process by which postmodern American culture produces an increasingly unified model of mind. Rather than the concentrated attention on the early 1960s that the plot of Libra necessitates, Underworld allows DeLillo to range over much of postmodernity: more than forty years of U.S. history.

In Underworld, postmodernity appears to become nascent in the years immediately after World War Two, an event that, in Perry Anderson's words, marked a critical 'caesura', after which 'With all the historical forces that had spurred it gone, the elan of modernism gave out'.⁷² The novel begins on 3rd October 1951, with the conjunction of the famous and dramatic World Series play-off between the New York Giants and the Brooklyn Dodgers and the news of the Soviet Union's second atomic test. Brian Glassic insists on the date's pivotal nature, remarking that the match's historical importance lies in its narrowly predating the full onset of postmodernity and belonging to an era before events were 'replayed and worn out and run down and used up before midnight of the first day' (p.98). Nevertheless, after World War Two, as Anderson points out, 'modernist energies were not subject to sudden cancellation, but still glowed intermittently here and there' (p.82). It seems appropriate, therefore, that several characters, such as the protagonist Nick and the schoolteacher and nun Sister

⁷¹ E.L. Doctorow, Ragtime (New York: Random House, 1975)

Edgar move slowly from the psychological withdrawal of modernist paranoia to a more communal, postmodern mode of thought. This tension between modernism and postmodernism is also present in the form of the novel. Indeed, as Phillip Nel argues shrewdly, it is a novel that 'complicates traditional distinctions between modernism and postmodernism'.⁷³ DeLillo's appropriation of numerous cultural texts, from TV, film, and music, of which he gives numerous detailed accounts, seems characteristically postmodern, as does his use of cinematic techniques such as montage. Yet, paradoxically, montage is a technique firmly associated with modernist cinema and the complex, insular web of plot connections that DeLillo constructs in Underworld also seems modernist in its production of the text as a closed, autotelic system. Indeed, in spite of DeLillo's reputation as a postmodernist, the importance of modernist technique is sufficiently great in Underworld that the author himself has suggested 'Maybe it's the last modernist gasp'.⁷⁴

DeLillo use of cinematic technique, especially montage-like juxtapositions, assists him in exploring the postmodern 'deep mind', by allowing him to hint at the unacknowledged interdependence or hidden similarities between groups or individuals profoundly alienated from one another. In Part 5, 'Better Things For Better Living Through Chemistry', which consists of short, dated scenes from the 1950s and 1960s, DeLillo follows the activities of African American civil rights campaigners with those of suburban 1950s white Americans, who are likely to consider themselves their antithesis (p.521). For much of the section, scenes from the

⁷² Perry Anderson, The Origins of Postmodernity (London: Verso, 1998), p.82.

⁷³ Phillip Nel, "'A Small Incisive Shock': Modern Forms, Postmodern Politics, And the Role of the Avant-Garde in Underworld", in Modern Fiction Studies, 45 (1999), 724-52, (p.725).

⁷⁴ Richard Williams, 'Everything Under the Bomb', in The Guardian 10th January 1998 at <<http://reports.guardian.co.uk/papers/199801109-34.html>>, p.9 of 9, last accessed 15th February 2005.

1950s alternate with those from the later decade, as though to emphasise the halting rate of progress achieved by civil rights campaigners across the period. Elsewhere, DeLillo uses montage to remark eloquently on 'high culture's' tendency to dismiss its 'low' equivalent as waste, while remaining inextricably linked and indebted to it. He pointedly embeds a monologue by legendary subway graffiti artist, 'Moonman 157' within an account of a public showing of a fictional Eisenstein film Unterwelt, which is attended by many of the New York intelligentsia (p.433). In depicting crowds, DeLillo's narrative gaze appropriates the range and speed of the movie camera, to present the experience of numerous individuals, within a short time. This camera-eye mode is employed with particular frequency in the novella-length prologue, 'The Triumph of Death', which contains the novel's largest crowd, gathered for the World Series play-off game. The section is structured around the highly cinematic juxtaposition of the Soviet Union's second atomic test (p.23), news of which reaches J. Edgar Hoover during the match, and the ecstatic response to Bobby Thomson's ninth innings home run, which gave the Giants victory. DeLillo maintains the connection between the two synchronous occurrences throughout the novel, suggesting that, to different sections of the public, both become known as 'the Shot Heard Around the World' (p.669). In interview, he has revealed that his discovery of the concurrence of the two events made him feel the 'power of history' and inspired him to write the novel (Everything, p.4). The two 'Shots' are connected by the competition and possibility of defeat that characterise both baseball and the Cold War and the analogy DeLillo draws between them may imply a view of U.S. culture as inherently, and pathologically adversarial.

DeLillo switches focus between apparently disparate characters to indicate the unsuspected links between them. From Hoover, who is watching the game with Frank

Sinatra, among others, he moves to Cotter Martin, an African American truant who escapes with the match ball at the end of the game, and then to an anonymous 'sixteen-year-old in the Bronx' listening to the game, who we later understand to be Nick Shay (pp.30-32). As the novel goes on, the reader appreciates that Hoover and Nick are connected by profound isolation and paranoia, which, in both men, is symbolised by an obsessive concern with waste, in its myriad forms, and a concomitant difficulty in disposing of it. As Nick says, waste always seems 'to tell us something about ourselves' (p.104). Hoover's paranoia manifests in perpetual terror of unclean 'unseeable life forms' and the equally insidious left-wing political activists, by whom he believes the nation is threatened (p.18). Nick's, on the other hand, is made plain by his fixed belief that his father, who deserted the family, was murdered by the local Mafia or 'underworld', another connotation of the novel's title, who, he claims, in self-consciously clichéd terms, which may hint at unexpressed doubts on the subject, took him 'where the lagoon lies silent' and 'gave it to him good' (p.91). As Deleuze and Guattari suggest, paranoia carries 'an energy of disjunction' that isolates the human subject (p.13). Both men are presented as solitaires. Nick carries an enduring feeling that he is, like the modernist Bill in Mao II, 'a country of one', characterised by 'a measured separation' (p.275), while the isolate Hoover dreams of towels never 'used by anyone else' and is described as a 'self-perfected American' (p.32). Their obsession with waste disposal symbolizes what Freud interprets as the paranoiac's need to rid themselves of repressed libido, after having, in his words, 'withdrawn from the people in his environment and from the external world generally'.⁷⁵ Such is Nick's interest in waste disposal that he becomes

⁷⁵ Sigmund Freud, 'Psycho-analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Case of Paranoia', in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Vol. XIII (1911-1913), trans. by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), pp.3-82 (p.70).

a professional waste manager and, later, an 'executive emeritus' of waste (p.804). He is pathologically compulsive in his repeated references to his method of discarding 'yard waste' (p.103), informing the reader on several occasions that 'We bundled the newspapers but did not tie them in twine' (p.103, p.89, p.804, p.807). Similarly, 'J. Edgar Hoover' is depicted as comically obsessive in his efforts to avoid having his private waste inspected, in half-digested form, by revolutionary 'urban guerillas'. The group, led by Nick's future colleague Jesse Detwiler, plans a 'garbage raid' on Hoover's home in Washington D.C., in 1966, to which the F.B.I. boss responds as though it is 'the end of the world in triplicate' (p.557). Their paranoid mind-set arises from trauma and profound unhappiness. Hoover possesses a 'stop-cocked soul' (p.28), while Nick's emotional life is constructed around the rigorous exclusion of several disturbing events that have caused him to repress any hope of achieving what Freud calls 'libidinal cathexis' (Paranoia, p.72). As Michael Thompson argues, waste must always remain 'covert' and, accordingly, Nick's experiences remain secret, even from his wife, until the end of the novel.⁷⁶ Waste is, by definition, beyond linguistic expression; it is, as Slavoj Žižek puts it, the 'remnants' of signification and Nick's past is similarly resistant to articulation (Sublime, p.167). He never speaks of the 'strange shaded grief' he feels for the foetus his girlfriend Amy had aborted in 1959 (p.589). His father's abandonment of his family is considered so heinous by the Italian American community that, as Matt remarks, 'They don't even have a name for this' (p.204). Likewise, Nick finds himself unable to describe in detail his shooting of his friend George (p.132). When it is finally narrated, it is in the third person and in a halting, repetitive style reminiscent of Gertrude Stein, which conveys the immense shock the incident inflicts on him (pp.780-81).

⁷⁶ Michael Thompson, The Creation and Destruction of Value (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p.20.

In spite of its ineffability, in Underworld, waste plays a dynamic role in the construction of culture and the forms of consciousness attendant upon it. Like A.R. Ammons, in his poem Garbage, published in 1992 during the writing of Underworld, DeLillo portrays garbage as ‘the catalyst of going and becoming’.⁷⁷ He suggests that waste exists in a dialectical relationship with culture: Nick’s colleague, former garbage ‘guerrilla’, Jesse Detwiler argues civilization did not produce garbage as ‘a noisome offshoot’, but ‘garbage rose first, inciting people to build a civilization in response’ (p.287). Garbage’s potency and resistance to articulation causes DeLillo, like Ammons, to attribute ‘spiritual’ qualities to it (Garbage, p.18). Nick declares that the ‘whisper of mystical contemplation’ is ‘totally appropriate’ to ‘the subject of waste’ (p.282). But the power of supposed waste becomes most apparent in the paranoid treatment of human beings as refuse, a fate that, in Underworld, is often visited upon non-whites, whose contribution to the cultural ‘deep mind’ is frequently repressed by whites and dismissed as dirt. This is first apparent in the prologue, in DeLillo’s portrayal of Cotter Martin. Where Hoover and Nick are connected by a shared paranoia, the African American Cotter’s main connection to Nick and Hoover is a common nationality. DeLillo emphasises this from the novel’s first line, which declares of Cotter ‘He speaks in your voice, American, and there’s a shine in his eye that’s halfway hopeful’ (p.11). Critics overlook the importance of race and racial disharmony in Underworld, but DeLillo’s early assertion of Cotter’s unity with other Americans makes clear the centrality of these issues. DeLillo suggests that white America sustains a sense of unity, by defining non-whites as a meaningless excrescence, reducing them to what Thompon calls the ‘cultural category ‘rubbish’’, which exists to eliminate ‘intrusive and dangerous elements’ (p.90). As Mary Douglas

⁷⁷ A.R. Ammons, Garbage: A Poem (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2002), p.32.

remarks, 'rituals of purity and impurity create unity in experience' and, in Underworld, the dominant white culture seeks internal unity, by categorising non-whites as, to use Douglas' terms, 'non-being' to their 'being' and 'formlessness' to their 'form'.⁷⁸ Critics have been attentive to DeLillo's concern with waste as an abstract concept and a metaphor for paranoid fears, but have ignored its application to racial group consciousness and the culture's 'deep mind'. Ruth Helyer remarks that DeLillo explores the 'dividing line between what is considered waste and what is not' and focuses her perceptive analysis on Nick's struggle to digest the trauma of his father's desertion and his seemingly inadvertent shooting of his friend George Manza.⁷⁹ Like Oswald, black 1950s characters like Cotter are desperate to fuse with the unifying, historical forces of nascent postmodernity, from which they feel excluded. DeLillo makes this disjunction clear on the first page, when he contrasts the notion that 'Longing on a large scale is what makes history', with Cotter's status as 'just a kid with a local yearning'. Yet, significantly, DeLillo also counteracts his solitude by adding that the boy is 'part of an assembling crowd' (p.11). It is a suggestive phrase, typical of DeLillo's hints that, with the post-war emergence of postmodernity, far greater psychological union between black and white culture has become possible. In his discussion of the relation between Underworld and The Waste Land, Paul Gleason argues that DeLillo prescribes art as the 'means by which the individual can reinvent and redeem the waste that defines America in the second half of the twentieth century'.⁸⁰ Whether or not this is DeLillo's 'prescription', within the gigantic work of

⁷⁸ Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo (London: Routledge, 2001), p.2, p.6.

⁷⁹ Ruth Helyer, "'Refuse Heaped Many Stories High': DeLillo, Dirt, and Disorder", in Modern Fiction Studies, 45 (1999), 987-1006 (p.987).

⁸⁰ Paul Gleason, 'Don DeLillo, T.S. Eliot, and the Redemption of America's Atomic Wasteland', in Underwords: Perspectives on Don DeLillo's Underworld, ed. by Joseph Dewey et al (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2002), pp.130-43 (p.130).

art that Underworld is, DeLillo suggests the existence of a veritable psychological 'underworld', in which numerous connections are formed that promote psychological unity and reduce the paranoid urge to dismiss fellow human subjects as excremental.

In the scenes following the baseball game, DeLillo emphasises the determination of African Americans to gain recognition as part of the American 'deep mind' and the contempt and fear with which American Whites regard them. Cotter's aggressive appropriation of a symbol of American unity, the baseball struck by Bobby Thomson, indicates his desperate, perhaps unconscious, wish for inclusion in American culture and refers ironically to its systematic rejection of him and his fellow blacks. The terror with which whites regard the latent power of the African American community they have discarded is made clear when Cotter flees into Harlem with the ball. Aware that the area is a ghetto, to which the supposedly 'intrusive and dangerous' African American community is consigned, Cotter's erstwhile companion and competitor for the ball, the white Bill, is afraid to follow him (p.57). Cotter is aware of the suspicion with which he is regarded and refuses to run with the ball, for fear that he will be apprehended as a thief, for being a 'black kid running in a mainly white crowd' (p.52). His cultural alienation is reaffirmed by the fact that his poverty soon robs him of even this dubious symbol of belonging. In three sections, which appear at regular intervals, the reader encounters the chronicle of Cotter's father Manx, who steals the ball and sells it to white advertising executive Charles Wainwright, for only thirty-two dollars and change (p.652). Paradoxically, these interludes keep Cotter's marginality present at the centre of the novel, implying that, in spite of paranoid white hostility, he does constitute part of the communal consciousness DeLillo describes. Nevertheless, DeLillo implies that, poignantly, his

artistic reconstruction of events remains the only narrative of Cotter and Manx's actions. Because the collector Marvin Lundy is unable to trace the baseball's passage back beyond Wainwright, Cotter and Manx's existence is undiscovered and their stewardship of the ball, and the American culture it symbolizes, is excluded from the official record (p.181). For the purposes of formal history, therefore, Cotter and Manx remain that which, as Žižek remarks of the mythical Jew, is 'excluded from the symbolic order', but 'returns in the Real as a paranoid construction' and is portrayed as a menace to society (Sublime, p.127).

This habitual American treatment of non-whites as disposable and invisible is repeatedly emphasised in Underworld. Nick's African American colleague Big Sims compares the fate of a black player Donnie Moore to that of the Dodgers' pitcher Ralph Branca. According to Sims, both 'gave up a crucial home run in a play-off game' (p.98) but, unlike his white colleague, Donnie 'was not allowed to outlive his failure' and his life ended in tragedy when he 'ended up shooting his wife'. As Sims concludes, 'you can survive and endure', 'But you have to be white before they let you' (p.98). Sometimes, non-white invisibility manifests literally, as when Klara pursues the New York subway graffiti artist Ismael Muñoz, who signs himself 'Moonman 157'. Klara sees Ismael's art as 'the romance of the ego, poor kids playing out a fantasy of meretricious fame' (p.394). Her approach indicates an understanding of Ismael's desperation to acquire a recognised cultural identity (p.394), a desire Stephen Powers suggests is common among graffiti writers and summarises in the phrase 'Graffiti, Ergo Sum'.⁸¹ Yet, in spite of Klara's wish to introduce Ismael's work into mainstream culture, she 'never found the young man himself' (p.395). Like

⁸¹ Stephen Powers, The Art of Getting Over: Graffiti at the Millenium (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), p.39.

Cotter, he remains among what Žižek calls the ‘scraps’ of the culture, the ‘excess which escapes the process of symbolization’ and which ‘causes a series of failures’, like those in Donnie Moore’s or Cotter Martin’s life (pp.169-70). As Thompson notes, waste is ‘always covert’ and people ‘strive to deny its existence’ (p.20), a view also articulated by Jesse Detwiler, who calls it the ‘best kept secret in the world’ (p.281). Big Sims argues that the U.S. government systematically categorises blacks as extraneous matter, excluding ten million of them from official records, ‘underplaying the true number’ (p.334) by ‘forty percent’, for fear that ‘white people’ will feel ‘menaced’ (p.336).

This association of black skin with waste products has a long, if undistinguished, philosophical history. According to Mark Larrimore, it is traceable at least to Kant’s view ‘of the (non-white) races as an unsalvageable waste, a mistake’.

⁸² This disturbing psychological association of blackness with garbage is similarly apparent in a widespread eighteenth-century view, also held by Kant, concerning the ‘demonstrable excellence’ of black skin ‘in ridding the body of the dangerous phlogiston of the African climate’ (p.107). Sims believes the U.S. government makes a similar connection and suggests that U.S. foreign policy makes the link disturbingly literal. When discussing toxic atomic waste, Sims points out that the U.S. routinely rids itself of ‘terrible substances’ by paying a ‘less developed country’, or what he provocatively calls ‘little dark-skinned countries’, to accept it (p.278). Read more subtly, this association of blackness with atomic power might imply acknowledgement of the power latent in black anger, something like the passion that Langston Hughes articulates in his comparison of the rage inside a ‘Jim Crow car’

⁸² Mark Larrimore, ‘Sublime Waste: Kant on the Destiny of the Races’, in Civilization and Oppression, ed. by Catherine Wilson (Calgary, Alta: University of Calgary Press, 1999), pp.99-125 (p.107).

with the force of 'an atom bomb'.⁸³ Sims does not make this connection, but his critique of U.S. foreign policy resonates powerfully with African American concerns about their government's policy on the dumping of waste, which has favoured affluent whites at the expense of poor and predominantly non-white neighbourhoods. As Robert D. Bullard points out, 'toxic dumping' by industry and government in America has had a disproportionate effect on 'poor, powerless, black communities'.⁸⁴ Indeed, like Sims, Bullard believes that African Americans, 'regardless of their class status', have been treated as 'throwaway communities' (p.xvi).

Nevertheless, DeLillo provides strong hints that, in contemporary culture, such apparent waste may be recuperated and assimilated into a larger social and mental unity, or 'deep mind'. At times, he even implies that its rejection infuses it with chthonic force, that, in Douglas' words, 'To have been in the margins', is 'to have been at a source of power' (p.98). As Nick affirms late in the novel, rejected matter returns, replete with what he calls 'redemptive qualities' to repair a divided psyche and socius. 'Look how they come back to us, alight with a kind of brave aging' (p.809), he declares of our many discarded items, echoing the tone and structure of T.S. Eliot's assertion of spiritual unity 'We are born with the dead: / See, they return, and bring us with them'.⁸⁵ Notably, the neglected, undiscovered Ismael Muñoz shows faith in the possibility of recycling seemingly irrecoverable junk, spending his later years rescuing 'abandoned cars', 'hoodless, doorless and rust-ulcered' machines, to sell for scrap (p.241). DeLillo also implies an underlying unity between Ismael's non-

⁸³ Langston Hughes, 'Lunch in a Jim Crow Car', in Selected Poems of Langston Hughes (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959), p.280.

⁸⁴ Robert D. Bullard, Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2000), pp.3-4.

⁸⁵ T.S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding', in Collected Poems 1909-1962 (London: Faber and Faber, 1990) pp.214-23 (p.222).

white 'low' culture and the white 'high' culture, by which it is often dismissed. This point is made by his insertion of a dynamic and demotic diatribe by Ismael in the interval of Eisenstein's Unterwelt, at the 'Radio City Music Hall' (p.424).

Appropriately, DeLillo's use of montage mimics Sergei Eisenstein's own modernist aesthetic and its effect is consistent with the director's view that 'any two pieces of film stuck together inevitably combine to create a new concept': in this case, unity between high and low and black and white cultures.⁸⁶ In describing Unterwelt, DeLillo wryly draws attention to his adaptation of modernist cinematic technique, remarking on the 'undeniable power of the montage' in another, genuine, Eisenstein film Ivan the Terrible (p.425). Juxtaposing Eisenstein's work with Ismael's underground graffiti suggests that the latter's work may be of greater importance than his detractors suspect. Its direct involvement with what Peter Burger calls the 'praxis of life' implies a characteristically avant-garde critique of art's 'autonomy' 'in bourgeois society'.⁸⁷ Such revolutionary willingness to extend the limits of artistic legitimacy implies an affinity between his aesthetic and that of well known avant-garde artists, notably the celebrated Klara Sax, known as the 'Bag Lady' for her use of 'castoffs', such as obsolete B-52 bombers (p.70). Ismael makes his artistic aspirations explicit, drawing a parallel between his supposedly unsophisticated 'wildstyle' graffiti (p.433) and the cinema enjoyed by the white middle-class audience in the hall, asserting defiantly that his work 'climbs across your eyeballs' 'like I'm your movie motherfucker' (p.441). His subterranean location symbolises his role as a profoundly repressed element of his culture's 'deep mind'. It also creates another

⁸⁶ Sergei Eisenstein, Notes of a Film Director (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), p.63.

⁸⁷ Peter Burger, Theory of the Avant-Garde, trans. by Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p.22.

parallel with Unterwelt, in which victims of atomic experiments are hidden far underground. The prisoners are hideously deformed; one resembles 'A cyclops', a detail that may allude to Dr Cyclops, a 1940 horror film about radioactivity.⁸⁸ Like that of Ismael, their presence underground is metaphoric of their status as 'an inconvenient secret of the society around them' (p.443) and like his subversive graffiti, Eisenstein's film contains 'camp elements' that 'resemble sneak attacks on the dominant culture' (p.444). The conceptual and psychological unity implied by DeLillo's montage is confirmed by Unterwelt's hopeful ending. The prisoners escape, climb 'to the surface' (p.444), and return to mainstream society, while the camera focuses on a man who 'sheds his marks and scars and seems to grow younger' (p.445). Although 'mawkish', as DeLillo puts it, the conclusion is also 'wonderful' and provides images of miraculous healing, which suggest that the underlying mental unity implied by the juxtaposition of high and low and black and white cultures may one day become manifest in a social and political context (p.445).

Yet, even these intimations of unity are not easily won in Underworld, but emerge from, often ferocious, dialectical struggle, during which the interdependence or interconnectedness of apparent combatants is revealed. Rather than view his communist enemies as radically alien, DeLillo's Hoover believes the antithetical political systems 'bring each other to deep completion' (p.51). He even suggests that the two nations enjoy a mental and physiological connection, speaking of 'Us and Them' and wondering 'how many bundled links do we find in the neural labyrinth?', which he envisages at the conjunction of the Superpowers (p.51). Throughout the novel, apparent polarities collapse to form unexpected and liberating wholes. Like the

⁸⁸ Spencer R. Weart, Nuclear Fear: A History of Images (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), p.63.

U.S. and U.S.S.R in 'deep completion', Branca and Thomson, the losing pitcher and victorious batter in the World Series play-off, become 'the longest-running act in show business', appearing together at 'sports dinners' (p.98) and on 'the White House lawn' (p.100). The principle applies to concepts as much as individuals or nations. Hoover sees 'fame' and 'secrecy' as 'the high and low ends of the same fascination' (p.17), while his alter ego, the schoolteacher and nun Sister Edgar pursues 'death' (p.249), for the paradoxical therapeutic goal of curing 'the linger of destruction inside of her' (p.248). As Žižek argues, arrival at a final 'truth' often requires conflict, or a process of mutual 'misrecognition', 'where each subject receives from the other its own message in the inverse form' (Sublime, p.59, p.63). In its concentration on technological interconnections, criticism omits DeLillo's use of technologies, like that of vast garbage disposal systems, as metaphors for the nation's emergent 'deep mind'. While visiting the 'Fresh Kills' 'landfill on Staten Island', the waste manager Brian Glassic, Nick's colleague and friend, suggests the site's true function is to produce psychical and physical equilibrium in New York. Brian asserts that the material evidence of New York's 'habits and impulses' forms a 'mass metabolism' (p.184) that is in 'poetic balance' with Manhattan's 'World Trade Center'. In the section's final paragraph, DeLillo makes the landfill's symbolism more explicit. He describes 'a hundred' 'gulls', 'positioned on a slope', as being 'joined in consciousness' (p.186), an avian psychological union that represents the burgeoning of a human equivalent among those served by 'Fresh Kills' (p.184).

The atomic bomb also symbolizes DeLillo's unified 'deep mind', particularly in his portrayal of the nun and ex-schoolteacher Sister Edgar, whose intense interest in the weapon becomes 'the faith that replaces God with radioactivity' (p.251). Nuclear weapons inspire Edgar to adopt a recognisably schizophrenic epistemology, which

causes her radically to doubt her perceptions and embrace the 'the faith of suspicion and unreality', instead of her erstwhile Catholicism. DeLillo's reference to her quasi-mystical belief in 'the power of alpha particles and the all-knowing systems that shape them' resembles the interconnectedness Karen pursues in Mao II and suggests that the bomb may lie behind the Deleuze and Guattarian schizophrenia that Sister Edgar manifests. Like schizophrenia, which Deleuze and Guattari argue 'scrambles all the codes', the bomb is inimical to signification and may therefore provide a convincing aetiology for the suddenly visionary quality of Edgar's outlook (Anti-Oedipus, p.15).

As Klara notes, the bomb 'eludes naming' (p.77). Consequently, it achieves the paradoxical status of divinity and waste, or, as the bomb's inventor J. Robert Oppenheimer puts it, 'shit'; as Weart shows, metaphors of "'sewage'" and 'excrement' have been frequently applied to the bomb and nuclear power generally (p.298). Yet, in the 1950s section 'Arrangement in Grey and Black', Edgar is persistently associated with paranoia and isolation. As Deleuze and Guattari argue, 'paranoia and schizophrenia can be presented as the two extreme oscillations' of capitalist culture and, like Nick, Edgar shifts, over time, from one to the other (p.281).

As a 1950s schoolteacher, she enjoys the Cold War culture of fear. She is portrayed 'Alone in her room' reading 'The Raven', by her 'namesake poet' Edgar Allen Poe (p.775) and subjecting pupils to the unexpected anxiety of a 'Duck and cover' nuclear drill (p.727). Her eventual rejection of this mind-set, in the second and final 1990s section of the novel 'Das Kapital', is made more striking by what critics agree is her status as the second self of the resolutely paranoid head of the FBI J. Edgar Hoover.

The contrast between her radical psychological shift and the painful stasis of his paranoia suggests that, in the later phase of the novel's timeframe, she lives out Hoover's unconscious desires and perhaps those of the nation he helped govern.

Besides sharing his ghoulish fascination with powerful weaponry, she has a similarly harsh, stubborn personality, a 'raven's heart, small and obdurate' (p.249), and the same passionate interest in mortality. While watching the baseball game between the Dodgers and the Giants that dominates the prologue, 'Hoover' is showered by fragments of Life Magazine that include Pieter Bruegel's painting The Triumph of Death, which Hoover apparently 'loves' (p.50). The incident recalls William Gaddis' The Recognitions, in which the young forger Wyatt Gwyon finds inspiration in 'the horror of the Breughel copy in his father's study'.⁸⁹ Gaddis' debut novel is noted for its critique of the parodic and derivative nature of post-war culture. DeLillo's reference, to a novel that he has elsewhere called 'tremendous', may therefore reaffirm that the baseball game marks, not only an intensification of the Cold War, but the full instantiation of the postmodernity Gaddis satirizes.⁹⁰ Decades later, Edgar finds herself similarly transfixed in a 'Capuchin church' by 'skeletons' that convey to her the idea of 'death, yes, triumphant' (p.249). While Edgar becomes immersed in the schizophrenic unreality of America's emergent 'deep mind', DeLillo's Hoover remains paralysed by his twin fears, which DeLillo implies are, for Hoover, inextricably connected: leftist political activity and the prospect of inhabiting an 'all-pervading medium of pathogens' (p.19). As DeLillo may know, biographical records show that this pathological connection is detectable in the F.B.I director's real life use of language. For instance, Hoover described communism as 'a condition akin to a

⁸⁹ William Gaddis, The Recognitions (New York: Penguin, 1983), p.35.

⁹⁰ Don DeLillo, 'On William Gaddis', in Conjunctions, 41 (2003), at <<http://www.conjunctions.com/archives/C41-dd.htm>>, last accessed 3rd April 2005.

disease that spreads like an epidemic and like an epidemic a quarantine is necessary to keep it from infecting the nation'.⁹¹

In the novel's final scene, the relation Edgar detects between contemporary technologies and the postmodern drive towards mental unity is made explicit. These technologies are present in the form of the bomb, but also 'cyberspace', in which, against her orthodox Catholic expectations, Edgar finds herself after death (p.824). DeLillo treats the web as radically unifying, if somewhat homogenising, suggesting that here 'all conflict' is 'programmed out' and 'difference itself' is erased (p.826). Indeed, the Web's unifying power is apparently such that it can fuse doubles like Hoover and Edgar into a single being: after Edgar's arrival, a 'coupling' takes place, as she 'joins the other Edgar', 'a kindred spirit' and 'her male half, dead these many years' (p.824). DeLillo therefore implies that the Internet is emblematic of the 'deep mind' and that, as J. Macgregor Wise puts it, it offers people the 'affect and community that are so absent in their lives'.⁹² Nevertheless, DeLillo indicates that, even here, American culture oscillates between modernist paranoia and a more collective postmodern consciousness. When Edgar views a virtual nuclear explosion on a nearby Web site, DeLillo teases the reader with the mystical notion that 'The jewels roll out of her eyes and she sees God', before admitting it is a 'Soviet Bomb she sees' and retreating wryly into paranoid, numerological speculation: 'fifty-eight megatons -- add the digits and you get thirteen' (p.826). He remarks darkly on the 'paranoia of the web' that Edgar senses (p.825), what in interview he has called the

⁹¹ Richard Gid Powers, Secrecy and Power: The Life of J. Edgar Hoover (London: Hutchinson, 1987), p.289.

⁹² J. Macgregor Wise, 'Community, Affect, and the Virtual: The Politics of Cyberspace', in Virtual Publics: Policy and Community in an Electronic Age, ed. by Beth E. Kolko (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), pp.112-33 (p.119).

'paranoid spaces of the computer net', to which he suggests the uncritical 'worship of technology' may lead.⁹³

As with the Web, in addressing the question of atomic weapons directly, DeLillo emphasises the unifying psychological forces it can unleash. He uses the metaphor of 'atoms forcibly combined' within 'fusion bombs' to symbolise its dramatic effect on the collective psyche (p.826). As usual in Underworld, however, harmony only emerges dialectically, from immense struggle. It takes the 'thermal pulse' of a vast nuclear device to provoke the longing for tranquillity with which the novel closes (p.825): the single, concluding word 'Peace' emerges out of a computer-generated mushroom cloud (p.827). The finale is preceded by a substantial passage outlining the word's connotations and 'ancestral roots', the latter part of which is a paragraph-long sentence of twenty-four lines. This daring strategy conveys the rapturous desire, or 'sunlit ardor', that DeLillo suggests the word 'Peace' can provoke. The half-page epiphany promises no easy resolution; DeLillo insists that 'all it can do is make you pensive' (p.827). Nevertheless, among the etymologies listed are 'Fasten, fit closely, bind together' (p.827), which hints that, despite the lack of reassuring closure, U.S. culture retains a powerful desire to uncover the potential for unity in the 'overarching presence' of technological systems (Strangeness, p.5).

Throughout Underworld, the movement from opposition to unity manifests as a shift from paranoia to a schizophrenic drive towards psychological unity, states of mind, which, for Deleuze and Guattari, are 'the two extreme oscillations' of capitalism (p.281). Critics often assume that DeLillo's notion of paranoia matches

⁹³ Gerald Howard "'The American Strangeness': An Interview with Don DeLillo", in Hungry Mind: an Independent Book Review at <http://web.archive.org/web/19990129081431/http://www.bookwire.com/hmr/hmrinter>, p.5 of 9...6/10/2004.

that of Thomas Pynchon. Tony Tanner's claim that in Underworld DeLillo is 'engaged in a prolonged and repetitious quoting' 'of Pynchon' is typical of critics' willingness to conflate their views.⁹⁴ O'Donnell takes a similar line in asserting that 'DeLillo posits paranoia as the ideal condition of knowing in the moment when identity has become multiple, virtual, and open to all of the available connections' (p.159). But DeLillo and Pynchon's treatments of this complex issue are not identical. In Gravity's Rainbow, Pynchon defines paranoia as 'the leading edge of the discovery that everything is connected', which, may be frightening, but is also reassuring in its inclusion of the paranoid, and opposes it to anti-paranoia, in which connections are frustratingly absent and the contemporary subject suffers anomie.⁹⁵ In DeLillo, Pynchon's 'paranoid' sense that 'everything is connected', which he paraphrases several times (p.408, p.465, p.808, p.826), is reinterpreted as a sign of the schizophrenic interconnectedness that heralds the unified 'deep mind' of postmodernity. DeLillo's paranoia, meanwhile, combines a sinister, largely fictitious series of connections in the world with the complete isolation of the perceiving human subject. DeLillo frequently suggests that paranoia is pathological and related to the effects of personal trauma. Nick's cultivation of 'remoteness' and his faith in implausible theories of his father's death is traceable to his abandonment, as a child, and sense of responsibility for George's death (p.275). Similarly, in Marvin's case, it is his wife's demise that precipitates a series of bizarre beliefs, including the conviction that Mikhail Gorbachev's birthmark represents 'the map of Latvia', which symbolises 'the total collapse of the Soviet system' (p.173). Marvin suffers the same difficulties with waste as Nick and Hoover, experiencing 'violent' bowel movements

⁹⁴ Tony Tanner, The American Mystery: American Literature from Emerson to Don DeLillo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.210.

that struck him as 'deeply personal' and seemed to 'say something awful about the bearer' (p.310). As with the other two, this problem is symbolic of a return of the repressed, consequent upon his paranoid treatment of groups or individuals as 'a threat to good order', to be 'vigorously brushed away' (Purity, p.161). Like Hoover, Marvin shamelessly promotes the benefits of Cold War rivalry, informing Nick that without 'the power and intimidation' of the state directed at the U.S.S.R (p.170), he would be 'the lost man of history' (p.182).

Yet, Marvin also shows considerable signs of a schizophrenic connection to culture's 'deep mind', which bear out Deleuze and Guattari's sense of an 'oscillation' between paranoia and schizophrenia in capitalism and Freud's assertion that, even in a case that first manifests as paranoia, 'paranoid and schizophrenic phenomena may be combined in any proportion' (p.77). Marvin finds traces of this 'deep mind' among baseball aficionados and uses a metaphor that combines depth and mental awareness to describe this phenomenon, when he remarks the 'fraternity of missing men' (p.182), who share 'an ESP of baseball, an underground what, a consciousness, and I'm hearing it in my sleep' (p.179). Indeed, DeLillo suggests that, in early postmodernity, a schizophrenic sense of unreality even seeped into baseball culture. He refers to numerous, supposedly live, matches that the commentator Russ Hodges described from a studio, having to 'create the weather' and 'flesh out the players' from a 'paper filled with letters and numbers' (p.25). It is a factitious element in post-war American sport that is explored at greater length in Robert Coover's The Universal Baseball Association, Inc., J. Henry Waugh, Prop., in which Coover's protagonist Henry Waugh creates a baseball game with paper and dice and comes to

⁹⁵ Thomas Pynchon, Gravity's Rainbow (London: Picador, 1975), p.703

believe unquestioningly in its reality.⁹⁶ Marvin displays a similar credulity borne of the schizophrenic's interest in the interconnectedness of cultural artefacts and systems, attributing occult significance to the fact that 'they make the radioactive core' of the bomb 'the exact same size as a baseball' (p.172). Indeed, his response to postmodern capitalism converges remarkably closely with that of Deleuze and Guattari's account of capitalist schizophrenia. When travelling in Europe, he reflects that capitalist marketing of sex reduces the human subject to 'Floating zones of desire' and causes the 'dismantling of desire into a thousand subspecialities' (p.319), recalling the 'deterritorialized flows of desire' that Deleuze and Guattari argue are characteristic of the capitalist schizophrenic (p.277). Marvin's near mystical view of technology is also consonant with the 'miraculate, enchanted surface' Deleuze and Guattari attribute to the schizophrenic's 'body without organs' (p.13). His use of high-tech photographic analysis in searching for the baseball convinces him that 'all knowledge is available if you analyze the dots' (p.174) and that technology 'makes reality come true' (p.177). Like the schizophrenic Oswald, whose dyslexia symbolises the disorientation capitalism causes him, Marvin is verbally incoherent, often seeking unsuccessfully for the appropriate signifier, the 'what-do-you-call' (p.308), as in his comical confusion over 'the word for the thing that's not ultimate but next to ultimate' (p.315). As Žižek remarks of the schizophrenic, Marvin, like Oswald, maintains 'a kind of distance from the symbolic order', and pursues his arcane interests without being 'caught in the signifying network' (p.165).

DeLillo never treats the schizophrenic impulse towards unity as straightforwardly Utopian or wholly beneficial. In fact, the threat of violence

⁹⁶ Robert Coover, The Universal Baseball Association, Inc., J. Henry Waugh, Prop (New York: Plume, 1968)

schizophrenic consciousness often carries in Libra and Mao II is made alarmingly explicit, in the figure of the Texas Highway Killer Richard Henry Gilkey. DeLillo portrays Gilkey as utterly affectless and typical of what Mark Seltzer calls the 'absence of a sense of self' that afflicts serial killers (Serial, p.7). As such, he is the dangerous obverse of the self-abnegation that drives Karen towards communal mental experience. Like Oswald, to use Seltzer's vocabulary, Gilkey longs to 'become part of the history of others' and does so through the extreme expedient of terminating their lives (p.266). Gilkey's vacuity is apparent in robotic behaviour that DeLillo conveys by an accumulation of curt, denotative phrases such as 'He spread mayonnaise on the bread. Then he slapped the lunch meat down' (p.262). He endures the sense that mind and subjectivity are unreal that afflicts other schizophrenics in DeLillo's work, suffering what Seltzer, like R.D. Laing, calls a 'False Self Syndrome' (p.18), which, Seltzer argues, entails 'a complete failure of distinction between self and others' (p.20). This syndrome is made acutely apparent by his need to watch and converse with television news anchor Sue Ann Corcoran, just to experience 'taking shape as himself' (p.269). Such is Gilkey's pathology that only 'eye contact with the TV' can provide him 'with the knowledge that he was real' (p.270).

At times, the disorientation occasioned by postmodern schizophrenia even precipitates a determined retreat into paranoia. As O'Donnell argues, 'paranoia can be viewed as the reaction-formation par excellence to the schizophrenias of post-modern identity, economy, and aesthetics' (p.11). This tendency is most evident in the behaviour of Nick Shay, who defiantly resists the postmodern idea of the 'business of life as a fiction', declaring his modernist belief that history is knowable as 'A single narrative sweep' (p.82). Like Mao II's Bill, he retreats from postmodernity and cultivates a discrete modernist subjectivity, which he describes as 'handmade', like 'a

sturdy Roman wall' (p.275). Yet, despite rejecting the 'ten thousand wisps of disinformation' that characterise paranoia (p.82), his 'remoteness' (p.275) derives from a paranoid anxiety that causes him, like David Bell in Americana, to admit to 'spying on himself', as what he calls a 'third person' who continually watches the 'first person' (p.119). As we saw, Nick's emotional history suggests a possible Freudian basis to his paranoia. One might read his father's desertion as leading to the repression of 'homosexual libido' (Paranoia, p.43), formerly directed towards his male parent, and its replacement with unconscious, internalized rage that manifests as what Freud calls 'Delusions of persecution' (p.63). This reading assists in interpreting Nick's killing of George Manza. As the psychologist in juvenile correction implies, in pulling the trigger, Nick gave vent to longstanding anger at his father, who, in her words, was 'the third person in the room' on the day he shot George (p.512).

As with Bill in Mao II, Nick's retreat into paranoia and a fossilized modernism is the displacement of a desire for self-annihilation. His first remarks in the novel indicate a longing for the extinction of mind and ego in the affectless serenity of computational thought, like that pursued by Lyle in Players. His wistful reference to his 'Lexus' having been 'assembled in a work area that's completely free of human presence', constructed by 'programmed drudges that do not dream of family dead' indicates a wish to emulate their immunity from emotional discomfort (p.63). His habit of running while listening to 'Sufi chanting' on a 'wireless headphone' (p.89) suggests a similar desperation to destroy the self; as Ian Richard Netton notes, Sufism is an Islamic sect that advises the 'total nullification of ego consciousness'.⁹⁷ Over time, Nick's attraction to self-dissolution prompts his embrace of schizophrenic thought, with its fragmentation of the unitary subject and notion of psychological

⁹⁷ Ian Richard Netton, Sufi Ritual: The Parallel Universe (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000), p.177.

union. His pursuit of isolated signifiers as routes to religious truth, while imprisoned, resembles that of Karen in Mao II and may be an initial sign of this schizophrenia. He adheres to the advice of The Cloud of Unknowing and seeks to create a 'naked intent' towards God by using a 'single word of a single syllable' (p.295) or, as The Cloud's author puts it, had his 'intention wrapped and unfolded in one word'.⁹⁸ By the time Nick meets his former lover Klara Sax in 1992, for the first time in forty years, his paranoid wish for isolation has begun to dissolve, allowing him to assert that postmodern technology 'expands your self-esteem and connects you' 'to the things that slip through the world otherwise unperceived' (p.89). Indeed, as with Bill's meeting with Brita in Mao II, his encounter with Klara may accelerate this movement toward postmodern consciousness. He encounters in her the obverse of his rejection of postmodernity, a woman untroubled by admitting that contemporary life 'took an unreal turn at some point' (p.73) and who, perhaps as a consequence, feels little need of overt self-assertion, or what she calls any 'brilliant jack-off gesture that asserts an independence' (p.377). Klara may therefore function for Nick as one of the characteristically postmodern second selves that populate DeLillo's later fiction. Whether or not her influence is decisive, it is noticeable that, by the time of the epilogue, Das Kapital, a few years after this meeting, Nick's shift away from paranoia is complete. He expresses exhilaration at the psychological unity of contemporary computer culture, declaring 'The real miracle is the web, the net, where everybody is everywhere at once' (p.808). He finally accepts that his father's disappearance was voluntary, that he had simply 'wanted to go under' (p.809), a refusal of selfhood and responsibility that again demonstrates the less palatable side of the collective

⁹⁸ Anonymous, The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works, trans. by A.C. Spearing (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001)

postmodern 'deep mind', which may have helped give Underworld its title. In this respect, Nick's experience of identity seems continuous with that of his father. His schizophrenia extends to the kind of formalism practiced Libra's Win Everett, who dismisses selfhood as utterly factitious. After Nick discovers his wife Marian's affair with Brian, he concludes that they 'could keep the two houses, all the cars' and 'both wives'. 'None of it ever belonged to me except in the sense that I filled out the forms' (p.796).

Nick's visceral approach to life is in contrast to the comparatively cool rationality of his brother Matt. Rather than involvement in gang life, which leads indirectly to Nick's imprisonment, Matt channels anger at their father's departure into esoteric pursuits. As a child, he takes up chess, which offers the sublimated pleasure of 'hearing the loser declare himself dead' (p.707), while, in adulthood, his careful repression of rage is suggested by his job constructing 'safing mechanisms' for nuclear weapons (p.452). His qualities are manifestly the obverse of Nick's and, to a large extent, DeLillo portrays him as another of his brother's doppelgangers, who lives the civilized, intellectual life Nick eschews. His freedom from paranoid anxiety enables him to adjust quickly to the schizophrenia and myriad technological systems of postmodernity. Indeed, he is a detached critic of his brother's paranoid psyche, which, in his view, uses the 'one plot' of their father's supposed death to avoid the more 'general distrust' to which it is prone (p.454). Matt evades the isolation of paranoia by immersing himself in the complexity of postmodern weapons systems production, in which 'Everything connected at some undisclosed point' and many workers 'didn't know where their work ended up' (p.408). It is a method of construction DeLillo may have adapted from the actual practices of The Manhattan

Project, in which, as Weart remarks, 'tens of thousands of workers had no idea of what they were making' (Nuclear, p.120). Matt therefore dismisses paranoia as a 'superficial state' (p.422). He prefers analytical observation of contemporary schizophrenia, particularly the dazzling interconnectedness of postmodern capitalism that renders moral judgements difficult, or even irrelevant. As he remarks, 'everything connects in the end' and it becomes difficult to distinguish between 'a soup can and a car bomb, because they are made by the same people in the same way and ultimately refer to the same thing' (p.465).

Matt's ability to assess paranoiac and schizophrenic culture with a measure of objectivity makes his consciousness the ideal tool for DeLillo in his theorisation of contemporary culture, particularly the influence of the atomic bomb. More than once, Matt serves as the filter for ruminations on the relation between technology and consciousness in postmodernity, in which the reader is addressed by DeLillo's generalised 'you', which implies their membership of the communal consciousness Underworld adumbrates (pp.155-160, p.402, p.413). Matt speculates on nuclear weapons' effect on the psyche, with special emphasis on the religious and mystical ideas connected with the bomb. Notably, a number of his mystical references are drawn from Hinduism, a religion known for its assertion of the fundamental unity of creation. The Bhagavad Gita insists on perceiving 'the various states of being as existing in the one, and extending from that alone'.⁹⁹ The suggestion that the Hindu gods 'Kali and Shiva' might be summoned by 'the visionary flash of light' produced by the atomic bomb may therefore refer to the unifying psychological forces atomic weapons unleash (p.458). DeLillo suggests that this effect is due partly to the bomb's ability to expand human imagination and create an enlarged, more collective model of

⁹⁹ The Bhagavad Gita, trans. by W.J. Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.59.

consciousness. Because, as Klara puts it, the weapon has 'out-imagined the mind' (p.76), it proves able, in Matt's words, to 'redefine the limits of human perception and dread' (p.422). The Cold War period, in DeLillo's reading, is therefore characterised by an emergent sense of mind as unlimited by space or individual subjectivity. As he told Peter Henning, 'In Underworld', 'I wanted to broaden consciousness, open it up'.

¹⁰⁰ He remarks, for instance, on the U.S. government's decision to test supposed psychics, on the basis that 'psychic commandos' might transmit thought over long distances to 'read the intentions' of ministers, or 'jam the enemy's computer networks and weapons or systems'. The images with which Matt expounds his experience of nuclear weapon production often lay similar emphasis on mind as vastly enlarged and publicly observable. Matt suggests that the 'interplay of terrain and weapons' is 'a kind of neural process remapped in the world, a hollow sort of craving lifted out of the brain stem', only to appear in the 'diamondback desert' (p.451). This notion of an immense 'neural process' 'remapped' in a gargantuan communal space captures the radical transformation of consciousness taking place under the influence of technological systems that informs the entire novel. It asserts unequivocally the power of the revolutionary weapon that harnesses the 'sun's own heat' to bring the formerly private, fragmented 'underworld' of consciousness into dazzling, unified visibility (p.24).

¹⁰⁰ Peter Henning, 'An Interview with Don DeLillo', 20th November 2003, in Frankfurter Rundschau, trans. by Julie Apitzsch, at <http://www.perival.com/delillo/ddinterview_henning.html>, last accessed 2nd April 2005.

Chapter Seven

Matter as Mind: 'Root Identity' in 'The Body Artist' and 'Cosmopolis'

DeLillo's two most recent novels, The Body Artist (2001) and Cosmopolis (2003) examine the possibility of the quest for the fundamental nature of consciousness, or what DeLillo refers to as 'root identity'.¹ They do so largely by exploring the relationship between mind and body, particularly its central role in the construction of subjectivity. DeLillo takes the view that, in Elisabeth Grosz's words, 'Body' is too often the 'subordinate term', in the opposition mind/body, and is unfairly treated as 'an intrusion' on 'the operation of mind'.² In this respect, the novels constitute a partial return to the concerns of his earliest works, which often emphasise the importance of rapprochement with the physical, for the development of subjectivity. But, in these texts, DeLillo goes beyond mind-body unity to consider the affinities between mind, body, and natural world, especially the 'mental' qualities that may subsist in all organic matter. In so doing, he examines a notion similar to the one Maurice Merleau-Ponty calls 'organic thought', or what, in Cosmopolis, DeLillo calls the 'counter-consciousness' of the body, and extends his concern with psychological unity beyond human life to all organic existence (p.50).³

The Body Artist focuses on performance artist Lauren Hartke, who devotes herself to 'body work', and her grief at the unexpected suicide of her husband, film director Rey Robles (p.57). Lauren finds solace in the company of an apparently

¹ Don DeLillo, The Body Artist (London: Picador, 2002), p.104 and Cosmopolis (London: Picador, 2003)

² Elisabeth Grosz, Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1994), p.3, pp.3-4.

³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, trans. by Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p.77.

retarded, 'sadly gifted', young man, who has been living unnoticed in her rented holiday home (p.100) and to whom she gives the name 'Mr Tuttle', after a science teacher at high school, who also 'spoke in unmeasured hesitations' (p.47). Some of Mr Tuttle's mental handicaps, and astonishing abilities, resemble the qualities DeLillo associated with the capitalist schizophrenic in previous novels. Yet, here, DeLillo raises the possibility that these indicate access to an ultimate reality, as well as to the hidden capacities of mind, and therefore of a significant element of 'root identity'. Mr Tuttle's apparent violation of the 'limits of the human', particularly his experience of past and future events in present time, prompts Lauren to profound reflection on temporality and its relation to body and mind and allows her to discover a radically expanded view of both (p.100). Cosmopolis, published two years later, examines the final day in the life of multi-billionaire Eric Packer and focuses on the psychological and conceptual journey that accompanies his dramatic, seemingly voluntary, descent from a commanding position in the world of stock and currency trading to impotence and abject poverty. Like Players, the novel combines elements of the science fiction and thriller genres and has a protagonist who works in the New York financial markets. But, in Eric, DeLillo presents a character that rejects Lyle's reduction of the mind to technology and abandons his highly abstract view of consciousness for a holistic belief that mind is immanent in the body and that matter may be a less rarefied form of mind.

In The Body Artist, DeLillo explores the feasibility of enquiring into the fundamental question of 'who we are when we are not rehearsing who we are', which has been implicit in all of his work (p.110). He acknowledges that the quest for this supposed substratum of subjectivity may be perilous. Although Rey thanks his much younger wife for 'helping him recover his soul', he remarks ambivalently that the

result 'is bad, but it's like myself when I was myself' (p.61). As Rey's first wife Isabele insists, his suicide 'was not a question of chemicals in his brain', but the fact that 'he hated who he was', a disturbing possibility that complicates Lauren's grief with the guilt of assisting in the exhumation of his loathed former identity (p.59). Nevertheless, Lauren's body art makes her well suited to the search. As her journalist friend Mariella Chapman suggests, the discipline specialises in exploring 'root identity' (p.105), a notion lent support by real-life body artist Simone Forti, who regards it as critical in her quest for 'that part of myself' 'that would always be there'.⁴ Mr Tuttle is particularly suitable as partner to Lauren in this enterprise. He occupies a zero degree of consciousness without selfhood; he is 'a man anonymous to himself' (p.95), who endures what, in Players, DeLillo calls 'states of' 'reduced sensibility'.⁵ Although Lauren's search for 'root identity' may appear essentialising, or even primitivistic, it is characteristically postmodern in its emulation of the efforts of contemporary science to comprehend elucidate the relationship of mind and body and its implications for the nature of consciousness. Yet, neither The Body Artist, nor Cosmopolis, embraces the scientific objectivism that DeLillo has long questioned. Both focus predominantly on the protagonists' subjective perspective and the minutiae of their mental and emotional response, thus making clear that consciousness is the primary and privileged subject of both texts.

The Body Artist is the novel by DeLillo, in which the influence of literary modernism is most apparent and it is often this use of modernist tropes that critics have emphasised. Philip Nel suggests it is DeLillo's 'homage to modernist poetics' and takes on the 'modernist (and romantic) project of bridging the gap between word

⁴ Louise Steinman, The Knowing Body: The Artist as Storyteller in Contemporary Performance (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1995), p.6.

and world'.⁶ Similarly, Cornel Bonca examines the parallels between DeLillo's treatment of what Bonca calls 'ontological indwelling or presence' and the modernist philosopher Martin Heidegger's examination of the issue.⁷ David Cowart, meanwhile, notes the influence of Virginia Woolf's To The Lighthouse, whose famous 'Time Passes' passage is echoed in the first line of The Body Artist: 'Time seems to pass'.⁸ But this apparently minor distinction between the declarative statement in Woolf and the merely apparent duration DeLillo describes is a telling one. It signals that, in spite of modernism's influence on DeLillo, he adopts a more sceptical and exacting approach to consciousness than that offered by stream of consciousness writing, which emphasises phenomenological observation of the mind's fluid motion.

This shift from modernist to postmodernist is enacted in the novel's structure, which begins with something close to a stream of consciousness aesthetic, before adopting a more contemporary sensibility after Rey's suicide. The opening chapter, where Rey and Lauren chat over breakfast, is narrated in typically modernist, although highly colloquial, free indirect discourse: 'There were voices on the radio in like Hindi it sounded' (p.10). The breakfast happens in 'real time': our reading of its eighteen or so pages is of similar duration to the meal itself, an effect that demands painstaking, intensely realist attention to detail and accentuates the close observation required by the modernist stream of consciousness DeLillo is imitating. Lauren is portrayed as acutely aware of the flow of her perceptions such as the 'savor' of

⁵ Don DeLillo, Players (London: Vintage, 1991), p.205.

⁶ Philip Nel, 'Don DeLillo's Return to Form: The Modernist Poetics of The Body Artist', in Contemporary Literature, 43 (2002), 736-59 (p.736).

⁷ Cornel Bonca, 'Being, Time, and Death in DeLillo's The Body Artist', in Pacific Coast Philology, 37 (2002), 58-68 (p.59).

⁸ David Cowart, The Physics of Language (Athens, GA, University of Georgia Press, 2002), p. 202.

'blueberries'. She is somnolent, 'puddled in dream melt' (p.7), and this semi-consciousness defamiliarises habitual, and hitherto unquestioned, thoughts and beliefs, like her sense that 'It was her newspaper', or that 'They both used the computer but it was spiritually hers' (p.12). She also observes, as though for the first time, that, in the mornings, she tends to carry 'a voice in her head', 'a voice that flowed from a story in the paper' (p.16). By contrast, the quasi-scientific approach that prevails after Rey's death transforms descriptions of driving on a highway or reaching for a paperclip into halting analyses, littered with qualifications. On the road, 'All the cars including yours seem to flow in dissociated motion, giving the impression of or presenting the appearance of' (p.31), while, after the apparent descent of a paper clip, 'you know you dropped it, you remember how it happened, or half remember, or sort of see it may be, or something else' (p.89). Speculation occurs under symbolic erasure, with tentative affirmation always about to become negation, as with Lauren's assertion, after explaining to Mr Tuttle her need for solitude, that 'Of course he understood. But maybe not' (p.47). In view of DeLillo's frequent concentration on mortality, it is worth noting that a death catalyses this epistemological shift. In his earlier work, rapprochement with mortality often removes an obstacle to 'first-person' 'consciousness' and the creation of subjectivity. Lauren does not endure the extreme pathologies of DeLillo's early protagonists and death simply causes her to abandon aesthetically pleasurable observation of consciousness, for a more methodical type of awareness. A similarly hesitant, exploratory tone is adopted, with respect to time. Thinking of Mr Tuttle's predictions of future events, Lauren wonders whether 'The laws of nature permit things that in fact, in practice, she thought, never happen. But could. But could not. But could. If only in his mind, she

thought' (p.77). Rather than modernist treatment of consciousness as what Paul Civello calls a 'separate entity' in opposition to 'the material world', DeLillo examines the nature of mind, matter, and the apparent 'flow' of time, as well as the relationships between all three.⁹

This postmodernist enquiry appears to act in counterpoint to the novel's frequently modernist form, in which major events are left unnarrated, to be signalled only by the unannounced introduction of documents into the text. But, the impression this creates, of the text as hermetic artefact, engaged primarily in conversation with itself, is curiously appropriate to Lauren's intensely subjective, almost solipsistic, purpose. Rey's obituary, for example, is the reader's first indication of his death. A newspaper article, describing Lauren's imitation of 'a naked man, emaciated and aphasic, trying desperately to tell us something' is our only evidence that Lauren continues performing and makes artistic use of her experiences with Mr Tuttle (p.105). Although it appears before the end of the novel, the article is undated and there is no indication as to whether she performs her piece 'Body Time' within the diegetic narrative or at some future time (p.104). Rather than a conventional reader, at these moments, one assumes the position of researcher or fan of the two artists and experiences the sudden, uncanny sensation of being situated in their fictional world, distancing the spectre of postmodern objectivism and fore-grounding the intensely subjective cognition the novel describes.

DeLillo draws liberally on literary modernism, particularly its notions of time. The remark, in the opening paragraph, that 'after a storm' the 'smallest falling leaf is stabbed with self-awareness' (p.7) recalls Septimus' belief in Mrs Dalloway that

⁹ Paul Civello, American Literary Naturalism and its Twentieth-Century Transformations (Athens, GA, University of Georgia Press, 1994), p.68.

'leaves were alive' and 'connected by millions of fibres with his own body'.¹⁰

Although the two perceptions are closely comparable, only DeLillo attributes consciousness to the inanimate leaf and makes a link between human consciousness and whatever manifestations of 'mind' may exist in vegetable matter. DeLillo extends this possibility of mental unity to the animal kingdom, by associating Mr Tuttle with the bird life of the cottage garden. Lauren's conversations with Tuttle or thought about him often coincide with intense avian activity. When she speculates on whether, to understand Tuttle, she requires a 'physicist' to 'tell her what the parameters were', 'The birds were going crazy on the feeder' (p.67). Like Tuttle, the birds are physically insubstantial. Where he has a 'thinness of physical address', they are 'disembodied', 'sheer and fleet and scatter-bright' (p.13), while their apparent ability to view the kitchen as 'the apparition of a space set off from time' foreshadows the radical timelessness of his consciousness (p.22). DeLillo therefore pursues the notion of psychological unity, again, but in unsuspected connections between human, animal, and plant consciousness, as well as the unity of past, present, and future. Rather than a function of social or technological circumstances, this unity in nature is treated as a true or ultimate reality, comparable to Gregory Bateson's view of Darwinian evolution as a 'mental process', in which a 'pattern of patterns', a 'meta-pattern', links numerous instances of consciousness.¹¹ As in Underworld, DeLillo uses the second person, to imply a broad commonality of thought and experience. Describing Lauren, for instance, the narrator asserts that 'you are driving in the third lane' (p.31), while later, when Lauren sees, or hallucinates, her dead husband, Rey, her experience is said to be the manifestation 'of every secret intimation you've ever felt' (p.122). In

¹⁰ Virginia Woolf, Mrs Dalloway (London: Penguin, 1992), p.24.

¹¹ Gregory Bateson, Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity (London: Wildwood House Ltd, 2000), p.18, p.11.

his presentation of Mr Tuttle, DeLillo associates intimations of mental unity with verbal incoherence, as in Underworld and Libra. But Mr Tuttle's linguistic difficulties are of a much higher order than those of Oswald or Marvin Lundy, rendering him virtually incapable of conversation, and appear to be the penalty for access to occult realities. In response to Lauren's initial enquiry concerning how long he has lived in the house, he replies only 'It is not able' (p.43). Lauren and the reader are left perplexed as to whether he is seeking to explain his disability, or if this represents an attempt to form the word 'notable', in which case he may be, correctly, prophesying the importance of this encounter for Lauren's grieving process. Either way, DeLillo suggests that Tuttle's mixture of incapacity and inspiration arises from a quasi-mystical psychological abstraction, reminiscent of Karen in Mao II. Lauren suggests that Mr Tuttle walks 'with a slight shuffle' because he 'feared levitation' (p.45) and 'amused herself by thinking he'd come from cyberspace' (p.45), a notion that recalls Sister Edgar's climactic journey into the Internet in Underworld.

DeLillo's exploration of temporal unity in consciousness involves examining the possibility that, as T.S. Eliot avers, 'to be conscious is not to be in time' and that, in reality, past, present, and future may exist as part of a single, present instant.¹² After DeLillo's revision of Woolf in his first sentence, he asserts enigmatically that 'The world happens, unrolling into moments', as though describing the artificial 'rolling' of a film-like projection, which was preceded by a radically different, timeless state (p.7). Words such as 'happen' or 'happened' occur four times in the early pages (p.7, p.8, p.11); for example, 'It happened this final morning that they were here at the same time' (p.7), implying, with the undertone of 'chance occurrence', that our adoption of a model of time as successive 'moments' is entirely

contingent. In a subtly different form, this concept of 'real' time as a unified entity also attracted Virginia Woolf's attention. In Jacob's Room, she suggests the British Library contains 'an enormous mind', which connects 'Plato' and 'Shakespeare' to the present day, a notion revised and clarified in The Waves, when she refers to the 'unlimited time of the mind, which stretches in a flash from Shakespeare to ourselves'.¹³ On a smaller scale, Mr Tuttle's behaviour attributes just such 'unlimited' scope to our experience of time. In Lauren's judgement, Mr Tuttle's 'future' is 'simultaneous, somehow, with the present' and 'they are equally accessible' to him (p.77). Bonca argues that such psychological amalgamation of time is replicated in Heidegger's views, yet Heidegger's concentration on the intermittent eruptions or coming 'into bloom' of past time differs from Tuttle's permanent simultaneity.¹⁴ A more striking modernist precursor for DeLillo's treatment of time may be found in Henri Bergson. Bergson describes a state, translated as 'Pure duration', which consists in the fusion of 'both the present and past states into an organic whole' and 'is the form which the succession of our conscious state assumes when our ego lets itself live'.¹⁵ But, like Woolf, Bergson says little of the future, except to remark that the 'present' has 'one foot' in the 'future', because it is 'impending over the future'.¹⁶ For modernist speculation on the type of prophecy Mr Tuttle practices, one must go to Edmund Husserl. As Barry Dainton shows, Husserl

¹² T.S. Eliot, 'Burnt Norton', in T.S. Eliot: Collected Poems 1909-62 (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), pp.189-195 (p.192).

¹³ Virginia Woolf, Jacob's Room (London: The Hogarth Press, 1971), pp.107-08 and The Waves (London: The Hogarth Press, 1961), p.194.

¹⁴ Martin Heidegger, The Question of Technology and other Essays, trans. by William W. Lovitt (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1997), p.11.

¹⁵ Henri Bergson, Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness, trans. by F.L. Pogson (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1913), p.100.

¹⁶ Henri Bergson, Matter and Memory, trans. by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1913), p.177.

held that 'primal impressions are typically accompanied by short-term anticipation of future impressions'.¹⁷ According to Izchak Miller, this led Husserl to conclude that 'a fully "prophetic" consciousness is, in principle, always possible'.¹⁸ Husserl's is therefore a position that might be stretched to account for the fact that Mr Tuttle 'remembers the future' (p.100), notably, in his seeming foreknowledge of Lauren's request 'Don't touch it', 'I'll clean it up later', which he 'mimics' long before it is made (p.93). However, in modernist thought, Mr Tuttle's atemporal perception is most closely related to Einsteinian relativity, which is made explicit in Lauren's suggestion that he inhabits 'an objective world, the deepest description of space-time' (p.83). Roger Penrose notes that Einstein's theory posits 'a 'static' four-dimensional space-time', in which 'space-time is just there and time 'flows' no more than does space'.¹⁹ Among other things, Einstein's theory is known for its assertion that there exists a 'curvature in the fabric of "space-time"'.²⁰ This may account for DeLillo's remark that 'From a long way off', Mr Tuttle appeared to walk 'narrowly, in curved space', an idiosyncrasy that reaffirms Tuttle's apparent access to hidden but profound truths (p.95). But, in light of the novel's postmodern epistemology, it is especially striking that Tuttle's experience coincides with the speculations of contemporary mysticism, which often closely resemble those of Einstein. Tuttle somewhat ethereal appearance, with 'something elusive in his aspect' (p.46), suggests mystical or ghostly qualities, which prompt the critic to seek parallels in this area. Numerous 'New Age'

¹⁷ Barry Dainton, Stream of Consciousness: Unity and Continuity in Conscious Experience (London: Routledge, 2000), p.153.

¹⁸ Izchak Miller, 'Husserl's Account of Our Temporal Awareness', in Husserl, Intentionality and Cognitive Science, ed. by Hubert L. Dreyfus (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), pp. 125-46 (p.141).

¹⁹ Roger Penrose, Shadows of the Mind (London: Vintage, 1995), p.384.

²⁰ Frank Close, Lucifer's Legacy: The Meaning of Asymmetry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.251.

works joyfully embrace the possibility that time is illusory and that, as Eckhart Tolle puts it, 'the inner equivalent of time is presence, awareness of the eternal Now'.²¹ Like Woolf in Mrs Dalloway, DeLillo opposes 'inner' 'awareness' of temporality to inauthentic clock-time. Lauren progresses from neurotic reliance on the clock, after Rey's death, when she is 'eternally checking the time' (p.73, p.58), to trusting circadian rhythms and viewing time as a function of the body, which can be known intuitively. She grows in the conviction that 'Time unfolds into the seams of being' (p.99) and demands of her audience that they also 'feel time go by, viscerally, even painfully' (p.104). In arguing for the artificiality of the concept of time, Tolle's interest, like Lauren's, is in exploring 'root identity', or what Tolle calls 'the ever-present I am' (p.3), which, he argues, is 'prior to I am this or I am that' (p.11). The phrase recalls Clarissa Dalloway's defiant refusal to 'say of anyone in the world now that they were this or that' (Dalloway, p.8). Yet, where Woolf's modernist point is to emphasise the mercurial fluidity of consciousness, Tolle, and Lauren, seek the substratum that may underlie all such superficial flux. In the unexpected appearance of Mr Tuttle, at the conclusion of chapter two, Lauren finds an unlikely mentor in her pursuit of this goal (p.41).

Tuttle's mysterious appearance and subsequent disappearance inevitably raises the question of his ontological status. Is he mental patient, spiritual presence, or second self? If his existence is truly extra-temporal, if, as Neale Donald Walsch quotes 'God' as saying of spiritual reality, for him, 'Past', 'Present', and 'Future' exist 'all at once', then he might also be, in some sense, extra-spatial, or illusory.²²

²¹ Eckhart Tolle, The Power of Now: A Guide To Spiritual Enlightenment (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2005), p.117.

²² Neale Donald Walsch, Conversations With God: An Uncommon Dialogue, Book 2 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1999), p.66.

Tuttle is certainly resistant to spatiality: when Lauren hears him, before he appears, she feels that 'The noise had this quality, of a body shedding space' (p.40). As Grosz remarks, 'the body is fundamentally linked to representations of spatiality and temporality', raising the question of whether a body can exist without a relation to these categories (p.90). DeLillo maintains a teasing and uncanny ambiguity on the subject. Rey's comments on 'the noises in the walls', before the young man's appearance, seems to testify to Tuttle's material existence (p.18). But, Tuttle's inhuman immunity to time suggests he may be a product of Lauren's unconscious. After all, as Freud argues, 'The process of the system Ucs. are timeless; i.e. they are not ordered temporally, are not altered by the passage of time'.²³ This notion is supported by the fact that, before Tuttle's appearance, Lauren's behaviour resembles that of her unsuspected guest: she is always 'thinking into tomorrow', as though unconsciously yearning for Tuttle's timeless quality (p.34). During the same period, she experiences hallucinations and the apparent fissuring of her identity, which implies a second self may be emerging from her unconscious. She begins 'hearing herself from other parts of the house' (p.35) and 'seeing herself from the edge of the room' (p.34). Moreover, her relation to Tuttle seems uncannily close. She is not surprised at discovering him 'in a small bedroom', regarding it as 'inevitable' (p.41) and seems to expect to communicate telepathically with him, prefacing her 'need to live here alone for a time', with a confident assertion that 'it is surely unnecessary to tell you this' (p.47). Although Lauren believes he is real, she remains uncertain about the nature of his being or his possible psychological problems. She tells herself half-heartedly that she ought to 'call the hospitals' to report him missing (p.56), yet later

²³ Sigmund Freud, 'The Unconscious', in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Vol. XIV (1914-1916), trans. by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), pp.159-215 (p.187).

asserts that 'He wasn't mental', 'except in the sense that people who threaten our assumptions are always believed to be mad' (p.97). When she does contact 'institutions', after his disappearance, she experiences an unaccountable feeling of fraudulence, adopting 'a made-up voice', while remaining 'mindful of the irony' of the conversation, as though acknowledging that, in reality, she may be the one suffering from mental illness (p.96). Tellingly, after his departure, 'When she could not remember what he looked like, she leaned into a mirror and there he was', a habit that suggests radical, if unacknowledged, doubts about his existence (p.112).

Lauren never brings herself to doubt her sanity or Tuttle's reality. In spite of his quasi-mystical qualities, therefore, he is what C.F. Keppler calls the 'genuine second self' which is 'always simultaneously objective and subjective, and never explainable as a mistake'.²⁴ Within this role, Tuttle most closely fits the category Keppler calls the 'saviour', in which 'the Power of Good appears as the uncanny and suspect counterpart' (p.101). This 'Power' manifests as subtle guidance to Lauren, offered through broken speech and by example. He assists Lauren in her grief, by serving as counsellor and substitute love object. In the process, he makes Lauren understand the 'hidden thinness of everything around her' (p.93), directing her attention to the possibility of revelatory, quasi-mystical existence. Most importantly, though paradoxically, since his characteristics are so abstract as to appear unreal, he dissuades her from metaphysical speculation. Instead, he emphasises the strong subjectivity and reassuring sense of narrative time that arises from the vigorous union of mind and body she experiences during bodywork. Although individual identity and narrative time may not be consistent with occult or ultimate reality, Tuttle's behaviour implies recognition that, if Lauren is to recreate a resilient sense of self, she must

accept these as pragmatic ontological fictions. Following Rey's death, Tuttle acts as a conduit for Lauren's sorrow, to the extent that 'she could not miss Rey without thinking along the margins of Mr Tuttle' (p.82). Her grief is symbolised by a temporary alienation from the physical and, in particular, the stars. Unlike Kant, she cannot 'associate them directly with my own existence' or feel a direct 'connection with all those visible worlds';²⁵ in Rey's absence, they are no longer a 'soul extension', or a 'a thing that lived outside of language in the oldest part of her' (Body Artist, p.37). To reconnect with the physical and her sense of self, she deliberately attempts to inhabit 'reality', castigating herself with such maxims as 'Real people don't look at ringing phones' (p.34). DeLillo articulates her sense of estrangement with the enigmatic notion that 'the world was lost inside her', implying the paradox of a continuing attachment to the natural world, from which she nevertheless feels alienated (p.37). Appropriately, it is at this moment of separation from her 'root identity' or 'oldest part' that she encounters Tuttle. As Keppler asserts of the second self, Tuttle arrives 'at exactly that juncture at which the first self, however reluctantly, is ready for him' (p.196). Tuttle's semi-coherent, unconventional speech strikes her as 'pure chant, transparent' (p.75), recalling the 'pure word' with which Rilke hopes to capture, appropriately, the 'untellable stars' in his Ninth Duino Elegy and DeLillo's previous reference to the poem's concern with the ineffable in End Zone.²⁶ His 'chant', in phrases like 'Coming and going I am leaving' (p.74), proves highly therapeutic, causing her to feel 'an elation that made it hard for her to listen carefully'

²⁴ C.F. Keppler, The Literature of the Second Self (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1972), p.190.

²⁵ Immanuel Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, trans. by Lewis White Beck (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1956), pp.161-2.

²⁶ Rainer Maria Rilke, Duino Elegies, trans. by J.B. Leishman and Stephen Spender (London: The Hogarth Press, 1939), p.85 and Don DeLillo, End Zone (New York: Penguin, 1986), p.64.

(p.75). Simultaneously, Tuttle guides her away from his own abstract and ethereal qualities. When Lauren enquires whether there is 'another language you speak' and asks him to 'say some words' in this occult tongue, he replies 'say some words to say some words' (p.55), as though questioning the value of purely verbal enquiry.

His 'pure chant' and her observation of his physical habits persuade her to emphasise flesh, at the expense of intellect: his 'transparent' speech causes 'an easing in her body that drew her down out of laborious thought' (p.74). She allows him to lead her in matters of the body. When she notices that 'He ate next to nothing for three days running', she imitates him: 'It was suitable in a way. It was what she hadn't thought of on her own' (p.94). The obtrusive presence of his body prompts her to intense concentration on the physical. Episodes in which she takes him shopping and returns to the car to 'find him sitting in piss and shit' (p.66) and 'unbashfully' gives him a bath (p.68) serve to refocus her attention on what Louise Steinman calls the 'wisdom of the body and the rituals that arise to express that wisdom' (p.3). She returns with satisfaction to her complex, ascetic routines of cleansing, exfoliation (p.76, p.83), and exercise, in which self-discipline reminds her of the indissoluble link between body and mind. As DeLillo observes, she 'calculated all the plausible requirements. Then she exceeded them...The mind willed it on the body' (pp.97-8). As this occurs, she becomes increasingly aware of his comparative alienation from the somatic. The incoherence of Tuttle's speech is partly explicable by incompetence with its material elements, the 'rhythmic intervals' and the 'mutters and hums' that 'pace a remark' (pp.65-6), while his lack of physical presence causes Lauren to feel that 'I'm standing closer to you than you are to me' (p.85). For Lauren, the body comes to appear as the centre of her identity and the origin of narrative time. She feels that

'Time is the only narrative that matters' and that it is to be located in the flesh, where 'Everything flows backward from the pelvis' (p.92). She abandons the notion of being what Gay Gaer Luce calls 'a slave to the clock on the wall' and emphasises the 'circadian fluctuations' that 'bind the fragments of our being into a coherent whole'.

²⁷ Luce argues that 'Tomorrow's human being' 'will be acquainted with his time structure, as we are acquainted with our temperaments' (p.248), a bold prediction that might cause one to reinterpret Tuttle's ability to remember 'the future' (p.100) as an indication that he is a messenger from Luce's hypothetical 'tomorrow'. Lauren believes that, in its estrangement from the body, Tuttle's existence lacks 'narrative quality' (p.65) and the possibility of subjectivity: the 'stirrings of tremulous self' (p.85). She senses that, as Antonio Damasio argues, a 'sense of self' and temporal awareness emerge simultaneously, in the process by which an organism creates a narrative with a 'beginning, a middle, and an end', based on bodily experience. ²⁸ Lauren therefore concludes, paradoxically, perhaps disingenuously, that, although bodily narrative time may be an illusion, this is where her 'root identity', or the 'oldest part of herself', is located. She declares 'we are made out of time' (p.92) and, in the novel's last line, affirms her need 'to feel the sea tang on her face and the flow of time in her body to tell her who she was' (p.124).

These conclusions are responsible for the title of her work 'Body Time'. In this piece, Lauren explores the consequences of the discovery that, as real-life performance artist Fakir Musafar puts it, only a 'disembodied consciousness' is 'free of time and space'. ²⁹ Consequently, as its name suggests, the piece conveys a sense

²⁷ Gay Gaer Luce, Body Time (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1972), p.15, p.25, p.15.

²⁸ Antonio Damasio, The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness (London: William Heinemann, 1999), p.3, p168.

²⁹ Fakir Musafar, Spirit and Flesh (Santa Fe, NM: Arena, 2002), p.5.

of time passing 'viscerally' (p.104), in successive moments. To convey this, among other things, Lauren employs a video of a web site, which she has watched intermittently at home and which shows an empty road in Kotka, Finland (p.38), with 'a digital display that records the time' (p.107). Lauren also pays homage to her mentor and second self, Mr Tuttle, by playing a version of him, as an 'emaciated and aphasic' man, 'trying desperately to tell us something', while sporting 'ash white' hair (p.103) to represent his 'pale-haired' (p.47) and sometimes 'chalky' appearance (p.66). Lauren's decision to honour Tuttle is well judged, since, as we discover in the final pages, he has also succeeded in transmitting to her his ability to experience the unity of past and present time. After his unexplained departure, she plans to 'deliver herself into his reality' (p.114) and 'walk down the hall into his time' (p.115). She accomplishes exactly this, seeming to merge with Tuttle, hearing 'him in her chest and throat' (p.121), and is led to the bedroom by 'chant, a man's chanted voice' (p.120), where she experiences a return of past time, in which Rey appears, as though on the day of his death. DeLillo's debt to Proust in this scene is clear and calls one's attention to the recurrence of the words 'intermittent' and 'intermittently' throughout, (p.28, p.100, p.107), which, in light of this climax, may be a reference to 'The Intermittences of the Heart' section of In Search of Lost Time.³⁰ The chapter in question is particularly important to Proust's opus, since its main theme, that 'with the perturbations of memory are linked the intermittencies of the heart', is central to the novel's thesis (p.147). Moreover, as Michael Wood notes, 'The Intermittences of the Heart' was at one point Proust's title for the whole novel'.³¹ The connection of

³⁰ Marcel Proust, 'The Intermittencies of the Heart', in In Search of Lost Time Vol. Three, trans. by C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (London: Everyman, 2001), pp.141-69.

³¹ Michael Wood, 'The Thing', in London Review of Books, 6th January 2005, pp.18-20 (p.19).

memory and emotion also proves highly appropriate to Lauren's experience in this scene, which has a profoundly cathartic effect. Her apparent meeting with Rey goes well beyond the imaginary returns of time envisaged by the modernist Proust; it engages fully with Tuttle's quasi-mystical experience of an eternal present, permitting Lauren the sense of wholly re-imagining and remaking her past. DeLillo suggests that it is only a 'question of fitting herself to the moment' of that 'final morning' (p.7), which is, in reality concurrent with her own (p.122). Once she does this, he declares, 'It is the simplest thing in the world when she goes out to his car and takes his car keys and hides them, hammers them, beats them, eats them, buries them in the bone soil', to prevent him driving to New York, to his self-inflicted death (p.123).

Although Rey's apparently 'real body' does not remain present (p.120), Lauren's temporary immersion in past time ameliorates her grief and extinguishes a longstanding sense of guilt. Its effect is such that it prompts a second, equally therapeutic, temporal eruption. She recalls that 'Her mother died when she was nine' and feels similarly able to transform this memory, with the liberating understanding that 'It wasn't her fault. It had nothing to do with her' (p.124). It seems likely that these episodes precede Lauren's performances of Body Time, which requires more concentrated energy than she appears to possess in the diegetic narrative. If so, then these returns of lost time may have assisted her creative process. Certainly, Proust would argue that her experience is the most valuable possible for the growth of creativity. In Time Regained, he asserts that the gift which most 'profoundly modifies' the mind of an artist is an event 'that reverses the order of time for them by making them contemporaries with another epoch in their lives'.³²

³² Marcel Proust, In Search of Lost Time Vol. Four, trans. by C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (London: Everyman, 2001), p. 297.

'Cosmopolis': Chaos Theory and Counter-Consciousness

Cosmopolis (2003) explores the radical change in the view of consciousness and the relationship between mind and matter taken by twenty-eight year old businessman Eric Packer, who begins the single April day in which the novel is set with a personal fortune worth 'tens of billions' (p.121). Eric also has a queasy aversion to organic matter, which causes him to emphasise orderly intellectual configurations and exclude the somatic and the chaotic or asymmetrical from his abundant theorising. This distaste for physicality and concomitant neglect of what his eventual assassin Benno Levin calls the 'little quirk', 'the thing that's skewed a little' (p.200), is symbolised by the 'asymmetry' of his prostate gland (p.52). As Benno reproves Eric, in a lengthy final scene, the 'answer' to his intellectual uncertainties lay 'in your body' (p.200). During the novel's diurnal time-span, Eric concludes that, rather than brilliant manipulation of abstruse numerical systems, his financial success is due to his recognition of 'a pattern latent in nature itself' (p.63). Eric perceives an 'order at some deep level', which is characteristic of postmodern chaos theory (p.86), what Joseph M.Conte calls the 'appreciation of order as the possible emanation of disorder', which he suggests is typical of contemporary American Fiction.³³ Eric's exploration of a unifying principle between mind, body, and the natural world is accompanied by the same desire to define a 'root identity' that motivates Lauren Hartke. To this end, he places himself in dire material need and proximity to death, first, by gambling away his fortune and that of his wife, the heir to a European

³³ Joseph M. Conte, Design and Debris: A Chaotics of Postmodern American Fiction (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2002), p.9.

banking fortune named Elise Shifrin, in ill-advised speculations on the Yen. He then deliberately seeks out his former employee and assassin Benno Levin, who, he is well aware, presents 'a credible threat' to his life (p.121).

Cosmopolis goes beyond the necessity for accepting the unity of mind and matter that DeLillo examines in his early fiction. It explores the possibility that mind and matter are not just inextricably linked, but that matter possesses low-level mental qualities and, viewed rightly, is a crude form of mind. As Jean-François Lyotard argues, mind is only the most refined form of consciousness: 'Mind is matter which remembers its interactions, its immanence'.³⁴ Eric begins to suspect the immanence of mental activity in the organic, while studying the 'affinity between market movements and the natural world' (p.86). The intelligible patterns in the currency markets strike him as an enigmatic sign of low level consciousness in the physical world; an example of what Bateson calls 'mind as an explanatory principle' in nature (p.19). Eric later calls this a 'counter-consciousness' within the body (p.50) and, in the concluding pages, enlists it as a powerful argument against his own erstwhile view that 'consciousness' might be easily transferable to 'chip' or 'disk' (p.206), protesting that the body has provided him with invaluable information regarding consciousness: 'He'd come to know himself, untranslatably, through his pain' (p.207).

The novel's emphasis on financial speculation makes particularly notable its location in April 2000, during the last months of Bill Clinton's presidency. The period is known for its considerable economic growth, which allowed Clinton, in the words of his economic advisor Bruce Reed, to be 'the only leader in all of history to leave a

³⁴ Jean-François Lyotard, The Inhuman: Reflections on Time, trans. by Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p.40.

budget surplus of such magnitude'.³⁵ Even more, though, Clinton's administration is remembered for exceptional stock market growth, which opened the possibility of millionaire status to an unprecedented proportion of the U.S. population. Much of this success has since been revealed to have been based on a damaging separation between share prices and real economic activity, some of which was the result of large-scale fraud, as in the famous case of the power company Enron. It was a time in which, as Eric tells Benno, 'Nobody's against the rich. Everybody's ten seconds from being rich. Or so everybody thought' (p.196). The concluding note of doubt is apposite because April 2000 is also notable for being the month in which the stock market began to fall. Eric's descent into penury is therefore historically coterminous with a substantial drop in the value of the assets held by many U.S. investors. Bearing in mind that the novel appeared only three years after these events, Cosmopolis is another DeLillo novel that portrays a contemporary situation with startling immediacy. In this fictional world, the Clinton presidency becomes the 'Midwood administration', a name that suggests the kind of uninspired period of interregnum that is consonant with Eric's evident desperation for dramatic change, especially for connection with real physical matter, so frequently neglected in the economic predictions of overly optimistic or fraudulent American firms in the 1990s (p.76). Certainly, we are made aware that, in the postmodern era of globalised capital, where multi-national corporations elude the control of any single government, executive power is impotent relative to the financial speculations of international enterprises like Packer Capital. When Eric learns that 'The President's in town', he simply asks nonchalantly 'Which President' (p.11) and responds to fears about the Commander-in-Chief's safety with the sly enquiry 'Do people still shoot at presidents? I thought

³⁵ Joe Klein, The Natural: The Misunderstood Presidency of Bill Clinton (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2002), p.198.

there were more stimulating targets' (p.20). President Midwood is portrayed as preoccupied by the media and his personal image, appearing on 'live videostream, accessible worldwide', on which he sits passively, with a 'gaze' that was 'empty', 'without direction or content'. Like his Presidency, he seems to Eric to carry no sense of 'vital occupancy', as though existing 'in some little hollow of non-time' (p.76), even appearing to inhabit some medial state between spirit and flesh, resembling the 'undead' in 'occult repose', 'waiting to be reanimated' (p.77).

The President's need for 'reanimation' by external forces contributes to the sense of cartoon-like unreality typical of the novel's postmodernist aesthetic. The world of Cosmopolis often betrays a factitious aura, which, again, is allegorical of the characters' sense of their own unreality, and which recalls Baudrillard's comparison of the postmodern U.S. to a vast cartoon landscape. Baudrillard argues that 'Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order' and that 'Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real'.³⁶ Eric's stretch limousine possesses a 'bruised cartoonish quality' and resembles 'a car in a narrative panel' (p.157). Characters are often ludicrous caricatures who exhibit the signs of 'distortion' and 'exaggeration' that John Geipel argues are typical of the cartoon as a medium.³⁷ Although a billionaire at twenty-eight, Eric is presented as super-fit, highly sexed, and, most implausibly, as a serious intellectual, who reads Einstein's 'Special Theory' at night, 'in English and German' (p.6). His employees are personifications of, by turns, nihilism, intellectual brilliance, and abject humility. Vija Kinski, his 'chief of theory' (p.82), declares

³⁶ Jean Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2004), p.12.

³⁷ John Geipel, The Graphic Cartoon: A Short History of Graphic Comedy and Satire (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1972), p.20.

expansively that the market is composed entirely of 'random phenomena', without 'plausible realities' to be 'traced and analyzed' (p.85), while his 'currency analyst' 'Michael Chin' (p.21) remains largely silent in Eric's company because, as he says, 'I know I can't answer these questions without losing your respect' (p.22). Its concern with the cartoonishness of postmodernity revisits the themes of DeLillo's most recent play, Valparaiso, which examines the relation between the search for 'root identity', or what DeLillo calls the 'naked shitmost self', and the artificially 'heightened brightened' self cultivated by television.³⁸ The play's main characters, Michael and Livia, enter this disturbing parallel world when Michael achieves momentary fame, through a well-publicised trip to various cities around the world named 'Valparaiso', rather than his intended destination: Valparaiso, Indiana. The circuitous journey represents the anomie pervading a postmodern America saturated by impersonal technologies and globalised industries. As in Cosmopolis, immersion in this unreal milieu creates a craving to explore its obverse, the 'naked shitmost self' (p.91) and, in both texts, only the determination to explore this fundament of consciousness permits escape from the quasi-animated aesthetic of postmodern America.

Although DeLillo's cartoon-like aesthetic has contemporary literary parallels, including the bitter satire of Robert Coover's The Public Burning and David Foster Wallace's luridly caricatured portrayal of Lyndon Johnson, the contemporary work closest to it may be Quentin Tarantino's Pulp Fiction.³⁹ DeLillo's frequent use of cinematic technique makes it appropriate that such a parallel be drawn from film. Yet, neither the movie, nor DeLillo's novel employs a traditional cinematic aesthetic. As

³⁸ Don DeLillo, Valparaiso: A Play in Two Acts (London: Picador, 2004), p.80.

³⁹ Robert Coover, The Public Burning (New York: Viking, 1977), David Foster Wallace, 'Lyndon', in The Girl With Curious Hair and Other Stories (London: Abacus, 1997), pp.75-118 and Pulp Fiction. Dir. Quentin Tarantino. A Band Apart et al. 1996.

Dana Polan points out, Pulp Fiction is situated in 'made-up spaces, cartoon-like built environments'.⁴⁰ In his view, Pulp Fiction's 'disjunctions', 'loops of narrative', and 'dramatic shifts of tone and image' belong to a revolutionary genre he calls 'cyber-cinema', which appeals to a form of 'visual literacy' that emerged with the Internet (p.37). In Cosmopolis, DeLillo's interest in cinema is fused with a more postmodern concern with video and digital images. Eric associates film with the tedium of childhood, as in his weary recollection of 'movies', in which the 'door is always locked' and the hero always 'kicks it open' (p.183). By contrast, he associates video with elevated status and feels nostalgia for the days when 'his image was videostreamed worldwide from the car', before security concerns made him operate on 'a closed circuit' (p.15). DeLillo's choice of metaphor also favours more contemporary technologies, as in his assertion that, in periods of ennui, Eric resists the temptation to 'take long walks into the scrolling dawn' (p.5). Their cartoonish aesthetic has caused both works to be dismissed as vacuous. Walter Kirn argues DeLillo's thirteenth novel is full of 'sleek despair' and 'medium cool existential aimlessness' and 'as riddled with trite conventions and canned attitudes as late medieval chivalric poetry'.⁴¹ As Polan notes, Pulp Fiction has often prompted the reaction that 'it doesn't seem to have anything to say and renders cinematic experience as pure play' (p.7). Like Cosmopolis, the film makes explicit reference to animation. Polan shows that Tarantino drew directly on cartoons, basing Mia Wallace's dance moves 'on one of the cats in the animated film The Aristocats' (pp.19-20). In a restaurant scene at 'Jack Rabbit Slim's', Mia accuses her companion

⁴⁰ Dana Polan, Pulp Fiction (London: BFI Publishing, 2000), p.73, p.37.

⁴¹ Walter Kirn, 'Long Day's Journey into Haircut', at <<http://query.nytimes.com/search/full-page?res=9E02E7DF1638F930A25757C0A9659>>, last accessed 6/2/05.

Vincent Vega of being a 'square' but, rather than speak the word, she draws the shape in mid air and it appears on the screen in animated form. Eric's obsession with technological progress, at the expense of history and collective memory, which manifests in his contempt for supposedly outmoded words such as 'airport' (p.22) and 'handgun' (p.19), leads unexpectedly to the fulfilment of his fantasy of knowing 'the truth about the future' (p.64). In implausible cartoon fashion, his video equipment begins screening actions moments before they happen. This prophetic camera is evocative of science fiction, and it is interesting to note that such a device did appear in an episode of the 1960s science fiction television show The Twilight Zone, entitled 'A Most Unusual Camera'.⁴² As in Fredric Jameson's description of a 'new depthlessness' caused by a 'weakening of historicity' in the age of 'the simulacrum', Eric's alienation from the past proves pathological and, in his case, unsustainable.⁴³ Far from feeling excitement at the technological miracle of making gestures 'a second or two after he's seen it on-screen', Eric is disturbed by the challenge the camera's predictions pose to his self-image as seer (p.22). Vija Kinski comforts Eric by suggesting obsequiously that he catalysed this unfeasible occurrence, declaring that 'Genius alters the terms of its own habitat'. This hints that Eric may be a Tuttle-like figure, whose 'consciousness' is 'hypermaniacal' and has 'contact points beyond the general perception' (p.95). Yet, rather than embrace Tuttle's eternal present, Eric clings, temporarily, to a belief that 'the past is disappearing' (p.86) and that the anti-capitalist protestors he meets are mere luddites, vainly seeking to 'hold off the future' (p.91) and the 'force of cyber-capital' (p.90). DeLillo comically indicates Eric's

⁴² <<http://www.tzone.the-croc.com/tceplist/camera.html>>, last accessed 7/3/05.

⁴³ Fredric Jameson, Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (London: Verso, 1993), p.6.

contempt for memory by his use of 'prousted' to describe the sound proofing of his limousine with cork, a term that reduces Proust's exposition of 'past time' to the single biographical detail of his cork-lined bedroom (p.70).

DeLillo subtly questions and undermines Eric's asymmetrical approach to time, most tellingly through Eric's own embryonic wish to explore memory, which is implicit in his willingness to traverse New York for a haircut from his childhood barber. As he declares, the experience has 'Associations' (p.15). Even Vija hints that the exclusion of past and present is impossible to maintain. She demonstrates an uncanny, metafictional grasp of the text's diurnal timeframe, remarking that 'something will happen soon, maybe today' 'To correct the acceleration of time. Bring nature back to normal' (p.79). Moreover, the novel's climax, in which Benno kills Eric, in retaliation for Eric firing him, is a dramatic eruption of the past time Eric seeks to repress. During the day, Eric himself grows increasingly attracted to Jamesonian 'historicity', primarily, through recognition of the organic as a tangible history of the human subject, what Merleau-Ponty calls the body as the 'specific past' of being (p.85). He notices the factitious, disembodied quality of his immediate employees, remarking of Vija that she was 'a voice with a body as an after thought'. 'Give her a history and she'd disappear' (p.105). On noticing that 'The Sikh at the wheel' of his limousine 'was missing a finger', he calls the 'stub' 'a serious thing', 'a body ruin that carried history and pain' (p.17), while the 'ravaged eye' of another driver, Ibrahim, evokes, for Eric, 'a brooding folklore of time and fate' (p.170). Eric's concentration on these physical scars counters his former neglect of body in favour of mind and of real economic activity for stock market abstraction. Moreover, the immigrant, possibly refugee, status of these characters calls attention to the title Cosmopolis, with its implication of a cosmopolitan cityscape, and the material

struggles of the developing world, on which decisions made in America's major cities have such a profound impact. Indeed, the association of physical scarring and these immigrants' relative poverty suggests Eric's rediscovery of the body seems partly allegorical of America's need to consider the overseas impact of its economic policies.

Physical asymmetry recurs in the text, in the form of Benno Levin's exercise bike with its 'missing pedal' (p.61) and Eric's failure to acquire more than half a haircut from his barber Anthony (p.169). Their use is comparable to Samuel Beckett's black humour of bodily histories in Molloy, where comparable examples of physical disproportion appear, notably the narrator's 'short stiff leg', 'the loss of the toes' on his 'left foot', and a bicycle that 'had no brakes'.⁴⁴ The similarity alerts one to a more profound parallel: the oscillation in Beckett's work between cartoon-like humour and the brute facts of physicality and DeLillo's exploration of cartoonishness and the 'naked shitmost self'. Indeed, though Beckett is sometimes treated as exclusively modernist, some of his works, for example Endgame, share elements of the cartoon-like aesthetic in Cosmopolis and Pulp Fiction.⁴⁵ Endgame's main characters, HAMM and CLOV, are outrageous 'cartoon stereotypes' of power and submission. Its world, like that of Cosmopolis, is claustrophobic, artificially closed system or 'parallel universe', which excludes the organic. As CLOV announces, 'There's no more nature' 'In the vicinity' (p.16). Like Eric, and Mafia boss Marsellus Wallace in Pulp Fiction, the play is ruled by an absolute monarch, HAMM, who bullies spineless subordinates with the prospect that beyond his blessed kingdom lies desolation: 'Outside of here it's death' (p.45). The aura of fantasy is reinforced by a cast of low

⁴⁴ Samuel Beckett, Molloy: Malone Dies: The Unnamable (London: Calder and Boyars, 1966), p.23, p.55, p.47.

⁴⁵ Samuel Beckett, Endgame (London: Faber and Faber, 1964)

life characters who speak a highly literate, sometimes quasi-Shakespearean, prose in lines like HAMM's 'Accursed progenitor', addressed to his elderly father (p.15). In spite of his reputation as, in Anthony Cronin's words, 'The Last Modernist', therefore, Beckett may have contributed significantly to DeLillo and Tarantino's postmodernist aesthetic and may be considered, as Michael Worton argues, 'one of the founding fathers of, and one of the major witnesses to, our Post-Modern condition'.⁴⁶

Like Cosmopolis and Endgame, Pulp Fiction renders character in terms of what Robert Crumb would call 'classic cartoon stereotypes'.⁴⁷ Marsellus Wallace's tyrannical behaviour resembles that of Eric and HAMM. Although, unlike his counterparts, Marsellus rules by brutal physical force, all three appear to guarantee the relative stability of their unreal world with the force of their personality or reputation. Marsellus' status as a cartoon stereotype of African American brawn and criminality is reinforced by the many rear-angle shots of him, which obscure his identity for much of the movie. Mia is a stereotypical youthful white 'trophy wife', who reinforces his status in a white dominated world. As in Endgame, the unreal quality of the action in Cosmopolis and Pulp Fiction is heightened by low-life characters employing an elevated register. In an anti-capitalist slogan, 'A RAT BECAME THE UNIT OF CURRENCY', which seems to symbolise Eric's connection of organic matter with the 'arcane charting' (p.63) of currency trading, he recognises a line of poetry he has recently read (pp.96-7). DeLillo's epigraph informs us that the line is by Zbigniew Herbert (pp.96-7). Pulp Fiction's gangsters appear similarly contemplative

⁴⁶ Anthony Cronin, Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist (London: Harper Collins, 1996) and Michael Worton, 'Waiting for Godot and Endgame', in The Cambridge Companion to Beckett, ed. by John Pilling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.67-87 (p.85).

⁴⁷ Robert Hughes, 'Roll Right Up Folks!', in The Guardian: G2, 7th March 2005, pp.5-7 (p.7).

and literate: after carrying out a Mafia hit, Vincent concludes a scene by asking his colleague Jules Winnfield whether we should 'continue this theological discussion elsewhere'. This animated 'parallel universe' also contains characters who seek peaceful sequestration, as though to reaffirm that their cartoon-like immunity to quotidian pressures and dangers. This attraction to safe, interior spaces may account for the infantile humour that circulates around anality in Pulp Fiction and Cosmopolis. DeLillo's novel contains Eric's ludicrous prostate examination, carried out with his chief of finance in attendance (p.48), while, in Pulp Fiction, we learn of boxer Butch Coolidge's father, who, as a POW, carries a pocket watch 'in his ass' for the sake of his son's patrimony. Yet, frequently, the unfortunates who crave safety re-emerge to find that their fears have precipitated a violent return of the repressed and catastrophe has ensued in their absence (p.72). Mob enforcer, Vincent, repeatedly retreats to the toilet, only to encounter disastrous situations on his return, in the last of which Butch appropriates his weapon and murders him. Eric, similarly, secretes himself in limousines and elevators, to the extent of commandeering two elevators in his apartment building as 'private' (p.28) and denying any distinction between the 'office' and the 'car' (p.15). When he finally sheds his heavy personal security and leaves the womb or anus-like environs of his car/office, he, like Vincent, suffers a rapid, violent demise. The parallel suggests that the 'root identity' Eric discovers in poverty and death is the obverse of his glossy animated world and that one may call the other into being. The compelling power of the cartoon landscape is such that only self-abnegation and asceticism provide hope of escape. Eric's eagerness, and that of Jules in Pulp Fiction, to effect such an exit testifies to the ennui their banal existence provokes and to the satirical intent of these works, which, as Geipel argues of the

cartoon generally, 'accentuate the essential imbecility of the situation they depict' (p.33). In Cosmopolis, Eric seeks liberation by 'pissing away' his wife's 'birthright' in 'the smoke of rumbling markets' (p.123); his loss of various garments, including 'necktie', 'jacket', and 'socks', at regular intervals, seems symbolic of the process and also suggests that he unconsciously desires it (p.68. p.118. p.179). Mafia hit man, Jules, meanwhile, foregoes his profitable career and the briefcase of gold bullion he is carrying to 'walk the earth', or as Vincent puts it contemptuously, to 'be a bum'. Just as Eric aims to find a 'root identity' by being seen 'pure and lorn' in 'killing light' (pp.123-4), in poverty, Jules is determined to become 'Just Jules', 'no more, no less'.

Eric's emphasis on the body arises from his intimation of unity between mind and organic matter and a Batesonian suspicion that both entities possess 'mental' qualities. Like Lauren, in The Body Artist, Eric adopts a quasi-scientific mode of enquiry into the mind-matter relation, which is, again, characterised by oscillation between assertion and doubt, this time apparent in his supplementing numerous observations with the proviso 'but maybe not' (p.16, p.78). Notably, his eventual position implies a radically different reinterpretation of the issues Lyle confronts in Players. Where Lyle cherished 'stock symbols' for an 'impression of reality disconnected from the resonance of his own senses' (p.70), Eric becomes convinced that 'data on a screen' is inextricable from the organic swell of the 'life process': of his 'streams of numbers', he remarks 'Here was the heave of the biosphere'. 'Our bodies and oceans were here, knowable and whole' (p.24). Eric's failed attempt to analyse the Yen is pivotal to his arrival at this holistic view. The importance of the currency to the U.S. economy and collective psyche makes its presence especially noteworthy and may indicate that Eric's intellectual journey is needed by the nation as a whole. As R. Taggart Murphy shows, since the Reagan Presidency, the U.S. has

borrowed vast sums from Japan to finance a deficit that 'exploded', under the pressure of tax cuts and stable public spending.⁴⁸ Eric's massive purchasing of Yen might therefore be regarded, by some, as a heroic balancing of accounts with a country whose large-scale investment in dollars causes America to feel uncomfortably indebted.

Unfortunately, Eric's misjudgements produce the kind of financial catastrophe some analysts predict for America's over-stretched economy. He begins from the assumption that he is, as his finance expert Jane Melman calls him, a 'seer', intuitively cognisant of the 'predictable components' of fluctuations in 'technology stocks' (p.46). In this sense, he is typical of professional stock analysts who, as Sydney S. Alexander explains, 'operate on the assumption that there exist certain trend generating facts' 'that will guide a speculator to profit'.⁴⁹ Unexpectedly, however, he perceives more than 'predictable' patterns; he encounters the 'interrelation of order and disorder' characteristic of Chaos Theory (Design, p.2) and, in his view, a 'pattern latent in nature itself' (p.63). This rouses his interest in organic matter and, again, like Chaos Theory, he sees 'Common forces at work' within phenomena as disparate as 'fruit flies and heart attacks' (p.37). Their daunting complexity leads him to attribute a form of 'mental function' to them (Mind, p.93); of the Yen's startling behaviour, he declares the 'Yen is making a statement' (p.21) and, later, reflects privately that 'The Yen knew itself that it could not go any higher' (p.84). This seeming anthropomorphism culminates in the assertion that his prostate gland contains 'some bundled other brain, a counter-consciousness' that caused him

⁴⁸ R. Taggart Murphy, The Weight of The Yen: How Denial Imperils America's Future and Ruins an Alliance (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996), p.32.

to feel 'He was living in the gland' (p.50). The notion of low level intelligence in the body causes him to adopt his doctor's verdict on a 'blackhead', 'Let it express itself' (p.45), as a refrain, with which he responds to many apparent crises (p.51, p.74, p.186). Eric's attribution of mental qualities to the body recalls Merleau-Ponty's notion of an 'organic thought, through which' 'the relation of the 'psychic' to the 'physiological' becomes conceivable' (p.77). This radical view of matter as mind has a long, if little discussed, philosophical history: Lyotard quotes Leibniz's assertion that 'One can consider every body as a mind that is instantaneous but deprived of memory' (p.39). Eric's search for configurations 'latent in nature' goes further, looking for evidence of mental action throughout the physical world. Just as Bateson finds an 'aesthetic' 'unity' (p.19) in the way the natural world is 'joined together in its mental aspects' (p.18), Eric accepts he is seeking 'An aesthetics of interaction' in his biological speculations (p.86). Yet, Eric finds asymmetry within this unity and therefore the same fusion of order and disorder that is articulated in Chaos Theory. Reflecting on his prostate, Eric asserts that asymmetry was 'a counterforce to balance and calm, the riddling little twist, subatomic, that made creation happen' (p.52). This notion seems to allude to the theory of matter and anti-matter, which, in Frank Close's words, 'suggests that the stuff of which we are made is but half of a symmetric whole' (p.4) and that there resides 'an intrinsic asymmetry in nature's fabric' (p.252). When Eric later attends the funeral of humorously named Sufi rap singer Brutha Fez, there is a performance of an 'anti-matter rap'. The song champions idiosyncrasy, one might say asymmetry, in its lament about a 'Prince of the street', who 'had a case of conventional wisdom/Never say nothing the others don't say' (p.137). With his

⁴⁹ Sidney S. Alexander, 'Price Movements in Speculative Markets: Trends or Random Walks', in The Random Character of Stock Market Prices, ed. by Paul H. Cootner (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1964), pp.199-218 (p.199).

endless stream of advisors and desperate quest for coherent pattern, the song seems directly applicable to Eric. As Benno tells him, his ruin was precipitated by his mistaken belief that the Yen would behave predictably; he overlooked 'the importance of the lopsided', 'The little quirk. The misshape' (p.200). Some noted reviewers have therefore concluded that, in Michiko Kakutani's words, Cosmopolis' central theme is that 'chaos and asymmetry will trump the search for order and patterns', but the principles of chaos and order remain inextricably linked.⁵⁰ The paradox of Benno's observation is that without Eric's asymmetrical outlook, his horror of the body and his possession of 'half a heart' (p.190), he would not have undergone the radical intellectual shift that prompts his asceticism and leads to his climactic meeting with Benno. The plot or ordering principle of the work itself is set in motion by this asymmetry and 'order' and 'disorder' are united in the structure of the novel.

The importance of Eric's adoption of 'organic thought' is signalled partly by his horror of human biology, in the earliest parts of Cosmopolis, which prompts him to enrol sophisticated technologies in order to avoid physical contact. He revels in the 'context' of his limousine being 'nearly touchless', requiring him only to 'talk' 'systems into operation' (p.13). In his rarefied sex life, he has only to 'say the words' (p.51) for 'man and woman' to reach 'completion', 'touching neither each other nor themselves' (p.52), while his bodyguard Torval's 'force and brawn' is sufficient 'provocation' (p.20) for Eric to shoot and kill the man (p.146). The same revulsion at physicality underlies his boast that he exercises his self-confessed 'ruthless efficiency' (p.31) in reducing himself to 'six percent body fat' (p.111). For Eric, excess flesh is

⁵⁰ Michiko Kakutani, 'Books of the Times; Headed Towards a Crash, Of Sorts, in a Stretch Limo', at <<http://www.query.nytimes.com/search/full-page?res=940CE7D61730F937A15750C0A9659>>, last accessed 6/2/05.

metonymic of the organic in general and he treats it as what Julia Kristeva calls the 'abject', a being or quality ejected by the superego to re-establish psychic equilibrium.

⁵¹ Near the novel's climax, however, Eric recuperates what he has rejected. An exemplary moment arrives when he discovers a scene being filmed with 'three hundred naked people sprawled in the street' (p.172) and follows his craving to be 'here among them, all-body, the tattooed, the hairy-assed, those who stank' (p.176). In the act, he fulfils Merleau-Ponty's criteria for the fullest 'experience' of consciousness, something achievable through 'communication with the world, the body and other people, to be with them instead of being beside them' (p.96). The presence of cameras adds ambiguity to his courage in stripping off, suggesting the enduring attraction that the simulacral world he has inhabited may retain for him, but the event nevertheless demonstrates a hitherto unseen willingness to confront 'bodies' as 'blunt facts' (p.173).

In many respects, his assassin is a human metaphor for the somatic he rejects. The squalor of the building in which Benno lives, 'without water, heat or lights' (p.150), his lack of coordination, manifest in his walking 'whatever, funny' (p.57), and the fact that he is unemployable because, as he explains, 'I stink. Smell me' (p.193) are ugly facets of physicality that terrify Eric and towards which he gravitates in search of 'root identity'. For Eric, Benno is an example of what Kristeva calls the 'utmost abjection', which is 'death infecting life' (p.3). Having clearly declined to his 'naked shitmost self', he is qualified to instruct Eric in his search for the substratum of subjectivity. His sense of self is so utterly enervated that he feels 'It's all I can do to be a person' (p.196) and firmly believes he is degenerating towards asexuality,

⁵¹ Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p.2.

because 'my sex organ is receding into my body' (p.192). His prose writing is characterised by a similarly half-formed quality, with numerous sentences ending prematurely or lacking an object: for example, 'I steal electricity for a lamppost. I doubt if this occurred to him, for my living space' (p.57). This eccentric grammar does not prevent him developing comically grandiose ambitions for his 'Confessions', of which we receive two instalments (pp.55-61, pp.149-55), and which he regards as a 'spiritual autobiography', presumably in the manner of St. Augustine.

Benno seems related to the low life characters of Dostoevsky's fiction, particularly the narrator of Letters from the Underground, who he resembles in terms of age, 'Forty-one' (p.189) to the 'forty' of Dostoevsky's character, and occupation, having been a 'professor of computer applications' at a 'community college' (p.189), and therefore, like his counterpart, a civil servant.⁵² Like Benno, this subterranean figure has 'never succeeded in being anything at all' and now wishes to be 'a colourless being, since a man of character, a man of action, is a being who is essentially limited' (p.6). The final remark is appropriate to Eric's quest, which is predicated on exactly this sense of the limitations of the 'man of action'. Eric's search for Benno arises from an intuitive realisation that his assassin is his doppelganger or second self and, as such, can assist him in resolving the blatant 'asymmetry' of his being. Benno can clearly be taken to represent the 'disorder' that counterbalances the 'ruthless efficiency' of Eric's 'order' and the 'organic' to match Eric's dynamic 'intellect', but DeLillo adds numerous, often comical, details that confirm Benno's status as his victim's double. Benno unknowingly departs from Eric's contemptuous indictment of the term 'automated teller machines' as 'burdened by its own historical

⁵² Fyodor Dostoevsky, Letters from the Underground, trans. by C.J. Hogarth (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1913), p.5.

memory' (p.54), by remarking, several pages later, that the ATM has 'a charisma that still speaks to me' (p.60). By contrast with Eric's effortless mastery of the 'global era' (p.91), Benno's use of the Web results in his acquisition of numerous 'syndromes' (p.202), with such bewildering titles as 'hwabyung', a form of 'cultural panic' from Korea, which he has 'caught on the Internet' (p.56). But, perhaps, the evidence that clinches their intimacy is the revelation that Benno's prostate is also 'asymmetrical' (p.199), which confirms Eric as matter to Benno's anti-matter and each as 'half of a symmetric whole' (Lucifer's, p.4). As Close points out, 'when any particle of matter meets its mirror anti-particle, mutual annihilation occurs' (p.4) and the destructive consequences of the pair's eventual meeting fulfils all such dark prophecies. Much of the humour in the long final scene arises from the implausibly reasonable tone in which the two men discuss at length the reasons for Eric's impending murder, while Benno's resolve to carry out the deed remains steadfast. Eric is sufficiently relaxed to enquire into Benno's toilet facilities, asking 'What happens to your waste?' (p.190), while his doppelganger is happy to assure his former boss that his prostate is 'a harmless variation. Nothing to worry about' (p.199). The novel ends with Eric gazing into 'the crystal of his watch' observing another quasi-animated portrayal of future events (p.209). In this case, it is his imminent death and transportation to the 'hospital morgue' as the unidentified 'Male Z', a designation that confirms his attainment of a zero degree of consciousness and exploration of an unmistakably 'root identity' (p.208). Observing this scene, he reflects on Artificial Intelligence, which has engaged DeLillo's interest for more than twenty-five years, and explicitly rejects his former desire to witness consciousness 'transcending his body mass, the soft tissue over the bones' and live as 'data' or 'quantum dust' (p.206). He concludes that the somatic contributes vastly towards his sense of self, his 'pain' being 'crucial to his

distinctiveness' and 'not susceptible, he didn't think, to computer emulation', as well as to his thought process, which Eric calls the 'veer of his libidinous intellect' (p.207).

It is the most explicit rejection, in DeLillo's work, of what Searle calls 'Strong AI'.

Some of Eric's predecessors have met equally unpleasant ends on account of their wish for digitalised 'transcendence', but his intellectual conversion and insistence that 'my situation has changed in the course of the day' earns him no reprieve (p.202).

This may be because escape from the unreal, cartoon-like dimension he inhabits can only be achieved in death. As long as he remains alive, he is reduced to the status of spectator in his own life, viewing his dead body, but 'still alive in original space, waiting for the shot to sound' (p.209).

Conclusion

In spite of giving an increasing number of interviews to journalists over the last fifteen years, it is still Don DeLillo's 'nature', as he once put it, 'to keep quiet about most things. Even the ideas in my work'.¹ Notably, DeLillo has avoided being interviewed by the academics who study his work, perhaps sensing that the scholar is more likely than the average journalist to probe the intellectual process and thematic concerns that have given rise to his highly sophisticated oeuvre. In a letter to me, he explained that his determination to 'keep my distance from studies of my work' arises, not from a 'strategy', but an 'elemental impulse', a remark that indicates the uneasiness he experiences in articulating even the most fundamental concerns of his fiction.² As I noted in the introduction to this thesis, it was 2003 before DeLillo made the slightest mention of his lifelong reverence for Ernest Hemingway or of Hemingway's influence on his work.³

Nevertheless, in recent conversations with newspaper columnists and the occasional publisher, such as his former editor Gerald Howard, DeLillo's mentions of the term 'consciousness' have grown noticeably more frequent, almost matching his numerous uses of the word in his fiction. As we saw, he told Peter Henning that, in Underworld, he wanted to 'broaden consciousness' to 'open it up' (Henning). In his interview with Howard, DeLillo also makes explicit his view that the value of the

¹ Tom LeClair and Larry McCaffery, eds. Anything Can Happen: Interviews with Contemporary American Novelists (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1983), p.80.

² Don DeLillo, Letter to the author, August 2003. Although Tom LeClair famously interviewed DeLillo, this was part of a book of interviews with American novelists and was not connected with his later study of DeLillo In The Loop: Don DeLillo and the Systems Novel (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1987)

³ Peter Henning, 'An Interview with Don DeLillo', in Frankfurter Rundschon, 20th November 2003, 271, pp.28-29, trans, by Julie Apitzsch at <http://www.perival.com/delillo/ddinterview_henning.html>, last accessed 3rd April 2005.

novel form lies in its ability both to examine consciousness and to acknowledge its importance, by giving free rein to its considerable powers.⁴ As he puts it, 'The novel expands, contracts, becomes essay-like, floats in pure consciousness' (p.5). Moreover, in 'The Power of History', he says of the historical novel's ability to slip 'into the skin of historical figures' that 'This is how consciousness is extended and human truth is seen new'.⁵

I interpret DeLillo's new readiness to discuss this subject as a greater openness that has come with the knowledge that, at the age of sixty-eight, thirty four years after the publication of Americana, the bulk of his work as a novelist is now done.

Statements like these make clear what DeLillo's novels have long implied, that his central and abiding concern is with the nature of human consciousness and the status it has acquired, or failed to acquire, in the discourses of American postmodernity.

DeLillo has made comparable remarks on the strength and resilience of the self, which he has called 'free and undivided', which affirm what has long been apparent to careful readers, that much of his interest in consciousness is in how the growth of subjectivity is hindered or encouraged by contemporary U.S. culture and, of equal concern, what forms of selfhood are available in that cultural milieu (Power, p.62).

Undoubtedly, the phrase 'free and undivided' does little justice to the variety of DeLillo's portrayals of the self, which range from absolute nullity to the balance between maintaining an individual sense of self and sharing in the unified 'deep mind' of the wider culture, which is present in Underworld, for example. Yet, it is an

⁴ Gerald Howard "'The American Strangeness': An Interview with Don DeLillo", in Hungry Mind; an Independent Book Review at <http://web.archive.org/web/19990129081431/http://www.bookwire.com/hmr/hmrinter>, last accessed 6th October 2004.

⁵ Don DeLillo, 'The Power of History', in The New York Times, 7th September 1997, pp.60-63 (p.63).

apt description of the degree of autonomy that DeLillo attributes to the self, when consciousness realises its full potential, to choose, actively and freely, between competing epistemologies.

Throughout the thesis, I have attempted to do justice to the range of epistemologies that DeLillo explores, from the hyper-rationality of scientific, behaviourist, or computational thought that many of his early protagonists choose in order to escape their own mind and body, to the deeply intuitive modes of thought that often prevail in his later fiction. These, less rational, epistemologies frequently cause a measure of intellectual impairment and psychological disorientation, but compensate by their dissemination of a unified model of mind that transforms ethical thought, and by their appreciation of mind-body unity, which permits a more subtle understanding of the nature of consciousness. Where I believe my contribution has been particularly original is in my analysis of the relation between knowing and being, or epistemology and ontology, as I have often called it. I have tried to demonstrate that DeLillo consistently shows mind taking a leading role in this relationship and, moreover, that it has a direct, causal effect on the sense of self, including physical and emotional response. Precisely how and why the action of the mind has this impact on subjectivity remains mysterious in DeLillo's fiction. In Ratner's Star, Billy Twillig indicates the stubborn obscurity of the interstice between epistemology and ontology. In Billy's words, 'There is something in the space between what I know and what I am and what fills this space is what I know there are no words for'.⁶ I apply the term 'mysterious' advisedly, since numerous commentators, and DeLillo himself, have alluded to his use of the word and the enigmatic quality that informs his oeuvre. He once told Anthony De Curtis that 'in the

⁶ Don DeLillo, Ratner's Star (London: Vintage, 1991), p.370.

background of my work' there is 'a sense of something extraordinary hovering just beyond our touch'.⁷ This dissertation suggests that much of the uncanny quality that pervades DeLillo's novels arises, above all, from the difficult confrontation with the uncharted territory of consciousness.

⁷ Anthony De Curtis, "'An Outsider in This Society'": An Interview with Don DeLillo', in Introducing Don DeLillo, ed. by Frank Lentricchia (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), pp.43-66 (p.63).

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