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**REDEEMING THE BETRAYED BODY:  
Technology and Embodiment in the Fiction of Thomas Pynchon  
and Don DeLillo**

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2011

## **Thesis Abstract**

**Abeer Abdel Raouf Fahim**

### **Redeeming the Betrayed Body: Technology and Embodiment in the Fiction of Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo**

This thesis presents a reading of the fiction of Don DeLillo and Thomas Pynchon that focuses on the significance of embodiment in the authors' technologically mediated worlds. The study draws upon the work of Vivian Sobchack, Steven Connor, Merleau-Ponty, and Jean-Paul Sartre. Critics of DeLillo and Pynchon's fiction have generally avoided phenomenological perspectives; as a result, the concept of corporeality has not been thoroughly examined. Thus, the thesis examines the fiction of Pynchon and DeLillo in light of theories of embodiment that have been overlooked. Central to the thesis is a study of the theoretical and technical aspects of visual and auditory technology that is focused on how the authors depict an intrinsic connection between the physical body and prosthetics. To subvert the conventional dichotomy between the human and the technological, the thesis explores the sensory experiences of the characters, drawing attention to the inextricable connection between the body and the world. The analysis also considers the significance of the unity of the senses and the connection this has to the manner in which the body's materiality is depicted. Moreover, the concept of monstrosity is used to explore how the authors portray the fluidity and the multiplicity of the human body. Giving a close reading of the body's inherent connection to technology and the prominence of materiality, the thesis suggests that the characters depict subjective experiences that are rooted in their physicality. Technology is not perceived, in its conventional sense, as a means of disembodiment; on the contrary, it is the gateway to exploring corporeality.

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## INTRODUCTION: Back to the Senses

Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo have provided some of the most detailed and insightful depictions of twentieth and twenty-first century American society. More than any other authors, their fiction has tackled various topics related to modern technology, ranging from the limitations and problems that it causes to the freedoms that it facilitates. Considering the significance of their fiction in the literary canon, many scholars have repeatedly discussed their work, focusing on the numerous themes, including science and technology, that are especially prominent in their rich oeuvre. The work of both authors is almost always synonymous with the term postmodernism; while Jeremy Green describes DeLillo as “the representative postmodern novelist for the end of the century,”<sup>1</sup> several renowned Pynchon critics explore how Pynchon’s work epitomizes the thematic and structural concerns of postmodernity. Although it is debatable whether it is DeLillo or Pynchon that gives a more representative portrayal of America, it is often agreed upon that their fiction is equal in its significance to the work of Samuel Beckett and James Joyce.

Before establishing the argument of this thesis, I will begin with a question that I find necessary to justify the pairing of the authors in this study. Given that Pynchon and DeLillo are often grouped together, and that many of the connections between their work have already been examined, is it necessary to provide another study of their work? The answer to this question, I believe, depends on the direction that the study takes. Yes, there is a need to address the fiction of the authors, once again, by focusing on a gap in the available criticism. When the body is re-examined, we find that there is a kind of void. Criticism has focused

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Green, *Late Postmodernism: American Fiction at the Millennium* (New York: Palgrave, 2005) 4.



mostly on the emptiness of the body, the body as a representation, not the body as flesh, the body as complex materiality. One is reminded of Pynchon's depiction of the *Bordando El Manto Terrestre* (1961) ; at the top of a circular tower, frail girls are seen "embroidering a kind of tapestry which spilled out the slit windows and into a void, seeking hopelessly to fill the void."<sup>2</sup> Fortunately, the attempt to re-establish the corporeality of the body in Pynchon and DeLillo's fiction is not a hopeless one. It does, however, require a new approach.

The relationship between DeLillo and Pynchon is especially evident when we compare *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) and *White Noise* (1985). Both texts are focused on characters that are in search for meaning in the midst of a world of visual representations. For both Oedipa Mass and Jack Gladney, there is an incessant desire to find a tangible presence behind intangible symbols. The Trystero symbol and "The Most Photographed Barn in America" are only two examples of such representations. Moreover, the theme of the quest is connected to a state of paranoia, a concept that critics have thoroughly examined in the authors' work. For example, Aaron S. Rosenfeld makes an insightful claim when he addresses the relationship between Pynchon, DeLillo, and George Orwell:

Not least among the prescient aspects of George Orwell's 1984 is its articulation of a paranoia that is at once dismal and thrilling. If today paranoia's distinctive sensibility— its blend of grandiosity and abjection— has become a commonplace of the modern novel, with writers from Pynchon to DeLillo to Amis riffing on the suspicion that the world might be a setup, Orwell's version lays the groundwork for their sense of paranoia's possibilities.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Spanish surrealist Remedios Varo's painting is very significant to Pynchon criticism. It epitomizes the notion of emptiness and confinement. Stefan Mattessich argues that "this room in Varo's tower assumes for Oedipa the fatal and enigmatic attraction of a destiny from which there is no escape, a point of departure and arrival that exposes the illusion of movement between here and there," "Ekphrasis, Escape, and Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*," *PMC* 8.1 (1997): 1.

<sup>3</sup> Aaron S. Rosenfeld, " 'The Scanty Plot,' : Orwell, Pynchon, and the Poetics of Paranoia," *Twentieth Century Literature* 50 (2004): 337.

Indeed, Pynchon and DeLillo's fiction is often framed in conspiracies and the desperate need to escape them. Thus, in their work, paranoia, the state of excessive anxiety or fear, becomes characteristic of the modern condition. While paranoia is certainly one of Pynchon and DeLillo's most important themes, it is also problematic; it often leads to readings that are focused on Jean Baudrillard's simulations, a topic that I will discuss further. What is lost in such readings is the material state of the body. Let us note, for instance, Patrick O'Donnell's analysis of paranoia in DeLillo's fiction. Referring to Tom LeClair's argument, O'Donnell suggests that "DeLillo writes the novel of information systems, of Baudrillard's 'hyperreal,' where everything is visible and on the surface."<sup>4</sup> While such readings are insightful, they become problematic when the body is perceived as part of the semiotics of this information system.

In contrast with the intangible conspiracy that overwhelms the characters, there is a tangible presence of the body. Pynchon and DeLillo foreground the corporeality of the body throughout their fiction. The senses have a prominent place; seeing, hearing, and touching are especially significant parts of the characters' connection to the world. This is the main rationale behind choosing both authors for this thesis. Moreover, when the authors' perspective on embodiment is examined, it becomes evident that they make an intrinsic connection between technology and the body. According to Amelia Jones, "whether overtly or not, all visual culture plumbs the complex and profound intersections among visibility, embodiment, and the logics of mechanical, industrial, or cybernetic systems."<sup>5</sup> This intersection is especially central to the fiction of both authors. As further examples will show, unlike other authors whose fiction may to a certain extent prioritize disembodiment, Pynchon and DeLillo share the same basic outlook; lived experience does not transcend the

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<sup>4</sup> Patrick O'Donnell, "Engendering Paranoia in Contemporary Narrative," *Boundary* 19.1 (1992): 193.

<sup>5</sup> Amelia Jones, "The Body and Technology," *Art Journal* 60.1 (2001): 20.

corporeality of the body, and the presence of modern technology does not justify eliminating the body. It is important to acknowledge that the magical and the spectral have a significant place in the authors' texts and are often depicted as a manifestation of technology. Mr. Tuttle in *The Body Artist* and Luca Zombini in *Against the Day* are two examples of this. However, as this thesis will argue, for every apparent absence, there is always a material presence.<sup>6</sup>

This thesis is inspired by Henri Lefebvre's words that "Western philosophy has betrayed the body; it has actively participated in the great process of metaphorization that has abandoned the body; and it has denied the body."<sup>7</sup> To an extent, Pynchon and DeLillo criticism has also "betrayed the body."<sup>8</sup> The body in their fiction has generally been analysed in accordance with one of two theoretical perspectives; the body as a simulation in light of Jean Baudrillard's theory or the body in a more human and spiritual dimension. Examples of these in DeLillo criticism include the critic Frank Lentricchia who has shown a keen interest in Baudrillard, while the more recent work of Jesse Kavadlo, *Balance at the Edge of Belief* (2004), encourages a reading of DeLillo that avoids postmodern theories and instead focuses on spiritual values. A similar tension is found in Pynchon criticism where postmodernism is central to analysing Pynchon's recent fiction, though critics such as Dwight Eddins in *The Gnostic Pynchon* (1990) favour a more religious perspective. Thus, one must acknowledge that there is a debate in Pynchon and DeLillo criticism that is generally framed in the conflict regarding how to label their work. This conflict is especially evident in Paul Maltby's argument that reading DeLillo's work strictly as postmodernist leads us to overlooking "the (conspicuously unpostmodern) metaphysical impulse that animates his

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<sup>6</sup> This concept will be discussed further in the introduction in light of phenomenological theory. Absence plays a central role in DeLillo and Pynchon criticism. Discussions of absence often address escapism or spirituality. See John A. McClure, "Postmodern/Post-Secular: Contemporary Fiction and Spirituality," *MFS* 41.1 (1995): 141-163. While McClure gives an insightful reading that resists a strictly secular/postmodern reading of Pynchon and DeLillo's work, there is no reference to embodiment.

<sup>7</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1974) 407.

<sup>8</sup> Lefebvre 407.

work”<sup>9</sup> and the claim that Pynchon’s characters are “heirs of Henry Adams, wander[ing] through intricacies where entropy and information theory are linked by Emersonian Metamorphosis.”<sup>10</sup>

Despite these differing perspectives and the concern with the postmodern label, embodiment has not been given such attention. In his overview of Pynchon criticism, Samuel Thomas offers a summary of the approaches used to read Pynchon. A few of the labels Thomas refers to are, “postmodern Pynchon, poststructuralist Pynchon, romantic Pynchon, scientific Pynchon, Pynchon read through Baudrillard, Derrida, Deleuze.”<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Thomas attributes some of the gaps in Pynchon criticism to the “over-zealous celebration of the postmodern.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, his study of Pynchon attempts to foreground the theme of the political, often trivialized by scholars who focus on scientific metaphors and theoretical play in accordance with the overarching framework of postmodernism.<sup>13</sup> I agree with Thomas’s main premise; however my thesis focuses on another neglected area, namely embodiment and its relation to technology. There remains a need to examine the body as a corporeal and fallible entity that forms the basis of the interaction between characters and technological media. It is because of the pervasiveness of modern technologies, the telephone, radio, television and computers, that critics have focused on representational aspects of the body as opposed to its materiality. This is understandable since such technologies have reconfigured the body; in the case of medical technologies, the body may be transformed into codes and virtual images on a screen, while sound technology detaches the voice from a tangible body.

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Maltby, “The Romantic Metaphysics of Don DeLillo,” *Blooms Modern Critical Views* (Philadelphia, PA: Chelsea House, 2003) 220.

<sup>10</sup> R.A. Yoder, “The Equilibrist Perspective: Toward a Theory of American Romanticism,” *Studies in Romanticism*, 12.4 (1973): 707.

<sup>11</sup> Samuel Thomas, *Pynchon and the Political*, *Studies in Major Literary Authors*, ed. William E. Cain (New York: Routledge, 2007) 10.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas 10.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas 10.

Thus, the general tendency to define DeLillo's work as postmodern is partly due to the thematic concerns of his work. Peter Knights asks if it is also DeLillo's "deployment of a set of stylistic techniques that makes him an exponent of a new artistic register that goes by the name of postmodernism."<sup>14</sup>

The main aim of this thesis is an attempt to question the conventional theorization of the body in DeLillo and Pynchon's work, not by overlooking technology, but by drawing attention to how modern visual and auditory technology, often associated with the absence of corporeality, can in fact direct critical attention back towards embodiment. In this reading, it is impossible to reach a comprehensive understanding of DeLillo and Pynchon's work without providing an in-depth analysis of their representation of the lived body in accordance with the phenomenological readings of Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Jean-Paul Sartre. Thus, I will begin by offering a provisional definition of phenomenology, and by briefly sketching out some of the connections between the theorists used in my analysis. Robert Salowoski, for example, defines phenomenology in terms of its key differences from postmodernism. A textbook postmodern understanding of the world implies that there is no substance or reality beneath the surface world representations or appearances:

In contrast with this postmodern understanding of appearance, phenomenology, in its classic form, insists that parts are only understood against the background of appropriate wholes, that manifolds of appearance, harbour identities, and that absences make no sense except as played off against the presences that can be achieved through them. Phenomenology insists that identity and intelligibility are available in things, and that we ourselves are defined as the ones to whom such identities and intelligibilities are given. We can evidence the way things are; when we

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<sup>14</sup> Peter Knight, "DeLillo, Postmodernism, Postmodernity," *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008) 27.

do so, we discover objects, but we also discover ourselves, precisely as datives of disclosure, as those to whom things appear.<sup>15</sup>

While there may be some differences between Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Jean Paul Sartre, there is a significant similarity that justifies referring to all of them in this thesis; in contrast to a postmodern perspective that does not support an inherent connection between the subject's body and the world, the three theorists suggest that there is always an inextricable connection between the two. Moreover, the three are often credited for establishing the foundations of phenomenology. In addition to these principal theorists, my thesis provides a reading of the authors that encourages an analysis that draws upon the recent work of Vivian Sobchack, Steven Connor, and Drew Leder, who also explore the inherent connection between corporeality and modern technology while engaging in the current debate regarding embodiment. As further analysis will show, Sobachack, Connor, and Leder are influenced by the phenomenological ideas of Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty. Thus, a main contribution of this thesis is to introduce such theorists of the body that are largely absent from DeLillo and Pynchon criticism in order to foreground the notion of embodiment.

The central concern is how to foreground the lived body as opposed to a simulated reality and a virtual body. For Baudrillard, signs and images have become substitutes for reality. We are immersed in a media-constructed reality that obscures the boundary between what is 'real' and what is not. According to Baudrillard, "to simulate is to feign to have what one hasn't."<sup>16</sup> However, it is not as simple as pretending, because "feigning or dissimulating leaves the reality principal intact; the difference is always clear, it is only masked; whereas

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Sokolwski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Cambridge UP: Cambridge, 2000) 4.

<sup>16</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, Foreign Agents Series, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman (New York: Columbia, 1983) 5.

simulation threatens the difference between ‘true’ and ‘false,’ the ‘real’ and ‘imaginary.’”<sup>17</sup>

It is indisputable that throughout DeLillo and Pynchon’s fiction, the technologically mediated contexts make it almost impossible at times to distinguish between the real and the imaginary. In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, published in 1973, the characters experience ‘reality’ as film; they are described as products of film, body doubles, and fail to realize whether or not a camera is actually present. In *Against the Day*, the Chums of Chance probe the boundaries of a parallel universe and Lew Basnight falls into trance-like phases that confuse the readers and characters alike. In *White Noise*, a media-saturated setting, even the narrative voice, is merged with random television and radio ‘sound bites.’ Drawing upon Sobchack to refute this approach is suitable, considering that Sobchack herself is quite sceptical of Baudrillard’s argument. In *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (2004), Sobchack doubts the rationale behind Baudrillard’s erotic technofantasy and asks, where is his body?<sup>18</sup> She notes that Baudrillard’s theory implies that “the man’s lived body (and, perhaps not coincidentally, the body of a man), in all its material facticity, its situatedness, its finitude, and its limitations, seem[s] to have been transubstantiated through textualization into the infinite possibility, receptivity, literally, and irresponsibly of the ‘pure’ sign.”<sup>19</sup> Thus for Baudrillard, the body has become detached from its very basis of embodied existence. Sobchack adds that having read Baudrillard’s theory while recovering from cancer surgery, she “wished the man a car crash or two, as well as a little pain to bring him (back) to his senses.”<sup>20</sup>

While I will maintain a reading of the fiction that prioritizes embodiment, I will not argue that the body’s presence is always clear. Instead, I will draw upon Drew Leder’s

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<sup>17</sup> Baudrillard 5.

<sup>18</sup> Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 2004) 167.

<sup>19</sup> Sobchack 167.

<sup>20</sup> Sobchack 167.

phenomenological critique of Cartesianism in *The Absent Body* (1990) to show that the apparent absence of the body does not necessarily imply disembodiment, nor does it follow that the lived body is inessential to our perceptual experiences. Though other critics will be more central to my thesis, it is Leder's general idea that provides an appropriate departure point. Through his definition of human experience, Leder identifies the inextricable connection between the body and perception:

Human experience is incarnated. I receive the surrounding world through my eyes, my ears, my hands. The structure of my perceptual organs shapes that which I apprehend. And it is via bodily means that I am capable of responding. My legs carry me toward a desired goal seen across the distance. My hands reach out to take up tools, reconstructing the natural surroundings into an abode uniquely suited to my body. My actions are motivated by emotions, needs, desires, that well up from a corporeal self. Relations with others are based upon our mutuality of gaze and touch, our speech, our resonances of feeling and perspective. From the most visceral of craving to the loftiest of artistic achievements, the body plays its formative role.<sup>21</sup>

Leder examines the paradoxical nature of corporeality, suggesting that it arises from the conflict between the body's presence and absence. He argues that "while in one sense the body is the most abiding and inescapable presence in our lives, it is also essentially characterized by absence."<sup>22</sup> Though the body is always present, it is also absent in the sense that we are not always focused on our embodiment. For instance, when reading a book or playing a sport, our attention is focused on the act, the ideas, the game, or the opponent, as opposed to our embodiment. He refers to a psychological experiment that showed that nine out of ten people have difficulty picking a photograph of their own hands from a group of such pictures. It is even more problematic when one has to identify an internal organ.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1990) 1.

<sup>22</sup> Leder 1.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.



Indeed, one “would surely be unable to recognize the look of [one’s] heart, though [our] very own life depends on its functions.”<sup>24</sup> These aspects of absence may lead to an analysis of Pynchon and DeLillo’s work that is based on disembodiment. Thus, it is necessary to re-examine the body and technology, focusing on how these apparent absences do not actually mean an absence of corporeality. According to Leder, the way to comprehend these absences is to examine the body’s structure through Merleau-Ponty’s idea of incorporation. Merleau-Ponty writes that “the blind man’s stick has ceased to be an object for him; its point has become an area of sensitivity, extending the scope and active radius of touch, and providing a parallel to sight.”<sup>25</sup> Leder explains that, in this context, the term “incorporation”<sup>26</sup> can explain how the body’s structure develops to encompass its surroundings:

The term “incorporation” seems to imply an absorptive process operating in a unilateral direction. Via a phenomenological osmosis, the body brings within itself novel abilities, its own temporal history, and tools that remain spatially discrete. However, incorporation is the result of a rich dialectic wherein the world transforms my body, even as my body transforms its world.<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, it is Merleau-Ponty’s concept of incorporation that can lead us to saving the material body from its absence in DeLillo and Pynchon criticism. The “rich dialectic”<sup>28</sup> between the body and the world can help illuminate the ambiguous relationship between the characters and their surrounding technologies. Though my thesis as a whole is not simply focused on Merleau-Ponty’s theories, most theorists referred to share with Merleau-Ponty the idea that the relationship between the perceiving subject and the world is not a dichotomy; instead, it is

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<sup>24</sup> Leder 1.

<sup>25</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (1954; London: Routledge, 2002) 165.

<sup>26</sup> Leder 34.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

a connection that is based on the direct engagement of the body with the world because as Merleau-Ponty asserts, our perception of the world is grounded in our embodiment.

The chapters of this thesis are not organised under a chronological principle, but on a thematic basis; each chapter considers a particular aspect of sensory perception in Pynchon and DeLillo's work. Moreover, I focus on characters and incidents that may have been trivialized by other critics, giving a detailed analysis of the specific character or episode. My first chapter focuses on Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, introducing my general approach to embodiment. I examine the overlooked cinematic techniques of doubling and morphing in *Gravity's Rainbow* to show a perspective on Pynchon's work that is not limited to German Expressionism. This analysis is significant because it allows us to approach more current topics regarding morphing and embodiment; focusing merely on German Expressionism limits the reading to a more conventional definition of identity. However, what is especially significant about this chapter is the connection that is made between the concept of monstrosity and the cinematic shape-shifting techniques. When Pynchon critics consider monstrosity, the point is made that the characters are monstrous because they are merged with their surrounding technologies, exemplifying mechanical beings. I draw upon Margrit Shildrick's work on the monstrous to examine how the characters' bodies already depict a monstrosity, an inherent multiplicity that mirrors the theoretical concerns of the doubling and morphing techniques. Moreover, the chapter examines how Pynchon's use of slapstick helps foreground the physical limitations of the body. Using the work of Ann Chisholm and Sobchack to provide technical perspectives on doubling and morphing in the novel, this chapter establishes the body's materiality as central and shows that the apparent representational cinematic technology is inherently connected to the characters' corporeality.

Additionally, a linguistic analysis in light of Jacques Derrida's concept of *différance* helps foreground the monstrosity of Pynchon's language.

Moving away from the general perspective on the body, the second chapter scrutinizes visual perception in Pynchon's longest novel, *Against the Day* (2006). The chapter begins with a brief overview of the history of optical technologies, focusing on the invention of magic lanterns and projectors. As mentioned previously, one cannot overlook the disembodied aspects of technology; this is especially relevant when considering visual technology in relation to the conventional idea that vision is a detached sense. More than any other sense, vision seems to enforce the subject-object dichotomy. This chapter uses Merleau-Ponty's concept of "inclusion"<sup>29</sup> to subvert this subject-object divide, focusing on how the subjective perceptual experiences of certain characters reflect an inextricable connection to the perceived world. In order to foreground this idea, the chapter considers the imperfections of vision, an aspect that is generally overlooked in Pynchon criticism. Moreover, while critics have given attention to surrealism in Pynchon's work, they have not established how surrealism can be used to emphasize the corporeal nature of visual perception. I argue that the chaos of sensation that defines surrealist art can be used as a conduit to subverting the conventional boundaries between empirical vision and imagination in *Against the Day*. The chapter also considers how photographic surrealism, as a means of revelation, is especially relevant to the characters' visual perception. I give a detailed linguistic analysis of the novel, in light of surrealist literature, in an attempt to show how Pynchon uses language as a means of maintaining the entwined relationship between the perceiving subject and object. The chapter concludes with a brief reference to Pynchon's role as an anticipatory writer, by

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<sup>29</sup> Merleau-Ponty 299.

focusing on the cutting-edge technique of photosynthography, to show that Pynchon insists on maintaining the centrality of embodied vision.

The third and fourth chapters of this thesis are focused on embodiment and technology in DeLillo's fiction. While I do analyse DeLillo's major novels, *Underworld* and *White Noise*, I also focus on DeLillo's other work, *The Body Artist* (2001), *Cosmopolis* (2003), and *Point Omega* (2010), that critics have referred to as less significant. DeLillo's shorter novels have often not been well received; responding to this criticism, DeLillo explains that the length depends on a novel's structure and development: "if a longer novel announces itself, I'll write it. A novel creates its own structure and develops its own terms. I tend to follow. And I never try to stretch what I sense is a compact book."<sup>30</sup> Despite DeLillo's defence of his work, critics often refer to DeLillo's post-*Underworld* fiction as relatively trivial and lacking in the stylistic and thematic ingenuity of his earlier work. This, I argue, is partly accountable for the limited types of approaches to DeLillo's fiction. Thus, I have given prominence in this approach to DeLillo's shorter fiction.

While visual perception in DeLillo's fiction has been analysed, hearing has been given less attention. Virtually the only novel in which hearing has been thoroughly examined is *The Body Artist*. The third chapter of this thesis also considers this text but it also addresses the connection between acoustic technology and embodiment in *Underworld* and *White Noise*. I consider both aspects of hearing and voice production. How do the characters hear their own and other characters' voices and how does the voice create a physical impact on the characters that traverses the boundary between the tangible sense of touch and the seemingly immaterial sense of hearing? Beginning with a definition of the prosthetic voice from Yoshiki Tajiri's *Samuel Beckett and the Prosthetic Body: the Organs and Senses in Modernism*,

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<sup>30</sup> Ed Caesar, "Don DeLillo: A Writer Like No Other," *The Sunday Times*, 21 Feb. 2010, web, 25 Feb 2010.

published in 2006, the chapter focuses on how this technologically mediated voice mirrors the inherently foreign nature of the human voice. Using Connor's characterization of the human voice as a benign monster, I examine how the characters' speech impediments exemplify the mechanical aspect of acoustic technology. The aspect of hearing is examined in terms of how the characters perceive voice through their bodies in light of vibroacoustic technologies that aid the deaf and enable them to 'hear' speech. Though the chapter examines two seemingly distinct aspects, the inherently prosthetic nature of the human voice and the embodied state of hearing, the aim in both cases is to show that in the midst of the various disembodied acoustic technologies, DeLillo uses voice to establish an inextricable connection between the body and technology and uses hearing to foreground acoustic perception.

Chapter four addresses the connection between DeLillo and Sartre, providing a phenomenological dimension to DeLillo's portrayal of medical technology. Focusing on *Cosmopolis* and *Falling Man*, I argue that Sartre's ontological modes of being can be used to reflect on Eric Packer and Keith Neudecker's sense of alienation from their surroundings. In *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, published in 1943, Sartre emphasizes that consciousness is an embodied state, always connected to the material body. Because humans are conscious beings, each a "being-for-itself,"<sup>31</sup> they can evaluate their bodily existence as opposed to merely existing as a material object or a "being-in-itself."<sup>32</sup> This ontological mode of being becomes reversed when one encounters the gaze of the other, for in becoming a "being-for-the-other,"<sup>33</sup> one's subjectivity is under threat. In *Cosmopolis*, where Packer is constantly obsessed with his well-being in the midst of a culture of hypochondria, these modes of being are especially telling. Drawing upon Connor's reading of

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<sup>31</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (1943; London: Routledge, 2003) xiv.

<sup>32</sup> Sartre vii.

<sup>33</sup> Sartre vi.

Sartre, I address the tension between Packer's lived experience of his body and his body as a being-for-the-other, an object for medical examination. This leads to an analysis of the nature of the doctor-patient relationship in the novel. Maintaining a similar argument in *Falling Man*, I examine the dimension of trauma and representation to Neudrecker's medical experience. The chapter as a whole aims to foreground a bodily perspective that reveals DeLillo's attempt to challenge the use of medical technology to reconfigure the characters' bodies.

The final section examines the cinematic technique of slow-motion in *Point Omega* and *Falling Man* and how this technique is connected to the characters' embodiment. The thickness of movement implicated in the technique manifests itself in all aspects of the characters' lives. Though previous chapters have addressed visual perception, this chapter examines it from a different angle. I argue that the slow-motion technique is intrinsically related to the characters' tendency to watch others closely, an argument that unfolds into a discussion of surveillance technology and culture in the novel. I also examine how the characters' ability to evaluate their own acts of seeing relates to Sobchack's concept that humans are "competent visual performers."<sup>34</sup> The chapter concludes with an overview of cinematic representation in the novel and an emphasis on how DeLillo manages to maintain the materiality of existence in a narrative that seems entrenched in Baudrillard's simulations. Thus, the thesis aims to foreground the importance of embodiment in the work of Pynchon and DeLillo, introducing phenomenological theory to the existing body of criticism. Using Sobchack's metaphor, though certainly not wishing to inflict any bodily pain, this thesis could be likened to the car crash that brings Pynchon and DeLillo criticism back to its senses.

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<sup>34</sup> Vivian Sobchack, "The Act of Being with One's Own Eyes," *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1992) 52.

**CHAPTER 1**  
**“Looking Easily his Double”<sup>1</sup>:**  
**Shape-Shifting and Metamorphing in *Gravity’s Rainbow***

In 1974, when *Gravity’s Rainbow* was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize, eleven of the fourteen-member jury rejected the novel, describing it as “‘unreadable,’ ‘turgid,’ ‘overwritten,’ and in parts ‘obscene.’”<sup>2</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* has always been associated with this complexity. The novel is set at the end of the Second World War and contains approximately four hundred characters, complicating any attempt to simplify or summarize its plot. Richard Poirier refers to the V2-Rocket as the “central character, and all the other characters, for one reason or another, are involved in a quest for it, especially for a secret component, the so-called Schwarzgerät, which was wrapped in Impolex G.”<sup>3</sup> Since this “multiple search”<sup>4</sup> discloses the intertwining connections between the “cultural, economic, and scientific aspects of contemporary life and its historical antecedents, Pynchon can properly refer to it as ‘the terrible politics of the Grail.’”<sup>5</sup> As the American Army Lieutenant, Tryone Slothrop, and other characters try to disclose the secret of the Schwarzgerät,<sup>6</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* takes the reader through a sophisticated plot, based upon a “film-form”<sup>7</sup> that is essential to its “structure and substance.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 113.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Kihss, “Pulitzer Jurors; His Third Novel,” *New York Times*, 8 May 1974: 38. Print.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Poirier, “Rocket Power in Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*,” *Critical Essays on Thomas Pynchon*, ed. Richard Pearce (Boston: Hall, 1981) 171.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Poirier 171-172.

Critics have written extensively on the clear references to science, technology, and film in *Gravity's Rainbow*, highlighting Pynchon's use of film as a structural framework to the novel. As early as Richard Poirier's 1973 review and Scott Simmon's 1978 article "Beyond the Theater of War: *Gravity's Rainbow* as Film," critics recognized the significance of film in influencing our approach to Pynchon's narrative. With numerous references to Hollywood stars such as Cary Grant, Spencer Tracy, Rita Hayworth, and Clark Gable, it is clear to the reader that film is central. Moreover, the parallel between film and Pynchon's narrative is evident in the manner in which chapters are separated using "stylized square film-projector sprocket holes."<sup>9</sup>

When addressing the overall structure of the novel, perhaps the most prominent and well-acknowledged connections between film and *Gravity's Rainbow* are those that foreground German Expressionism. German Expressionism, a significant artistic style in Germany in the years directly after the First World War, mirrored the general atmosphere of dissatisfaction. German Expressionist filmmakers were interested in reflecting this mood, especially through the manipulation of light. This is a technique that is certainly evident in the manner that Pynchon depicts certain scenes. In one of Margherita's movies, *Jugend Herauf!*, the characters are framed in dark silhouettes. The characters and the setting are described as "darkened and deformed, resembling apes, and the quality of the light is peculiar, as if the whole scene was engraved on a dark metal such as lead."<sup>10</sup> This scene is an example of the dark undertones of German Expressionism. The specific reference to the scene as "engraved on a dark metal such as lead"<sup>11</sup> mirrors the German Expressionist technique of engraving an image or design on a metal surface. Another example of this is

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<sup>9</sup> Scott Simmon, "Beyond the Theatre of War, *Gravity's Rainbow* as Film," *Critical Essays on Thomas Pynchon*, ed. Richard Pearce (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1981) 124.

<sup>10</sup> *Gravity's Rainbow* 573.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*



Bianca's vision while she is on a train. Her vision is described as outlined in the contrasts of light and dark and black and white;<sup>12</sup> Duyfhuizen asks what it means "not only to dream in 'black and white' (if we can conflate 'visions' and 'dream'), but also to dream in the overt stylization of German Expressionism?"<sup>13</sup> The aesthetic of German Expressionism is significant because of its dominant influence on some of the characters' perceptions. However, it falls short when examining embodiment in the novel.

I must note here that I do not attempt in this chapter to trivialize the significance of the ideas of critics such as Simmon, Poirier, or Duyfhuizen; on the contrary, the existing body of criticism has aptly covered the basic links between Pynchon and film by situating *Gravity's Rainbow* within a post-Second World War historical framework. However, limiting the novel to a particular time period can be problematic, for it excludes possible connections to contemporary filmic techniques, such as body doubling and morphing. Pynchon criticism lacks a perspective on these techniques, particularly as they figure in *Gravity's Rainbow*, and as a consequence, the novel has not been discussed in terms of its relevance to the current debates regarding embodiment, digital morphing and other shape-shifting techniques. Considering that my thesis reads Pynchon as an anticipatory writer, I am interested in how *Gravity's Rainbow* reflects a perspective on technology and embodiment that challenges the conventional dichotomy between the two. Thus, even though digital morphing techniques had not been developed when Pynchon was writing the novel, the novel anticipates the technical and theoretical concerns of these techniques.

Many critics have reflected on the anticipatory element of Pynchon's fiction; it is interesting to note that Pynchon himself makes a distinction between prophecy and prediction

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<sup>12</sup> *Gravity's Rainbow* 559. For Bernard Duyfhuizen's analysis of German Expressionism and Bianca's vision, see page 146 of the following article: Bernard Duyfhuizen, " 'A Suspension Forever at the Hinge of Doubt': The Reader-Trap of Bianca in *Gravity's Rainbow*," *Postmodern Culture* 2.1 (1991): 1-37.

<sup>13</sup> Duyfhuizen 34.

in his introduction to George Orwell's *1984*. For Pynchon, prophecy goes beyond the "details" upon which prediction is founded. Prophecy depends on being "able to see deeper than most of us into the human soul."<sup>14</sup> Perhaps this is why Pynchon critics focus mainly on prophecy and vision as opposed to prediction when analysing Pynchon's work. Phillip Gochenour argues that Pynchon "envisioned in the WASTE network the distributed community linked by a communications system that would later be realized through the internet and the World Wide Web."<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Gochenour suggests that there is a connection between the "nodal" subject in *The Crying of Lot 49* and the multiplicity of identity that characterizes subjectivity in virtual reality.<sup>16</sup> Thus, Pynchon's work is anticipatory because it explores this possible transformation of the subject before the invention of the internet.<sup>17</sup> Critics often refer to this connection between Pynchon and virtual reality when considering his "prophecy."

Another notable example of this is Brian Stonehill's essay "Pynchon's Prophecies of Cyberspace." Stonehill considers the prophetic element of *Gravity's Rainbow*, arguing that Pynchon anticipates the revolutionary changes that have obscured the distinction between the animate and the inanimate.<sup>18</sup> There are several references in *Gravity's Rainbow* to processes whereby flesh and metal or silicon are merged; Stonehill suggests that, through such examples, Pynchon "seems to foresee a path for the ultimate extension of human thought and expression across the phone lines, silicon chips, and phosphor screens of cyberspace."<sup>19</sup> Moreover, categorizing Pynchon's fiction as "science fiction" may also be credited for the

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas Pynchon, "The road to 1984," *Gaurdian* (2003): 2.

<sup>15</sup> "Anarchist Miracles: Distributed Communities, Nodal Subjects and the *Crying of Lot 49*," *Pynchon Notes* (2003): 52.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Brian Stonehill, "Pynchon's Prophecies of Cyberspace," First International Conference on Pynchon, Nov 1994.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

focus on the element of anticipation. Pynchon is often grouped with William Gibson and Kurt Vonnegut, writers of science fiction with insightful futuristic reflections. Lisa Zeidner goes as far as naming Pynchon the “Wizard of Oz” of science fiction.<sup>20</sup> It is certainly the case that critics have thoroughly examined this angle of Pynchon’s work. Therefore, I will not reiterate the connections between cyberspace and Pynchon’s work, but will instead examine the dimension of digital morphing that has received far less attention. I find it useful for the purpose of this thesis to begin with *Gravity’s Rainbow*, not only because it is Pynchon’s *opus magnum*, but also because the examples provided in the chapter will exemplify my overall approach towards the body in both Pynchon and DeLillo’s work. *Gravity’s Rainbow* provides the keystone for this thesis; it is the first step in my attempt to abolish the hovering denigration of the body that confines our reading of both Pynchon and DeLillo.

Since my aim is to avoid the received approaches to Pynchon’s work, I will begin by focusing on doubling and digital morphing in light of current film theory, examining how Pynchon uses language to obscure the boundary between the characters and film techniques in a manner that reflects technology’s affinity with embodiment. Both techniques, body doubling and morphing, are subversive in the sense that they challenge the oneness of the body. Loitering within the unorthodoxy of these techniques is the shadow of the monstrous, a concept that I use to show the intrinsic connection between the human and the technological in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. In the novel, body doubling is one of the most significant means of revealing the fluidity of the body. It is essential here to define what exactly is meant by body doubling, since the term may simply imply the replication of the body. While I am interested in this literal duplication, I find the underpinning theoretical concepts equally important. As Ann Chisholm puts it, “body doubles can be defined briefly as persons whose bodies or body

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

parts are filmed for the purpose of replacing the bodies or body parts of motion picture actors.”<sup>21</sup> Chisholm addresses the idea of body doubling in terms of “presence and absence,”<sup>22</sup> the absence of a star’s body and the presence of its body double,<sup>23</sup> analysing how the negotiation between the two bodies constructs the film character.<sup>24</sup> In this section I look at how Slothrop fails to be a body double, and yet ironically through this failure it becomes apparent that his body is already composed of its own inherent multiplicity.

Slothrop, who over the course of the novel is disguised in the costumes of an English war correspondent, the Rocketman and the Pig-Hero Plechazunga, presents a significant departure point for this analysis. He constantly finds himself in situations where he must disguise his body to become a duplicate of someone else. Pynchon frames these roles in slapstick images of the body’s limitations that allow him to explore the concept of corporeality in light of the cinematic technique of body doubling. Slothrop is a slapstick character because he represents “low physical comedy,”<sup>25</sup> and the doubling of Slothrop is based upon placing him in a situation that comically challenges his physicality, often resulting in scenes of slipping or falling. Because slapstick is dependent upon such absurdity, it is mostly taken lightly.<sup>26</sup> Thus, one may initially overlook the more profound meaning of Slothrop’s failings; therefore, it is necessary to introduce the concept of monstrosity and its relationship to this slapstick mode.

The concept of monstrosity in *Gravity’s Rainbow* has been explored. For example, Terry Caesar provides an insightful reading of monstrosity in *Gravity’s Rainbow* that is concerned with the connection between monstrosity and violence. Caesar argues that

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<sup>21</sup> Ann Chisholm, “Missing Persons and Bodies of Evidence,” *Camera Obscura* 15.1 (2000): 124.

<sup>22</sup> Chisholm 123.

<sup>23</sup> Chisholm 144.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Alan S. Dale, *Comedy is a Man in Trouble* (Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P, 2000) 1.

<sup>26</sup> In Dale’s analysis of slapstick comedy, he concentrates on the need to address the more significant implications of slapstick. See page 9-10.

*Gravity's Rainbow* is a “monstrous book-monstrous not only in its size or in the scale of its appetites, but because it contains monsters.”<sup>27</sup> She defines monsters as “undifferentiated – that is, combinations of various beings, such as man and beast- and for this reason they evoke both awe and dread.”<sup>28</sup> An example of this is Slothrop’s sexual desire, which is inextricably connected to the trajectory of rockets, thus relating him to the monstrous and the mechanized.<sup>29</sup> Another example is Seaman Bodine’s striking blue-paint costume that is described as “subversive.”<sup>30</sup> The suit is monstrous because it has its own identity and reflects “the kind of ontological rebuke which the exceptional, the undifferentiated, always transpires.”<sup>31</sup> One finds in Pynchon criticism that the monstrous is often associated with a merger of the human and the technological or the “superhuman.”<sup>32</sup> While this is a significant point, it does not allow us to examine Pynchon’s perspective on embodiment in light of the Heideggerian notion of “techne.”<sup>33</sup> To argue that there must be an obvious merger of the character with a technological medium implies that there is a boundary between the two. This goes against Heidegger’s idea that the connection between the human and the technological is one of “bringing forth”<sup>34</sup> and “revealing”<sup>35</sup> as opposed to “manufacturing.”<sup>36</sup>

Comedy is certainly a prominent feature of Pynchon’s style and Slothrop is one of Pynchon’s most infamously comic characters. Let us consider for instance Slothrop’s sexual affairs. When the narrator describes how Slothrop plots his affairs on a map, he is referred to

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<sup>27</sup> Terry Caesar, “‘Beasts Vaulting among the Earthworks’: Monstrosity in *Gravity’s Rainbow*,” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 17.2 (1984): 158.

<sup>28</sup> Caesar 158.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 842.

<sup>31</sup> Caesar 170.

<sup>32</sup> Caesar 159.

<sup>33</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” *The Question Concerning Technology and other Essays*. 1954, ed. William Lovitt (New York: Harper, 1997) 10.

<sup>34</sup> Heidegger 10.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

as “boobishly conscientious.”<sup>37</sup> The term “boobishly”<sup>38</sup> represents Slothrop’s vocabulary. Throughout the novel, Pynchon prefixes or suffixes slang terms or coins new terms altogether to depict Slothrop’s thinking. Also in the first few pages of the novel, we are introduced to Slothrop’s own perception of himself. When he sees two pretty blonde German women, he believes they will be attracted to him: “They especially love fat, plump americans, in a minute she’ll be reaching out to pinch his cheek and wobble it back and forth.”<sup>39</sup> Thus, even before he is disguised in a new identity, Pynchon foregrounds this humorous image of Slothrop; he is a plump figure with significant misconceptions about himself. Once Slothrop begins to assume other identities, the slapstick events that unfold are especially striking. When a woman leaves Slothrop some documents to help him escape, we are told that “he is now an English war correspondent named Ian Scuffling.”<sup>40</sup> Slothrop is expected to pose as the correspondent and to use his identity to help him manoeuvre his way through obstacles. However, Slothrop’s body, always an obstacle in itself, makes Slothrop’s attempt to double this role a complete failure. The first example of this is when Slothrop, disguised as Scuffling, is “hungry and thirsty”<sup>41</sup> and attempts to climb down a cable to reach the tunnel of Stollen 41 to find food. We are told that Slothrop does this “despite the clear and present miasma of evil in Stollen 41.”<sup>42</sup> Pynchon’s choice of words, “miasma of evil,”<sup>43</sup> is quite telling because it implies a kind of hellish point, somewhere below. The image is important given that it reflects Alan S. Dale’s argument that slapstick subverts the Christian theology in which “falling has the worst possible connotations.”<sup>44</sup> According to Dale, “the Christian fear

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<sup>37</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 26.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 30.

<sup>40</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 305.

<sup>41</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 364.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Dale 13.

of falling, with the pits of hell always imagined down below, indicates a ceaseless resistance to physical existence.”<sup>45</sup> Pynchon is perhaps using this secular slapstick,<sup>46</sup> making Slothrop take a comic plunge down a hellish path that threatens his corporeality:

Bracing his mustache in what he figures to be a stiff upper lip, Ian scuffling climbs on, one foot through an eye-splice, the other hanging free. An electric motor whines, Slothrop lets go the last steel railing and clutches on to the cable as 50 feet of twilight space appears underneath him. Uh...Rolling over Stollen 41, heads milling far below [...] Oh fuck, ‘Too young!’ he screams, voice pitched way too high so it comes out like a teenager on the radio, which ordinarily would be embarrassing but here’s the concrete floor rushing up at him [...] not even a body nearby to get him off with only multiple fractures.<sup>47</sup>

This passage exemplifies Pynchon’s overall mockery of Slothrop. As Ian Scuffling’s double, Slothrop fixes his moustache on what he assumes is “a stiff upper lip,”<sup>48</sup> confusing the British idiomatic expression, used to reflect resoluteness, with the actual body part. Thus, we immediately sense that this will be far from a perfect doubling and realize we are not mistaken as we read about Slothrop’s clumsy fall. As Slothrop falls, the crew below are laughing hysterically, though they are not laughing at Slothrop as they cannot actually see him. They also sing the following tune:

There was a young fellow named Hector,  
Who was fond of a launcher-erector.  
But the squishes and pops  
Of acute pressure drops  
Wrecked Hector’s hydraulic connector.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Dale 14.

<sup>47</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 364.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> *Gravtiy’s Rainbow* 365.

Slothrop does not realize the irony of the situation, and it is the narrator who tells us that he “does not know they are singing to him, and neither do they.”<sup>50</sup> Slothrop, instead of being a war correspondent, seems to be the anti-war correspondent; he is incapable of handling a difficult situation and is even inadvertently mocked. This results in a lot of “twisting and shoving”<sup>51</sup> to enable him to free his trapped foot from the cord during his fall.

It is important to pause here and consider the implications of Pynchon’s use of slapstick to present Slothrop’s attempts at a kind of cinematic body doubling. As Chisholm argues, cinematic doubling is based upon a harmony of presence and absence, a presence of the body double that expertly overshadows the absence of the star:

In short, there are two absences necessary to the economy of body doubling: the absence of the star's body and the absence of the body double's body. That body doubling is predicated on the disappearance of the star is apparent; that body doubling is predicated on the disappearance of the body double is less obvious. In many ways, the body double has served its purpose in those moments subsequent to its appearance, in those moments when the star (re)appears and audiences believe the identically clothed body they see in the present is that of the double, which they have seen in the past.<sup>52</sup>

Pynchon subverts this “economy of body doubling”<sup>53</sup> by using slapstick to create physical obstacles that make the absence of the star, in this case the original war-correspondent Scuffling, obvious. There is a significant gap between the heroic image of Scuffling and the awkward image of Slothrop. But why does Pynchon create this obvious gap? I will now examine a few more examples of slapstick body doubling to attempt to answer this question.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Chisholm 142-143.

<sup>53</sup> Chisholm 142.



The slapstick episode continues as a chase between Major Marvy's men and Slothrop as Scuffling. It begins when Marvy, pointing a finger in Slothrop's direction, orders his men to chase him. Slothrop, as opposed to benefiting from this cue, stands fixated on Marvy's finger; the finger is described as "illuminated in cute flourishes and curlicues of cherubic fat."<sup>54</sup> In this example, we see how Pynchon uses language to mock Slothrop's perspective. Slothrop finds the fat endearing, perhaps because he can relate to this image. When Slothrop finally realizes that he needs to start running, he embarks on a slapstick escape:

In another main tunnel now, Slothrop falls into a jog down the long mile to the outside, trying not to wonder if he has the wind to make it. He hasn't gone 200 feet when the vanguard comes clambering up off that ladder behind him. He dodges into what must be a paint shop, skids on a patch of wet Wehrmacht green, and goes down, proceeding through big splashes of black, white, and red before coming to rest against the combat boots of an elderly man in a tweed suit, with white, water-buffalo mustaches. 'Gruss Gott.'<sup>55</sup>

Though there is no direct reference in this passage to Slothrop's obesity, we are already aware that Slothrop is not necessarily the fittest candidate for sprinting. Moreover, considering his already established clumsiness, it is not surprising that he "falls"<sup>56</sup> and that he can barely outrun the men. The classic slapstick banana peel moment is replaced with the slippery paints; as Slothrop slides through the waves of paint, the example brings to mind the "essence of a slapstick gag"<sup>57</sup> which is defined as a "physical assault on, or collapse of, the hero's dignity."<sup>58</sup> Perhaps to 'add insult to injury,' Slothrop lands next to this man with the "water-buffalo mustaches."<sup>59</sup> Later in the episode we realize that Pynchon is mocking

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<sup>54</sup> *Gravity's Rainbow* 367.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Dale 3.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Gravity's Rainbow* 367.

Slothrop when we find Slothrop forced to “saw off pieces of mustache on both sides”<sup>60</sup> of his face and “comb his pompadour down his forehead”<sup>61</sup> in an attempt to once again appear as a convincing English correspondent. Thus Slothrop is the epitome of comedy in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, which also implies that he cannot truly represent a conventional heroic figure. Whenever Pynchon creates a double of Slothrop’s character, he uses such gags to reflect what Dale refers to as the central irony of slapstick, where the body is the impediment between the character and his “physical desires.”<sup>62</sup>

Throughout the novel, such episodes reveal the connection that Pynchon makes between slapstick comedy and the physical body. For instance, even before Slothrop is actually known as the Rocketman, Pynchon foreshadows his failure. Slothrop drinks water from the pond without boiling it and becomes sick. The narrator describes Slothrop, “or Rocketman, as he is soon to be known,”<sup>63</sup> as physically wrecked after this incident. Thus, as opposed to an admirable image of the body of a hero, we get a revolting image of a worn-out Slothrop:

Up all night and thirsty, Slothrop lies on his stomach and slurps up water, just an old saddle tramp at the water hole here...Fool. Vomiting, cramps, diarrhea, and who’s he to lecture about tulip bulbs?<sup>64</sup>

The image is enunciated further when we are later told, with a twist of irony, that he is the “unshaven, sweating, stinking Rocketman.”<sup>65</sup> One certainly would not expect the Rocketman to be associated with such degrading adjectives. Slothrop then spends days, “feverish,

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<sup>60</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 368.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Dale 3.

<sup>63</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 427.

<sup>64</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 428.

<sup>65</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 429.

shivering, oozing shit that burns like acid.”<sup>66</sup> As a result of his failure, he appears in a full-page photo in *Life* magazine in his Rocketman costume “with what appears to be a long, stiff sausage of very large diameter being stuffed in his mouth, so forcibly that his eyes are slightly crossed”<sup>67</sup> with the caption, “barely off the ground, the Zone’s newest celebrity ‘fuck ups.’”<sup>68</sup>

Thus, Slothrop’s body prevents him from successfully doubling another character. Dale makes an interesting connection between slapstick and the body’s limitations as described in Faulkner’s *Light in August*. Reflecting on how slapstick can be used to foreground an existential issue, Dale cites the following example from Faulkner’s *Light in August* (1932):

He watches quietly the puny, unhorsed figure moving with that precarious and meretricious cleverness of animals balanced on their hinder legs; that cleverness of which the man animal is so fatuously proud and which constantly betrays him by means of natural laws like gravity and ice, and by the very extraneous objects which he has himself invented, like motor cars and furniture in the dark, and the very refuse of his own eating left upon floor pavement.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 428. There is a preoccupation in the novel with waste matter. This topic has been thoroughly examined; thus, it is not the major concern of this section. However, it is certainly important, especially given its link to embodiment. One of the connections made is between waste and the notion of blackness. The following example where Gavin Trefoil describes the Schwarzcommando to his group is especially telling: “He had not meant to offend sensibilities, only to show the others, decent fellows all, that their feelings about blackness were tied to feelings about shit, and feeling about shit to feelings about putrefaction and death. It seemed to him so clear... why wouldn’t they listen? Why wouldn’t they admit that their repressions had, in a sense that Europe in the last weary stages of its perversion of magic has lost, had incarnated real and living men.” (276-277). Lawrence C. Woolfey argues that this description is reminiscent of the negative connotations associated with blackness that is rooted in Protestantism. In the history of Protestantism, anal secretions, death, and the Devil were symbolically connected to the “Black Man.” Woolfey provides evidence of the relationship between Norman O. Brown’s work, including “Studies in Analogy,” and blackness in the novel. See Lawrence C. Woolfey, “Repression’s Rainbow: The Presence of Norman O. Brown in Pynchon’s Big Novel,” *PMLA* 92.5 (1977): 873-889.

<sup>67</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 449.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> William Faulkner, *Light in August* (1932; New York: Random House, 1995) 76.

Dale finds it telling that the classic banana peel, in Faulkner's words, is "the very refuse of his own eating left upon floor or pavement."<sup>70</sup> This foregrounds an underlying existential condition to the slapstick:<sup>71</sup>

[Faulkner's] instinct is just right—it isn't too much to say that slapstick is a fundamental, universal, and eternal response to the fact that life is physical. Of the two components, body and soul, we have empirical proof of the first alone. It's the body that we can see interacting with physical forces and objects, and our intense exasperation that this interaction doesn't run smoother— hence Faulkner's scene of betrayal- stimulates the urge to tell a story in slapstick mode.<sup>72</sup>

It is "Faulkner's instinct"<sup>73</sup> that is especially relevant to Pynchon. By turning Slothrop into slapstick body doubles, Pynchon is able to foreground the body's monstrosity, what Shildrick refers to as a "troublesome lack of definition."<sup>74</sup> Slothrop may appear to be a Rocketman or an English War Correspondent and may desire the strength and control associated with such roles. However, he is unable to control his body and as a result exemplifies the "intense exasperation"<sup>75</sup> with his corporeality. Throughout his journey as the Rocketman, Slothrop maintains his slapstick persona, always falling awkwardly and always in trouble. When Margherita seductively asks Slothrop to follow her, we get a typical slapstick episode where Slothrop, attempting to climb the ladder onto the ship to follow Margherita, falls over after someone pulls the ladder back up.<sup>76</sup> Thus, when Slothrop drinks the water from the pond and

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Dale 11.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Margrit Shildrick, "The Body which is not One: Dealing with Differences," *Body Modification*, ed. Mike Featherstone (London: Sage, 2000) 78.

<sup>75</sup> Dale 11.

<sup>76</sup> *Gravity's Rainbow* 546.

starts vomiting, his Rocketman persona cannot save him from his corporeality, nor can his inability to balance himself on a ladder or his eyes' blurry vision be salvaged.

I will pause briefly again to examine the wider implications that these slapstick doubles have on embodiment in the novel. While, on the one hand, Pynchon dramatizes Slothrop's failure through comic physical mishaps, these absurd moments shed light on the concept of pain, a crucial aspect of embodiment. Pain figures prominently in the novel; however, though Pynchon at times depicts pain as an obstacle to Slothrop's endeavours, in other instances he suggests that it is a necessary and indispensable part of being. To illustrate this point, I will refer to an example that is often discussed in Pynchon criticism, the disturbing coprophiliac episode with Brigadier Pudding and Katje:

Tonight he lies humped on the floor at her feet, his withered ass elevated for the cane, bound by nothing but his need for pain, for something real, something pure. They have taken him so far from his simple nerves. They have stuffed paper illusions and military euphemisms between him and the this truth, this rare decency, this moment at her scrupulous feet [...] his failing body, his true body: undisguised by uniform, uncluttered by drugs to keep from him her communiqués of vertigo, nausea and pain...Above all, pain.<sup>77</sup>

Several critics have focused on the connection between sado-masochism and Pudding's desire for a "real" experience. Shannon Hengen argues that "Pynchon's use of sado-masochism functions like a complex variety of his application of the grotesque; it is a gesture towards the 'real.'" <sup>78</sup> Moreover, Molly Hite suggests that there is a significant connection

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<sup>77</sup> *Gravity's Rainbow* 279.

<sup>78</sup> Shannon E. Hengen, *Performing Gender and Comedy: Theories, Texts, and Contexts*. (OPA: Amsterdam, 1998) 156. Hengen also analyses the connection between humour and gender in Pynchon's work. She argues that "sado-masochism, in Pynchon, replicates the humour of absurdist reversals as it presses the roles of controller and controlled to extremes." (156) To emphasize this point, Hengen quotes Hanjo Berressem's assertion that "sado-masochism is the most common 'perversion' in Pynchon's work, because it mirrors the perversion of culture in general." (156).

between Pudding and Katje's sexual encounters and Herbert Marcuse's argument regarding the nature of perverse sexual experience:

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, "perversions" like Brigadier General Pudding's coprophagia (and the treatment of excrement generally), along with sadism and masochism, resemble drugs in that they frequently figure as routes to the revelation of essential reality. But further, 'perverse sex' is, or can be, revelatory or demystifying because it returns experience to the physical body, for Marcuse a ground of essential, unmediated preoedipal experience, once the encrustations of the performance principle's version of civilization have been scraped away."<sup>79</sup>

When one focuses on the references to the body in the passage, it becomes evident that indeed, as Hengen and Hite suggest, perverse sex is portrayed as a medium to achieving a true experience. It is important to note, for example, that the "failing body"<sup>80</sup> is equated with the "true body."<sup>81</sup> The phrase "simple nerves"<sup>82</sup> is a reminder that beyond any illusions created in the Zone, the basis of the characters' being resides in their sensory perceptions and especially in how they perceive pain. Thus, it is the body in pain that brings the characters closer to a 'truer' experience. Pain, described as "above all,"<sup>83</sup> constitutes evidence of physical existence. As Thomas J. Csordas describes it, "since we experience pain in the body, in so far as we see our bodies as physical objects, so will we also see pain as physical."<sup>84</sup> We are also reminded of David Morris's statement that "at times it is easy to wish that affliction had no claim on us, but probably we should train ourselves to think the peculiar thought that the real gift is not painlessness but pain."<sup>85</sup> Painlessness may lead to death, because pain is

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<sup>79</sup> Hite 6.

<sup>80</sup> *Gravity's Rainbow* 279.

<sup>81</sup> *Gravity's Rainbow* 279.

<sup>82</sup> *Gravity's Rainbow* 279.

<sup>83</sup> *Gravity's Rainbow* 279.

<sup>84</sup> Thomas J. Csordas, *Embodiment and Experience: the Existential Ground of Culture and Self*, Cambridge Studies in Medical Anthropology (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 207.

<sup>85</sup> David B. Morris, *The Culture of Pain* (Los Angeles: U of California P, 1991) 14.

necessary to detect certain needs and to relate to one's environment; thus, pain is essential to being.<sup>86</sup> The apparently frivolous slapstick mode that Pynchon uses to depict body doubling is actually connected to this far more profound phenomenological aspect of bodily pain.

I will now refer to another example where Slothrop, disguised as the Pig-Hero Plechuzenga, also fails to double this figure. After giving a close reading of this episode, I will then address how Pynchon foregrounds Slothrop's bodily monstrosity to imply that Slothrop embodies the strangeness and fluidity that characterizes cinematic body doubling. This episode begins with Slothrop falling asleep in a coastal town near Wismar.<sup>87</sup> A group of people gather around him and tell him about Plechazunga, "who, sometime back in the 10th century, routed a Viking invasion, appearing suddenly out of a thunderbolt, and chasing a score of screaming Norsemen back into the sea."<sup>88</sup> To celebrate the memory of this day, the townspeople dedicate a Thursday of each summer and one of the members dresses as the Pig-Hero. However, they tell Slothrop that the celebration may not take place because Schraub, who plays the role of Plechazunga, was drafted and did not come back. After telling Slothrop that he is the fattest one in town, they then ask Slothrop if he would "please"<sup>89</sup> take Schraub's<sup>90</sup> place. When Slothrop agrees, they take him to a basement to prepare him for the day. Slothrop becomes a slapstick monster:

In the basement are costumes and props for the Schweinhelfest—shields, spears, horned helmets, shaggy animal skins, wooden Thor's hammers and ten-foot lightning bolts covered with gold leaf. The pig costume is a little startling—pink, blue, yellow, bright sour colors, a German Expressionist pig, plush outside, padded with straw inside. It seems to fit perfectly. Hmm.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> *Gravity's Rainbow* 672.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> *Gravity's Rainbow* 673.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

In this example, Pynchon's imagery once again signifies Slothrop's failure; Slothrop imposes an out of place German Expressionist label on an otherwise simply comic image of himself dressed as a pig. When Slothrop finally joins the crowd, he "is a little nervous, unaccustomed as he is to pigherofestivals."<sup>92</sup> Perhaps it is not only Slothrop, but also the reader, that may be "unaccustomed"<sup>93</sup> to seeing the combination of words "pigherofestivals."<sup>94</sup> Thus, as opposed to merely representing a Hollywood image where an actor assumes a role, the scene reads like a parody, especially as Slothrop's disguise leads him to befriending a pig, Frieda, who takes him to Pökler.<sup>95</sup> It becomes even clearer then that Pynchon is mocking the heroic role, as Slothrop has to be assisted by a 'real' pig. Though the costume "seems to fit perfectly,"<sup>96</sup> we soon find that Slothrop is not as perfectly suited for this imaginary role. When we read the tune, "You can never go wrong with a pig, a pig / You can never go wrong with a pig,"<sup>97</sup> we are reminded that Slothrop, ironically, can "go wrong"<sup>98</sup> as a Rocketman and as a Pig-Hero.

Thus far I have highlighted the comic effect of the Pynchonesque imagery to establish how Pynchon ridicules Slothrop's ability to become a successful double. The reason this is important when considering body doubling is because language is used to subvert the seemingly expert doubling technique of Hollywood where one person is substituted for another. In the example of the Pig-Hero, Slothrop soon finds himself struggling to reappear from beneath the shadows of his assumed identity. His 'star' role lasts for a very short while, before he finds himself in the midst of what appears to be a 'real' war, and events begin to spiral out of control. Instead of acting as a heroic figure, Slothrop awkwardly makes his way

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> *Gravity's Rainbow* 673.

<sup>95</sup> *Gravity's Rainbow* 681.

<sup>96</sup> *Gravity's Rainbow* 673.

<sup>97</sup> *Graivity's Rainbow* 681.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.



through the crowd, his “pig mask cutting off half his vision,”<sup>99</sup> ironically deterring his ability to save anyone, including himself. When Slothrop, as the Pig-Hero, finds himself thrown in the midst of a battle, he wonders, “has the morning been only a dress rehearsal? Is [he] expected to repel *real* foreign invaders now?”<sup>100</sup> Unsurprisingly, Slothrop is hit with a club on his head and falls.<sup>101</sup> What remains is an image of Slothrop, beaten underneath a plush pig costume.

Thus, as the three examples of Slothrop’s disguises have shown, it is often the case in *Gravity’s Rainbow* that doubling involves a grotesque image. It is suitable now to pose the question how do these repulsive and absurd images relate to the monstrous, and why is this significant to body doubling? In order to answer this question, I believe it is necessary to establish a connection between Hollywood body doubling and the notion of monstrosity. Upon establishing this link, I will then examine how Pynchon equates the monstrosity of the Hollywood doubling technique with what, I will argue, is the inherently monstrous nature of the human body. If we consider some of the famous examples of body doubles in Hollywood, including Julia Roberts’s body double in *Pretty Woman* (1990) and Janet Leigh’s double in the *Psycho* (1960) shower scene, it is clear that body doubles have an essential role in the success of a Hollywood film. In *Pretty Woman*, the body that is used to represent an “excess of femininity”<sup>102</sup> in the pivotal scene of the film does not belong to Roberts.<sup>103</sup> It is Roberts’s body double that first appears as the character Vivian. The following shots of Vivian are also of the body double, though we do see pictures of Roberts’s face on the wall.<sup>104</sup> According to Chisholm, “these pictures, which provide the first glimpses of Julia

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<sup>99</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 676.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> Mary Ann Doanne, *Femme Fatales* (New York: Routledge, 1991) 25.

<sup>103</sup> Chisholm 140.

<sup>104</sup> Chisholm 144.

Roberts's face, orchestrate the film's earliest negotiations between the body of the double and the absent star.”<sup>105</sup> Thus, the director succeeds in using the camera techniques of close-up and panning to create an illusion that the two bodies, Roberts and her double, are one. When Shelly Michelle, Roberts’ double, disclosed the secret behind Vivian’s perfect body, “a scandal of sorts ensued.”<sup>106</sup> The reason it is interesting to highlight this is that it reflects the extent to which Hollywood techniques convinced viewers of their authenticity. However, far from the illusions and glamour of Hollywood, there is actually something monstrous lurking beneath the idea of two bodies representing one character. By giving one character two bodies, the body doubling technique subverts the conventional idea of a fixed body, projecting a challenge that is best understood if we consider the problematic nature of conjoined twins.

Conjoined twins are problematic because their existence implies that one body can be comprised of two beings. Thus, their embodiment is subversive because it represents “a monstrous insult to the norms of human corporeality, another mode of being that defies the binary of sameness and difference into which medical intervention is designed to recuperate them.”<sup>107</sup> This shows how “the ideal of the autonomous subject is contested by the twins’ concurrent and co-operative intentionality.”<sup>108</sup> When Pynchon orchestrates Slothrop’s failure as Ian Scuffling, the Rocketman and the Pig-Hero, through satirical language and unfortunate events, the monstrous image of Slothrop’s body emerges, drawing attention to the monstrosity implicated in the technique of body doubling. If, hypothetically, Slothrop were a successful Hollywood body double, then there would be no validation for the grotesque

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Margrit Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self* (London: Sage, 2002) 53.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

imagery. Only the slapstick mode can justify the pig-costume, the “stinking Rocketman,”<sup>109</sup> and the image of Slothrop cross-eyed with a sausage stuffed in his mouth. Thus, on the one hand, Pynchon uses Slothrop’s failed attempts at doubling to reflect the corporeal aspect that underlies the technique. On the other hand, Slothrop’s inherent bodily monstrosity implies that he already embodies doubling; there is a foreign other that exists within his own body. His body stands as an obstacle to successful doubling. Slapstick is the key to enunciating this connection, foregrounding Slothrop’s inherent multiplicity.

, I will refer to an example that clearly illustrates the foreignness of Slothrop’s body, and brings together all aspects of this argument. All the examples used in this section depict the otherness of Slothrop’s body as a result of certain physical limitations. When the narrator describes Slothrop’s stomach being invaded by an “invisible kingdom of flab,”<sup>110</sup> and takes us into Slothrop’s unconscious, we find an unexpectedly enlightening moment:

There is an invisible kingdom of flab, a million cells-at-large and they all know who he is—soon he’s unconscious, they start up, every one, piping in high horrible little Mickey Mouse voices, hey fellas! Hey c’mon, let’s all go over to Slothrop’s, the big sap ain’t doing anything but laying on his ass, c’mon, oboy! ‘Take that,’ Slothrop mutters, ‘a-and that!’<sup>111</sup>

Though Slothrop fails at doubling and often misconstrues his situation, this is a moment where, comically of course, he acknowledges that there is a lack of self-coincidence. Slothrop does not perceive the flab on his stomach as belonging to him; he believes that the flab “must’ve collected on his stomach while he was out.”<sup>112</sup> Thus, the invisible kingdom of flab of tiny cells that wait for him to be unconscious, enter his body uninvited. The “high horrible

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<sup>109</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 429.

<sup>110</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 466.

<sup>111</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 466.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

little Micky Mouse voices,”<sup>113</sup> draw attention to the body’s inherent monstrosity. By presenting an image of a stomach that comprises of tiny monstrous cells, Pynchon echoes Shildrick’s idea that “we are always and everywhere vulnerable precisely because the monstrous is not an exteriority.”<sup>114</sup> Shildrick justifies her refusal to categorize the monstrous as the ‘other’ by arguing that “it is not that some bodies are reducible to the same while others figure as the absolute other, but rather that all resist full or final expression.”<sup>115</sup>

Slothrop’s role as Scuffling, the Rocketman, and the Pig-Hero draws attention, not only to the monstrous nature of doubling, but also to Slothrop’s own bodily monstrosity. Thus, Slothrop already embodies the otherness that is associated with the cinematic technique of doubling. Slothrop’s slapstick endeavours, when examined closely, present a significant commentary on the nature of the human body. By rejecting a categorical reading of Slothrop’s body, Pynchon uses Slothrop’s continuous physical struggle and his “invisible kingdom of flab”<sup>116</sup> to depict a body that is already monstrous. Similar to a Hollywood body double or a congenital twin, Slothrop is composed of a multiplicity that subverts any attempt at being an autonomous subject. As noted previously, this chapter establishes the basic approach to the body in the thesis. Slothrop’s monstrosity is significant because it depicts a transforming body that grounds the character in its materiality. Moreover, monstrosity challenges the dichotomy of the interior and the exterior, reflecting an inextricable connection between the characters’ inherent physicality and the otherness of the world. Pynchon suggests that underpinning cinematic doubling and inherent in the human body are these monstrous contradictions.

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster* 1.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 466.

## Haunting Doubles

Having examined how Pynchon uses slapstick as a trope to foreground the body's monstrosity, I will now examine monstrosity in light of Pynchon's haunting use of imagery. Though both Katje and Margherita initially appear to represent glamorous starlets, it is not long before their monstrosity emerges. In this section, I will pay close attention to how the language itself depicts a monstrosity that ruptures the notion of selfsameness. Similar to the previous section, I will draw upon Shildrick's subversive use of the term monstrous that disrupts the dichotomy between a 'natural' body and an 'other,' focusing on how specific episodes unfold. As argued previously, Hollywood body doubling is a monstrous technique because it allows two bodies, that of the star and the star's body double, to resemble one character, defying the notion of bodily individuality; I will now examine how Pynchon, similarly, depicts Katje and Margherita as embodying this technique. As Pynchon's language begins to increasingly exhibit a Derridean *différance*, depicted in the numerous oxymorons and contradictory images used to describe both characters, the monstrous emerges from within the crevices of the language. In a manner that is similar to Derrida's concept of constantly deferred meaning, Pynchon uses language to establish the indefiniteness that characterizes the monstrous body. If *différance* is meant to question the notion of a unified origin by alluding to an "irreducible complexity within which one can only shift the play of presence or absence,"<sup>117</sup> then Pynchon is Derridean in the sense that he frames his characters in these irreducible complexities that defy a particular meaning. Pynchon uses language to haunt Katje and Margherita with the "trace"<sup>118</sup> of the other.

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<sup>117</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (1967; Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1974) 167.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

When we are first introduced to Katje, we see her through a camera's perspective, one that enunciates a Hollywood-like glamour:

In silence, hidden from her, the camera follows as she moves deliberately nowhere longlegged about the rooms, an adolescent wideness and hunching to the shoulders, her hair not bluntly Dutch at all, but secured in a modish upsweep with an old tarnished silver crown, yesterday's new perm leaving her very blonde hair frozen on top in a hundred vortices, shining through the dark filigree.<sup>119</sup>

This description, unlike the slapstick portrayals of other characters such as Slothrop, seems far more profound. And in the midst of its beauty, there is something haunting in Pynchon's choice of words. Lingering beneath the Hollywood-like glamour is the daunting past. The monstrosity of Katje's character unfolds through the increasingly morbid use of language. For example, we sense this in Pynchon's use of the archaic adjective "modish"<sup>120</sup> to describe the "upsweep,"<sup>121</sup> and his use of "tarnished"<sup>122</sup> to taint the crown's splendour. Moreover, while the passage begins with a direct reference to technology, the "camera,"<sup>123</sup> it culminates with an uncanny image of rocket explosions that are likened to "poor spirits, desperate for company."<sup>124</sup> Thus, from the very first image of Katje, Pynchon depicts her through seeming contradictions. She is glamour and darkness. She is also a body on film, which draws attention to the use of technology, though the technological is also surrounded by an uncanny setting.

Katje is one of the most fluid characters in the novel, with a body that is varied in its possibilities and multiple in its disguises. As mentioned previously, in the filming of Katje

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> *Gravity's Rainbow* 109.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> *Gravity's Rainbow* 109.

for Grigori the octopus, she is the film star.<sup>125</sup> However, we know that she is concealing another character, Gretel, mentioned in Blicero's story. Again, this character's image does not coincide with herself, and is instead portrayed as an extreme or dramatized femininity. According to Chisholm, this type of excessiveness is in itself a means of disguise; thus, one can perceive Katje as "a woman who uses her own body as a disguise, appearing to be someone else as she demonstrates the representation of another woman's body."<sup>126</sup> Not only is this a 'disguise,' but it also requires a performance that distances the character from what she envisions to be her role. As Annette Kuhn suggests, an act of performance allows the fluidity and the mutability of the self to emerge:

In effecting a distance between assumed persona and real self, the practice of performance constructs a subject which is both fixed in the distinction between role and self (and) at the same time, paradoxically, called into question in the very act of performance. For over against the 'real self,' performance poses the possibility of a mutable self, of a fluidity of subjectivity.<sup>127</sup>

Given that monstrosity is essential to this chapter, Kuhn's description of the "mutable self"<sup>128</sup> is especially relevant. Pynchon constantly subverts dichotomies, a subversion which allows the monstrous to emerge. Katje's performances foreground the body's capacity for multiplicity.

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<sup>125</sup> It is telling that Pynchon chooses an octopus to be the subject of experimentation in *Gravity's Rainbow*, given that the octopus, with its four pairs of arms, is often associated with the monstrous. Grigori is described as having a "gigantic, horror-movie devilfish name of Grigori," (51) and "the biggest fucking octopus Slothrop has ever seen outside of the movies," (186). Thus, though Grigori attacks Katje and is part of an elaborate plan to trick Slothrop, there, nevertheless, is an inherent connection between Gregori and Katje. Both are part of the same plan, and both resemble an otherness.

<sup>126</sup> Chisholm 146.

<sup>127</sup> Annette Kuhn, *The Power of the Image : Essays on Representation and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1985) 52.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

Throughout the episode Pynchon reminds us that Katje is framed in a cinematic perspective. This is especially evident when the narrator describes her skin in “close-up,”<sup>129</sup> as “nearly perfect.”<sup>130</sup> The skin is also “rouged and powdered,”<sup>131</sup> implying some preparation for the filming. It is important to note that even in the midst of the most mechanical image of Katje, there is always a “trace”<sup>132</sup> of the animate. As the narrative progresses, the camera begins to capture the immobility of Katje’s expression, “as if the frame were to be stopped and prolonged into just such a lengthwise moment of gold fresh and tarnished, innocence, microscopically masked, her elbow slightly bent, hand resting against the wall, fingers fanned on the pale orange paper as if she touches her own skin, a pensive touch.”<sup>133</sup> In one reflective image, Pynchon once again captures the contradictions in Katje’s character. She is both “tarnished”<sup>134</sup> and “innocent,”<sup>135</sup> and though there is something inanimate about her immobility, her “pensive touch”<sup>136</sup> counters this sense of death. Thus, Pynchon’s language is itself monstrous, as the whole image seems like an oxymoron; words and their seeming polar opposites converge and the description is rife with shifting metaphors. The variability of the language frames the otherness of Katje’s character. We still cannot identify her as alive or dead; we do not know if she resembles a captivating beauty or a tainted being. It becomes even more difficult to comprehend exactly what she signifies when the image of a victimized setting is given. The setting is corroded by harsh weather and bombs:

Outside, the long rain in silicon and freezing descent smacks, desolate, slowly corrosive against the mediaeval windows, curtaining like smoke the river’s far shore.

This city, in all its bomb-pierced miles: this inexhaustibly knotted victim...skin of

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<sup>129</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 109.

<sup>130</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 110.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> Derrida xv.

<sup>133</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 110.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*



glistening roofslates, sooted brick flooded high about each window dark or lit, each of a million openings vulnerable to the gloom of day.<sup>137</sup>

As we are later told of Katje's life with Blicero, a close look at this image reveals that the victimized "skin"<sup>138</sup> of the rooftops and the "bomb-pierced"<sup>139</sup> city become metaphors for Katje's violated flesh. Pynchon depicts skin as permeable, and as a result of this, corporeality and identity are always subject to change. What is especially telling about this image is that it reflects what Shildrick refers to as "the vulnerability"<sup>140</sup> of the body that makes humans monstrous. Even when Katje seems to present a wholesome image of glamour, Pynchon makes her vulnerable by confining her to a disrupted setting that contains a "trace"<sup>141</sup> of her otherness. Thus, Pynchon's language, constantly permeated by the monstrosity of otherness, mirrors Katje's own exposure. It is a language of paradoxes that reminds us of Shildrick's words:

For all that the monster may be cast as a figure vulnerable in its own right by reason of its own lack of fixed form and definition and its putative status as an outsider, what causes anxiety is that it threatens to expose the vulnerability at the heart of the ideal model of body/self.<sup>142</sup>

If we reconsider Chisholm's idea of the "presence and absence"<sup>143</sup> that defines the Hollywood body doubling technique, then one finds that Pynchon is also utilizing this concept to frame Katje's character. Thus far, the examples I have included are all representative of these contradictions. In the presence of the Hollywood Katje, Blicero's

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<sup>137</sup> *Gravity's Rainbow* 110.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self* (London: Sage, 2002) 46.

<sup>141</sup> Derrida xv.

<sup>142</sup> Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster* 48.

<sup>143</sup> Chisholm 123.

Katje seems absent. However, through the contradictions in the language discussed, we are made aware that the present Hollywood Katje is actually the absent Blicero's Katje. The violated setting imposes a haunting presence of Katje's monstrous double, and as a result of what Chisholm refers to as the "negotiations between presence and absence,"<sup>144</sup> Katje's character is constructed. Thus, Katje embodies the body doubling technique in the sense that she can be seen as two bodies, a starlet and a monster, that represent one and the same character.

Between the image of the Hollywood Katje and the gruesome image of Katje and Gottfried's monstrous performances, Pynchon describes the beauty of Katje's Harvey Nichols' dress, bringing us back to Hollywood glamour. The narrator describes how Katje knows that "she has posed before the mirrors too often today, that her hair and make-up are perfect, and admires the frock they have brought her from Harvey Nicholls, a sheer crepe that flows in from padded shoulders down to a deep point between her breasts."<sup>145</sup> The pivotal moment occurs when we are plunged into Katje's subconscious:

At the images she sees in the mirror Katje also feels a cameraman's pleasure, but knows what he cannot; that inside herself, enclosed in the *soignée* surface of dead fabric and dead cells, she is corruption and ashes, she belongs in a way none of them can guess cruelly to the Oven...to *Der Kinderofen*...remembering now his teeth, long, terrible, veined with bright brown rot as he speaks these words, the yellow teeth of Captain Blicero [...] She recalls his teeth before any other feature, teeth were to benefit most directly from the Oven: from what is planned for her, and for Gottfried.<sup>146</sup>

From the midst of Katje's thoughts, the narrator paints an image of eerie contradictions. Again, it is Pynchon's striking use of words that foregrounds the monstrosity of the image.

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> *Gravity's Rainbow* 110.

<sup>146</sup> *Gravity's Rainbow* 111.

The word “soignée,”<sup>147</sup> which is used to refer to elegance and precision, and also used in a mathematical context when referring to a precise solution, is juxtaposed with the uncanny image of “death”<sup>148</sup> and “ashes.”<sup>149</sup> As the narrator gives more detail, Gottfried is “masturbating metronomic[ally]”<sup>150</sup> and his skin is a “synthetic orange she [Katje] has never before associated with skin, his penis a blood monolith.”<sup>151</sup> It is useful here to return to Caesar’s definition of the monstrous as a murgence of the human with the mechanical.<sup>152</sup> Gottfried’s “metronomic”<sup>153</sup> “masturbating”<sup>154</sup> fuses the sexual act with a mechanical rhythm. Moreover, the word “synthetic,”<sup>155</sup> used several times in the novel, is an overt reference to the artificial, while the “blood monolith”<sup>156</sup> is a phrase that merges the liveliness of the corporeal with the coldness of a giant, solid structure. Thus, by paying close attention to language we find, once again, a Pynchonesque strategy of infusing the uncanny with the mechanical, undermining the strict boundaries we may place between seemingly opposing forces and simultaneously undermining the ability of language to confirm Kaje’s identity. Thus, the language itself is monstrous. This is quite suitable when considering how Katje’s character embodies the “leaky boundaries”<sup>157</sup> of a monstrous self. She is “ashes and corruption”<sup>158</sup> beneath the seemingly glamorous Hollywood-image. She is the Gretel of Blicero’s sadistic version of the Hansel and Gretel Tale. Part of this role involves the gruesome image of her where she is “kneeling, obliged to cut her lips and tongue, and then

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<sup>147</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 112.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> Shildrick, *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries: Feminism, Postmodernism and (Bio)Ethics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) i.

<sup>158</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 111.

kiss blood-abstracts across the golden ungressed back of her ‘brother’ Gottfried.”<sup>159</sup> And just as one reaches a point of defining Katje as the Gretel of Blicero’s tale, this definition is again subverted. Blicero decides to transform Katje into Gottfried and Gottfried into Katje, multiplying the indefiniteness of the characters:

But did Blicero also cut her hair? She can’t remember now. She knows she wore Gottfried’s uniforms once or twice (pushing her hair, yes, up under his forage cap), looking easily his double, spending these nights ‘in the cage,’ as Blicero has set the rules, while Gottfried must wear her silk stockings, her lace apron and cap, all her satin and ribboned organdy.<sup>160</sup>

In the midst of Katje’s own confusion, it is not possible to reach a definitive conclusion regarding her character. She is the beautiful Dutch girl, the violated body, and the body double of Gottfried. Pynchon’s language, constantly redefining her, confines her to the liminal; she is always only at the threshold of definition. She is unable to answer her own question, “But did Blicero cut her hair?”<sup>161</sup> The uncertainty is emphasized with the knowledge that she cannot remember. We are caught in a Derridean moment that defines the monstrous:

At the very moment of definition, the subject is marked by its excluded other, the absent presence which primary identification must deny and on which it relies. The monster is irreducible to the selfsame but it is also within. And it is that trace, the supplement, the undecidable signifier at the heart of *différance*, the spectre of the other who haunts the selfsame, which ensures that change is not only possible but perhaps inevitable.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 112.

<sup>160</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 113.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster* 5.

Moreover, Shildrick refers to the monster Sila in *Species* (1995) and looks at the significant moment where Sila is destroyed and the survivors pronounce the epithet “She was half us, half something else.”<sup>163</sup> Shildrick explains that this contradiction is framed in the unexpected familiarity of the monstrous:

It is precisely that ambiguity that lies at the heart of what makes the monstrous body transhistorically both so fascinating and disturbing. It is not that the monster represents the threat of difference, but that it threatens to interrupt difference—at least in its binary form—such that the comfortable otherness that secures the selfsame is lost.<sup>164</sup>

This concept of the “comfortable otherness”<sup>165</sup> is especially relevant to *Gravity’s Rainbow* where the monstrous is not always threatening or strikingly different. Often the monstrous offers a range of possibilities, and one of these possibilities is the ordinary or the mundane. To examine this point, let us consider an example where Slothrop insists he can see a monstrous figure in the sky:

Worried, all right. By the jaws and teeth of some Creature, some presence so large that nobody else can see it—there! That’s the monster I was telling you about.- That’s no monster, stupid, that’s *clouds!*—No, can’t you *see?* It’s his *feet*—Well, Slothrop can feel the beast in the sky: its visible claws and scales are being mistaken for clouds and other plausibilities...or else everyone has agreed to *call them other names* when Slothrop is listening...<sup>166</sup>

While everyone may actually be deceiving Slothrop, the confusion that occurs is telling. There is a possibility that the beastly figure is simply an image formed by the clouds. Regardless of whether or not there is a monster, the episode reveals that the monstrous and

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<sup>163</sup> Shildrick, “Monsters, Marvels, and Metaphysics: Beyond the Powers of Horror,” *Transformations: Thinking through Feminism*, ed. Sara Ahmed (Routledge: New York, 2000) 303.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 287.

the mundane may be intertwined. Katje, by embodying various contradictory roles, also jeopardises the notion of a fixed body or identity. Even in the absence of a cinematic doubling technique, Katje embodies the monstrosity of cinematic doubling. Thus, Pynchon uses language to subvert the binary oppositions that enforce a boundary between one's body and the other's, revealing a complexity in the body's corporeality as opposed to an oversimplified autonomy. As opposed to being a subject detached from the world, the body is constantly transforming; and while at times it is empowered, in others it is violated.

The most significant example of an actress in the novel is Margherita. She also exemplifies one of the explicit examples of body doubling. She stars in several pornographic movies, including *Alpdrucken* and is supposedly the “dizzy debutant Lotte Lustig, and [finds] herself during a flood, disguised as a scrubwoman, proceeding downriver in a bathtub with rich playboy Max Schlepzig.”<sup>167</sup> The narrator tells us that Margherita was not actually in any of the bathtub scenes, but that these scenes were shot using a double who is an “Italian stunt man named Blazzo in a long blonde wig.”<sup>168</sup> The couple are involved in a romance, “but Greta wouldn't go to bed with him, unless he wore that wig.”<sup>169</sup> Thus, she is one of the few characters that is explicitly involved in doubling. However, there is another more implicit aspect of doubling, also embedded in the Derridean *difference*.

Margherita's character resembles yet another example of embodying the monstrosity of the body doubling technique. Pynchon portrays Margherita in almost the exact manner he portrays Katje. Margherita's double emerges through the contradictions in the language used to describe her. Moreover, as the scene unfolds, the setting also projects the image of a violated body. Margherita's features are described as “eyes rimmed soft as black ash, separate grains of powder on her face clear as pores the powder missed or was taken

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<sup>167</sup> *Gravity's Rainbow* 573.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

from by tears.”<sup>170</sup> We sense a helplessness in Margherita’s image, but we initially do not infer far more than that. However, as Margherita narrates her story to Slothrop, more insight into her character is given. The first two sentences that introduce Margherita’s perspective of herself, as she tells Slothrop about her experience with the film director Von Gohll, reflects the Derridean *différance* that Shildrick refers to when defining the monstrous: “I knew he was a genius from the beginning. I was only his creature. Never star material, she admits freely, no Dietrich, nor vamp a la Brigitte Helm.”<sup>171</sup> Though Margherita’s role is to star in Von Gohll’s pornographic movies, the word “creature”<sup>172</sup> that she uses to describe herself immediately implies that she is not simply a “star.”<sup>173</sup> Margherita is referred to as the Anti-Dietrich,<sup>174</sup> “not destroyer of men but doll- languid exhausted.”<sup>175</sup> As she begins to describe the experience of watching herself on the screen, we see increasing similarities between her and Katje:

‘I watched all our films,’ she recalls, ‘some of them six or seven times. I never seemed to move. Not even my face. Ach, those long, long gauze close-ups...it could have been the same frame, over and over. Even running away- I always had to be chased, by monsters, madmen, criminals- still I was so’- bracelets flashing- ‘stolid, so...monumental.’<sup>176</sup>

Thus, Margherita who possesses a body that Slothrop believes tempted men to re-enact the pornographic scene from *Alpdrucken* with their “some drab fat excuse for a bride,”<sup>177</sup> is not merely this “beautiful”<sup>178</sup> body with the sexually appealing power of a sultry film noir actress such as Marlene Dietrich. She is Dietrich in that her sultry film star appearance has

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<sup>170</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 467.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 468.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>176</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 468.

<sup>177</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 472.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

significant impact on the masses, but she is the Anti-Dietrich because her violated and vulnerable body subverts this apparent power. Moreover, she is willingly victimized by Slothrop in her attempt to re-enact the pornographic scenes of the film:

‘Could you be? Please. Find something to whip me with. Just a little. Just for the warmth.’ Nostalgia. The pain of a return home. He rummages around through inquisitional props, gyves, thumbscrews, leather harness, before coming up with a miniature cat-o’-nine-tails, a Black Forest elves’ whip, its lacquered black handle carved in a bas relief orgy, the lashes padded with velvet to hurt but not to draw blood. “Yes, perfect. Now on the insides of my thighs...”<sup>179</sup>

And it is not long before Slothrop takes advantage of this and the narrator describes a strikingly vulnerable image of Margherita’s body as her “vulva, shivers, unprotected, between thighs agape and straining, amid movements of muscle erotic, subdued, ‘monumental’ as any silver memory of her body on film.”<sup>180</sup> Moreover, her body is mirrored in the violated setting: “Something...that dreams Prussian and wintering among their meadows, in whatever cursive lashmarks wait across the flesh of their sky so bleak, so incapable of any sheltering, wait to be summoned.”<sup>181</sup> That “something”<sup>182</sup> may be hard to define, as Pynchon’s ambiguity prevents us from attaining any definitive meaning. However, there is a haunting feel to that “something”<sup>183</sup> that is “wintering”<sup>184</sup> amongst them; perhaps, it is the always present “trace” of the other or the “other order of being” that defines the monstrous. It is the conflict of interiority versus exteriority that obscures meaning:

what is called ‘meaning’...is already, and thoroughly, constituted by a tissue of differences, in the extent to which there is already a text, a network of textual referrals

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<sup>179</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 471.

<sup>180</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 470.

<sup>181</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 470.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.



to other texts, a textual transformation in which each allegedly ‘simple term’ is marked by the trace of another term, the presumed interiority of meaning is already worked upon by its own exteriority...Only in this condition can it signify.<sup>185</sup>

Pynchon uses the “simple term,”<sup>186</sup> something, to reflect a far more complex connection between interiority and exteriority.

The “trace”<sup>187</sup> of Margherita’s otherness makes it impossible to define who exactly she is; is she a film star or is she a creature, or is she both? If cinematic body doubling is based on the notion of a presence and absence that allows the construction of a single character, then Pynchon’s language is perhaps his viewfinder, his means of constructing the discrepancies between the two bodies that comprise Margherita. Through the language and contradictory images, Katje and Margherita embody the doubling technique. They are both comprised of an inherent multiplicity, a star and a monster, representing the always monstrous nature of the human body. Moreover, Pynchon suggests that the characters are not confined to their skin. Instead of a barrier between the character and the world, the skin is permeable, and as a result of this permeability, the characters can connect to the world and to others; Pynchon’s language, similar to skin, allows the monstrous to seep through the gaps of its contradictions.

### **Morphing the Beauties and the Beasts**

The cinematic technique of morphing is another illuminating example of how Pynchon depicts the mergence of the human with the technological. In this section, I will address how Pynchon uses morphing to foreground the body’s inherent monstrosity. To develop this argument, I will consider embodiment in both *Gravity’s Rainbow* and *V*. I find it

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<sup>185</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, ed. Christopher Norris (London: Continuum, 1972) 28.

<sup>186</sup> Derrida 28.

<sup>187</sup> Derrida 47.

necessary to juxtapose the characters' bodily transformations in both novels in order to reach a comprehensive understanding of Pynchon's perspective on morphing. Throughout the two novels, Pynchon presents different kinds of morphing techniques, some that are far more detailed than others. Thus far in the chapter, I have argued that the characters embody the technique of body doubling, focusing on the concept of monstrosity to challenge the dichotomy between the human and the technological. To examine how the characters embody morphing techniques, I will draw upon Sobchack's idea on how the technique of digital morphing converges with the concept of body modification. Digital morphing is projected through various episodes where characters exhibit a striking bodily transformation that reflects the fluid transformations of the technique. I will include a quote from Sobchack where she describes morphing, in order to justify the need to focus on morphing in Pynchon:

Against the ground of (and sometimes grounding) the photo-realisms of film and television, its effortless shape shifting, its confusions of the animate and the inanimate, its curiously static movement, its queerly hermetic liquidity, its homogenizing consumption of others and otherness, are uncanny- uncanny not only in the sense of being strange and unfamiliar but also in the sense of being strangely familiar.<sup>188</sup>

These are precisely the aspects of morphing that I will examine, the "confusions"<sup>189</sup> implicated in the process and the contradictory state of familiarity and unfamiliarity that the technique represents. Thus, morphing is an exemplary theme to consider because it allows an analysis of Pynchon that defies simplistic dichotomies.

It is also important to note that that the roots of morphing are not directly related to technology. According to Louise Krasniewicz, "Mesoamerican cultures were notable for their

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<sup>188</sup> Vivian Sobchack, *Meta-morphing: Visual Transformations and the Culture of Quick-Change* (Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P, 2000) xi.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

illustration of the entire process in which a human transforms into an animal as part of a shamanic journey to a sacred place.”<sup>190</sup> This is a significant example of the deeply rooted “fascination with shape shifting”<sup>191</sup> in ancient cultures. Modern technological mediums, such as computers, have been used to depict such transformations for music videos and advertisements. Notable examples of more recent ‘computer-generated morphing’ include graphic studio Pacific Data Images (PDI) of a “swiftly moving automobile [transforming] itself into a gracefully running tiger.”<sup>192</sup> Accordingly, we find that modern morphing techniques are entrenched in the ancient belief in the body’s capacity for change.

To examine the embodiment of morphing, I am interested in how a technical perspective can provide an insightful reading. First, I will establish how Pynchon structures the episodes in a manner that mirrors the structure of a morphing scene in a film. Not only does Pynchon reflect these transformations through imagery, but he also structures the episodes in a way that projects the temporality of a morphing technique. It is suitable to begin with Blicero’s character, perhaps the most significant example of a morph in the sense that his shape-shifting occurs in different ways and makes him representative of several morphing techniques. Blicero’s example is also significant because it reflects how Pynchon uses metaphors to project morphing. Let us consider, for instance, the episode where Katje witnesses Blicero’s morphing eyes as he leads her to the Castle:

It was the Castle: Blicero looked over, about to speak, and I said, ‘The Castle.’ The mouth smiled quickly, but absent: the wrinkled wolf-eyes had gone even beyond these domestic moments of telephathy, on into its animal north, to a persistence on the hard

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<sup>190</sup> Sobchack 133.

<sup>191</sup> Louise Krasniewicz, “Magical Transformations: Morphing and Metamorphing in Two Cultures,” *Metamorphing: Transformations and the Culture of Quick-Change* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000) 41.

<sup>192</sup> Krasniewicz 42.

edge of death I can't imagine, tough cells with the smallest possible flicker inside, running on nothing but ice, or less.<sup>193</sup>

The narrator describes the striking beastly eyes through an image that resembles an animal heading to its habitat, perhaps the arctic north, a place that only this animal can relate to. Thus, this image depicts the extent to which the eyes have become beastly by being distant and on the verge of the inanimate. Though we are not told that the eyes change shape, literally, we are aware from the image that there is a monstrous change taking place. It is also important to note how the image shifts from the focus on Blicero to the "mouth,"<sup>194</sup> implying an otherness within the character. Moreover, the absence that characterizes the mouth's smile also implies the presence of an otherness, something else within Blicero is taking over. When characters embody doubling, their monstrosity emerges from the narrative as we witness the difference between their present physical state and their physical state in another context. However, Pynchon presents morphing quite differently by allowing the transformation to take place instantaneously. Perhaps the clearest example of this is when Slothrop looks at his face's reflection on the metal surfaces of the Rocket factory. The objects are described as "stacked alternately fins up/fins down, row on row identical, dimpled ripply metal surfaces."<sup>195</sup> Slothrop watches his face in the reflections as it "warp[s] and slide[s] by."<sup>196</sup> These words used to describe the transformation are telling; they signify the immediacy and fluidity of a morphing technique.

Another significant example of how metaphors are used to present the morphing of a character is Slothrop's perception of Katje while they are in the midst of a sexual encounter. The transformation occurs like a film scene where Katje's face suddenly and strangely

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<sup>193</sup> *Gravity's Rainbow* 577.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> *Gravity's Rainbow* 362.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

becomes abstract. Slothrop views Katje as a picture or an image, even in the midst of a sexual affair with her. As they lay together, Slothrop “lies on top of her, sweating, taking great breaths, watching her face turned  $\frac{3}{4}$  away, not even a profile, but the terrible face that is No Face, gone too abstract, unreachable: the notch of eye socket, but never the labile eye, only the anonymous curve of cheek, convexity of mouth, a noseless mask of the Other Order of Being, of Katje’s being- the lifeless non-face that is the only face of hers he really knows, or will ever remember.”<sup>197</sup> This is one of several examples in the novel where the body is portrayed as lifeless and belonging to an ‘other,’ a being that seems to be both exterior and interior to the character. Pynchon depicts these contradictions that embody the monstrous through using words as negations; for instance, the “lifeless non-face”<sup>198</sup> is the “only face of hers he really knows.”<sup>199</sup> In this image, Katje embodies morphing because her face transforms in front of Slothrop almost as though it were transforming on a screen. Similar to Blicero’s transformation, Katje’s transformation is expressed figuratively when her face goes “too abstract.”<sup>200</sup> She suddenly exhibits “the Other Order of Being,”<sup>201</sup> that represents the heterogeneity of morphing. The question to consider here is what is this heterogeneity comprised of, and how does Katje resemble a morph? I will answer this question in light of Žižek and Sobchack’s reading of the monstrous. In the essay, “Why does the Phallus Appear?” Žižek argues that the monstrous face is one where “the flesh has not yet assumed definite features, it dwells in a kind of pre-ontological state, as if ‘melted.’”<sup>202</sup> Žižek then argues that anyone who witnesses this face “has entered the forbidden domain,”<sup>203</sup> because it contains the “‘living dead’: as if death, the death stench it spreads, is a mask sheltering a life

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<sup>197</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 264.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 264.

<sup>201</sup> Sobchack, “At the Still Point,” *Meta-Morphing* 134.

<sup>202</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptoms: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (London: Routledge, 2001) 114.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*

far more alive than our ordinary life [...] having access to the life substance prior to its symbolic modification.”<sup>204</sup> Rereading Katje’s description in light of Žižek, several similarities are evident. Katje’s non-face contains curvatures where features should be, without the presence of the actual features. Perhaps the best way to describe the face is in Žižek’s terms, ‘melted.’”<sup>205</sup> Moreover, both Pynchon and Žižek refer to the monstrous face as a “mask”<sup>206</sup> that conceals another order of being. Kevin Fisher argues that the “life substance”<sup>207</sup> reflects the importance of the psychological implications of a morph. It represents a force that is incompatible with the stability of “the order of things.”<sup>208</sup> Thus, in one sentence about Katje’s transformation, Pynchon’s imagery captures the destabilizing effects of morphing.

Another characteristic of cinematic morphing, evident in the previous examples of Katje and Blicero, is the prominence that is given to that pivotal moment of shape-shifting and the captivating effect it has on its witnesses. When Blicero’s eyes transform, the transformation occurs suddenly and disrupts the continuity of the scene. The scene seems to pause and the long sentence that Pynchon uses to describe Blicero’s eyes foregrounds the significance of this transformation; this moment is not interrupted, and similar to the manner in which a morph is depicted on a Hollywood screen, the morphing of Blicero becomes central to the scene. In Mark Wolf’s essay, “A Brief History of Morphing,” Wolf argues that morphing on screen is given its own specific temporality.<sup>209</sup> Thus, it is not merely part of the scene, but instead it “momentarily takes center stage, before the action resumes.”<sup>210</sup> When

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<sup>204</sup> Žižek 115.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Žižek 114.

<sup>207</sup> Žižek 115.

<sup>208</sup> Kevin Fisher, “Tracing the Tesseract,” *Meta-Morphing* 123.

<sup>209</sup> Mark S.P. Wolf, *Meta-Morphing* 99.

<sup>210</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 264.

Katje's face becomes "too abstract,"<sup>211</sup> Pynchon uses a similar temporality to foreground this transformation. There seems to be a pause as Slothrop is fixated on Katje and the transformation is depicted in one long flowing sentence. Pynchon gives a specific beginning and an end to this moment by framing it in the sentence structure,<sup>212</sup> depicting what Wolf refers to as "the fantastic tone of morphing"<sup>213</sup> that "erode[s] the plausibility of [the] scene and disrupts its verisimilitude."<sup>214</sup> Thus far, I have addressed how Pynchon foregrounds the act of morphing by using a specific temporality that mirrors the cinematic technique of morphing. I have also addressed how Pynchon uses metaphors to present these transformations within that particular temporality. It is essential to note that even in the absence of a camera in these scenes, the scenes are inherently cinematic. As a result of the obscure boundary that Pynchon places between what is cinematic and what is not, one can examine the intrinsic connection between the human and the technological in the novel.

In another instance in the novel, morphing is shown through a visible process that involves a kind of performance, one that resembles the transformations in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. In *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Spencer Tracy transforms into Dr. Jekyll, "in front of the camera and our eyes, not through an elided process involving unseen applications [...] but through the visible labor and duration of the actor's performance in its uninterrupted metamorphosis."<sup>215</sup> In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Blicero's character reflects this Dr. Jekyll-like transformation, as the narrative enables us to witness the specific details of Blicero's shape-shifting. Though *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is not referred to explicitly with connection to Blicero, it is alluded to in another episode when Bodine attends a counterforce dinner party and the band plays the tune, "You Should See me Dance the Polka," a song from the film.

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Wolf 99.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Sobchack, "At the Still Point," 134.

This is the song Jekyll hums directly before he becomes Hyde for the first time. In this passage, the song relates to Slothrop's gradual dispersal and his mother's monstrous features: "She is a blond image of your mother dead: if you have ever seen her travestied in beaten gold, the cheeks curving too far, deformed, the eyebrows too dark and whites too white."<sup>216</sup> The connection is then made between Slothrop and his mother who "They have distorted."<sup>217</sup> He is like his mother, but he has also become "one plucked albatross plucked, hell-stripped. Scattered all over the Zone."<sup>218</sup>

More implicitly, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde are revealed through Blicero's character. Throughout *Gravity's Rainbow*, we observe a transforming Blicero, whose fluid identity exemplifies a monstrosity. The narrator tells us that Blicero "doesn't even know the Witch, can't understand the hunger that defines him/her, is only, in times of weakness, bewildered that it should coexist in the same body as himself."<sup>219</sup> Blicero embodies the character of the witch and undergoes strange physical changes that can perhaps only be explained through his eerie connection to this "other"<sup>220</sup> character. The witch's coexistence with Blicero becomes evident in certain passages where disconcerting physical transformations take place:

Blicero's own reflection in the oval mirror, an old face- he is about to don a wig, a Dragon Lady Pageboy with bangs, and he pauses, looking in, face asking what? what did you say? wig held on the side and slightly lower so as to be another face in heavy wig-shadows nearly invisible...but looking closer you can see bone-ridges and fat-fields begin to emerge now, an ice-glaze white bobbing, a mask hand-held, over the shadows in the hollow hood-space-two faces.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> *Gravity's Rainbow* 712.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> *Gravity's Rainbow* 670.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.



Though there is a difference between Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and Blicero's double emerging from beneath the hollow space, there is a significant similarity that should be acknowledged. Blicero's double's gradual emergence is a reminder of the gradual transformation of Spencer Tracy on the screen. The transformations are based upon a "mis-en-scene,"<sup>222</sup> where "linear[ly] and progressive[ly]"<sup>223</sup> a change takes place. Pynchon foregrounds this linearity in an especially inventive way. Instead of simply allowing Blicero's body to actually transform, he creates an external transformation that is symbolic of Blicero's own inherent exteriority. This "other face"<sup>224</sup> that appears from beneath the wig is Blicero's "other face,"<sup>225</sup> and Pynchon allow Blicero to witness his own monstrosity.

When Blicero's wolf eyes and Katje's abstract face are read in terms of morphing, it becomes evident that Pynchon finds something inherently technological about the human body. The characters are technological; they have bodies that project the monstrous multiplicity that is characteristic of a morphing technique. This becomes even more evident when we consider Isle's character. Perhaps the most striking example of the incredible transformation of a digital morph is Isle. Thus far, I have examined transformations that take place gradually and in front of a character. The process underpinning Isle's transformation is one that neither Pökler nor the reader witness. Referring to Isle as a digital morph necessitates a consideration of external factors that may have lead to her bodily transformation. As Sobchack emphasizes, a digital morph's transformation is a "consequence more of will than of external or internal temporal and physical labor."<sup>226</sup> It is possible to argue that Isle changes because 'They' recreate her image to manipulate Pökler. On the other hand, the lack of explicit detail regarding how this transformation takes place makes it impossible for us, as

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<sup>222</sup> 134.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> *Gravity's Rainbow* 670.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Sobchack 133.

readers, to determine the exact cause of the change. However, in all cases, we are aware that those who are in power in the Zone are accountable for the successive changes in Isle's appearance. It is possible to view 'Them' as graphic designers, warping and morphing Isle.

The always obscure boundary between illusion and reality that frames Isle's presence and absence has a significant impact on her relationship with Pökler. As Simmon indicates, "Isle is not simply a 'movie child' because she was created by Pökler's film fantasy, but because, as Blicero's apparent hostage, she is returned to Franz only during summers until he is unsure if she is even the same child each summer."<sup>227</sup> Simmon suggests that film's physical nature in the novel is used to show the elite's power to distort any possibility of continuity. While this example certainly reflects this projection of time as "a physical process of film projection,"<sup>228</sup> it is not simply time that is implicated in this example. Critics often refer to the possibility that the 'Isle' sent to Pökler each summer is merely a substitute, and that the structure of film is used to depict this continuity that Simmon refers to. However, I do not find it necessary to limit the reading of Isle's changes to a conventional film technique that depends upon the illusion of consecutive frames. Though there is no direct reference to computer imaging or digital technology, Pynchon portrays a transformation that reflects the cinematic technique of digital morphing. When Isle returns to Pökler, the narrator describes the appearances as follows:

A daughter each year, each one about a year older, each time taking up nearly from scratch. The only continuity has been her name, and Zwolfkinder, and Pökler's love-love something like the persistence of vision, for They have used it to create for him the moving image of a daughter, flashing him only these summer frames of her, leaving it to him to build the illusion of a single child...what would the time scale matter, a 24th of a second or a year...<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Simmon 137.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Simmon 137.

There are several film-related terms mentioned in this passage. The words “moving image,”<sup>230</sup> “flashing,”<sup>231</sup> and “summer frames”<sup>232</sup> allude to the overarching theme of cinema, though without any explicit reference to the actual presence of film technology. “They”<sup>233</sup> create an illusion that is similar to film, by flashing these successive images of Isle. While certainly technology had not advanced to a level that would allow the actual animations that present themselves in cartoons and movies today, a close analysis of Isle’s mutable physical appearance shows a significant connection with morphing and the surreal or magical effects that this technique produces on its audience. This example is especially telling because it foregrounds a connection between memory and morphing that allows Pynchon to use temporality to depict the transformations of Isle.

Morphing is related to memory because the morph’s effect on an audience is based on the audience’s memory of the successive images. In *Matter and Memory* (1911), Henri Bergson foregrounds a significant connection between memory and perception, a connection that suggests that “our successive perceptions are never the real moments of things, as we have hitherto supposed, but are moments of our consciousness.”<sup>234</sup> In other words, our perception gives us a series of images that are discontinuous, but are also intertwined with our memory and consciousness. Morphing creates this effect of successive and speedy change through a transformation that is based on the existence of a previous image. Unlike a single frame, it foregrounds a history and “sense of self.”<sup>235</sup> Using a single frame cannot

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 470.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, Dover Philosophical Classics (1896; Dover: New York, 2004) 75.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

project the effect of digital morphing in the manner that time lapse can be used to create a “relation between temporality and vision.”<sup>236</sup>

Isle becomes part of the sequence as she is part of the history that constitutes Pökler’s recollections. These memories make him wait for Isle, “for this summer’s return, and with it an explosion that will take him by surprise.”<sup>237</sup> Though he retains memories from her childhood, once she returns to him in her transformed image, he is forced to recreate these memories through a distortion of the old ones. Though Pökler, “knew all of Isle’s cryings, her first attempts at words...the sounds and shapes that brought her tranquillity,”<sup>238</sup> he fails to recognize her. The narrator tells us that “he ought to know if this child was his or not. But he didn’t. Too much had happened between. Too much history and dream.”<sup>239</sup> This discontinuity, Isle’s disappearance and sudden reappearance, and Pökler’s memories of his daughter, are both characteristics of the kind of process involved in morphing. The sequence of images creates this overall effect.

Not only is Isle presented as this changeable child, but she is also part of a ‘Disneyfied’ fantasy setting, which adds to the magic of the situation. When Pökler and Isle meet, she takes him to Zwolfkinder; the place is described as, “games, fairytales, legends from history, all the paraphernalia of make-believe can be adapted and even embodied in a physical place such as Zwolfkinder.”<sup>240</sup> In this fantasy land, Pökler has an incestuous affair with Isle. We are told that “the only continuity has been her name, and Zwolfkinder, and Pökler’s love.”<sup>241</sup> What we see in Isle is the finished product of these changes. We do not see ‘Them’ actually changing her. All we and Pökler have is a magical change, perhaps best

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 418.

<sup>238</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 427.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 419.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

described as a “fetishistic oversight,”<sup>242</sup> where “history is overlooked.”<sup>243</sup> A fetishistic oversight avoids recognition of the “marks of labor,”<sup>244</sup> or how the transformation actually takes place. What happened to Isle and how has she become another child? The narrator describes the change as follows:

But her hair, for one thing, was definitely dark brown, and cut differently. Her eyes were longer, set differently, she’d grown a foot taller. But at that age they shoot up overnight, don’t they? Perverse whispering began. Is it the same one? Have they sent you a different child? Why didn’t you look closer last time Pökler?” But does Pökler really want to look closer?”<sup>245</sup>

Isle changes in shape and as Pökler wonders if “they shoot up overnight,”<sup>246</sup> This reflects the instantaneous transformations of morphing. Moreover, the transformation means that she is Isle but also a “different child,”<sup>247</sup> a mixed identity that is representative of morphing.

In my detailed analysis of Isle’s character, I attempted to show how the various concepts that constitute the theorization of morphing are present in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. In the episode of the shape-shifting of Isle, Pökler’s experience is framed in the perceptual aspects of memory and illusion that define morphing. Thus, not only does Isle embody morphing, but Pökler’s experience also mirrors the experience of someone witnessing the transformation of a digital morph. This transformation varies significantly from other shape-shifting examples in Pynchon’s fiction. I choose to conclude this section with an analysis of morphing in *V.* to avoid a perspective that limits morphing in Pynchon to a single text.

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<sup>242</sup> Laura Melvey in Victoria Duckett, “Orlan and the Material Morph,” *Meta-Morphing* 211.

<sup>243</sup> Laura Melvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Feminism and Film Theory*, ed. Constance Penley (New York: Routledge, 1988) 33.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 417.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

If morphing in *V.* is considered, one finds that Pynchon, in a manner that is characteristic of his ambiguity, does not simply depict digital morphs. His debut novel foregrounds what Orlan<sup>248</sup> refers to as the “biological morph,”<sup>249</sup> a process of transformation that is presented in detailed imagery; every step of the transformation is evident:

It is in this realm that the distinctions between digital and material morph are best detailed: whereas the computergraphic morph represents a pause in narrative continuity or constitutes in itself a ‘distracting’ narrative and is tied, inevitably to a reemergent cinema of attractions, Orlan’s ‘biological morph’ represents a certain narrative continuity whereby each of her operations becomes a climax to a story that is in the process of unfolding.”<sup>250</sup>

An example from Pynchon’s *V.* provides a suitable context for the contrasting morphs that Pynchon presents us with. In the example of Esther’s nose job, Pynchon portrays a physical transformation where the body is altered.<sup>251</sup> However, unlike Isle’s magical transformation, we are taken into the operating room where the surgery is narrated explicitly. The detailed references to Esther’s body reacting to the surgery foregrounds corporeality:

Inside the nose again with another burden of anaesthetic, Irving’s hypodermic was inserted between the upper and lower cartilage and pushed all the way up to the glabella- the bump between the eyebrows.”<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> In the section titled “Theater of Operations,” of *Pynchon and the Political*, Thomas gives an in-depth analysis of the connection between Orlan and *V.* See p. 81-87.

<sup>249</sup> Sobchack, *Meta-Morphing* 213.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> It is important to note that Esther’s nose job can also be viewed as a symbol for the elimination of a particular racial identity. Esther despises her Jewish nose and instead wants a “retroussé nose the sign of the WASP or White Anglo Saxon Protestant in the movies and advertisements.” (*V.* 40). As Shzuka Hayaska argues, the notion of embodiment in this example is related to race and capitalism; a new identity can be purchased. Plastic surgery is a solution for the “Jewish girls who felt they were perfectly marriageable were it not for an ugly nose.” (*V.* 40). Hayaska suggests that this desire is a result of the girls’ attempt to adjust themselves to the standardized beauty, for the ‘trade’ of marriage.” Havaska, “Excess of Vision: Modernity and the Body in Pynchon’s *V.*,” *SHIRON: Essays in English Language and Literature* (Tohoku University: Sendai, Japan) 118.

<sup>252</sup> *V.* 105.

These few lines are only the beginning of a long, detailed description of the nose job. The pain involved in the surgery makes Esther's corporeality especially evident. The injection hurts to the extent that "nothing before in her experience had ever hurt so much."<sup>253</sup> The corporeal details of the surgery, "the incisions, one on either side through the internal lining of the nose, near the septum at the lower border of the side cartilage,"<sup>254</sup> make that pain justifiable. Esther is certainly unlike Ivana Trump and other celebrities who are only exposed before and after surgery. Ivana can "overlook the surgical procedure [and] attribute the transformation to a new hairstyle and lighter makeup."<sup>255</sup> However, when reading about Esther's nose job, we as readers are immersed in the very "theatrical story"<sup>256</sup> of this surgery, preventing us from the possibility of attributing such a transformation to simulations or "special effects."<sup>257</sup> Instead, it is an Orlandian experience where the narrator is similar to the camera that Orland inserts into the operating theatre to show the exact biological implications of a surgery as opposed to "the (cosmetic) morph's 'special effect.'"<sup>258</sup>

Why is it important to consider such an example of the biological morph when discussing morphing in *Gravity's Rainbow*? Pynchon's Esther is the reminder that beneath the seemingly effortless transformations is a body that is transformable, and that this characteristic necessitates the pain that defines the corporeal. Even Godolphin who makes a brief appearance in *V.* depicts the corporeality that underlays any transformation. Godolphin, who undergoes a major surgery after his face is deformed in an accident, refuses to be disillusioned by the seemingly magical transformation of his reconstructed face. When

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Duckett 213.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

Schoenmaker visits Godolphin and see the “perfect”<sup>259</sup> reconstruction, Godolphin tells him to “take a long look [because] it won’t be good for more than six months.”<sup>260</sup> Godolphin then points to a man with a deformed face similar to his before surgery. He then explains that the man has already had his face reconstructed but is now “back to where [he] started,”<sup>261</sup> because of the “foreign body reaction”<sup>262</sup> that causes infections or inflammations or the paraffin not taking shape.<sup>263</sup> Thus, when examples from *V.* are taken into account, we find that Pynchon uses morphing as a metaphor for the always changing body. The connection between Blicero, Katje, Isle and morphing technology lays in the concept that “bodily transformations of cinema and surgery inform each other.”<sup>264</sup> I used Esther and Godolphin to show that if “cinema is cosmetic surgery,”<sup>265</sup> then Katje, Blicero, and Isle *are* Esther and Godolphin. Beneath their seemingly effortless physical transformation is the underlying materiality of biological shape-shifting. Before I conclude this section, I will examine the wider implications of this statement. Why is the claim that these characters are mirrors of each other significant to advancing our understanding of Pynchon?

In “Multiculturalism and Morphing in I’m Not There,” Zelig Assava examines the concept of passing in the morphing scene of Michael Jackson’s *Black and White*. Assava refers to the problem that arises when shape-shifting is depicted as effortless, making cultural identity seem superficial. According to Scott Bukatman, though morphing resembles the freedom of transformations, it alludes to nothing beyond itself. It trivializes the “complexities

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<sup>259</sup> Pynchon, *V.* 100.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Sobchack, “Scary Women: Cinema, Surgery and Special Effects,” *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Los Angeles: U of California P, 2004) 50.

<sup>265</sup> Sobchack, “Scary Women” 50.



of history and ethnic culture behind its digital gloss.”<sup>266</sup> In an analysis of Jackson’s “Black or White,” Asava argues that there is a contradiction in the morphed faces of “Black or White”; on the one hand, through the consecutive movements of the different actors, they illustrate a common humanity. However, Asava also adds that since “they are digitally constructed cyborg images detached from reality, they are false images.”<sup>267</sup> Thus, the digital technique indicates a cultural diversity as opposed to an actual elimination of racial boundaries. This discussion is especially relevant to *Gravity’s Rainbow* where most of the significant characters have body doubles or morph into different images. Though at times we see the effort that creates the shape-shifting, at other times the process seems more invisible.

Throughout his fiction, Pynchon juxtaposes these effortless bodily transformations with more laborious ones. Pynchon seems to acknowledge the debate regarding the “passing” effects of digital morphing; though Asava’s argument and Jackson’s video address cultural and racial changes, Pynchon considers body modification in a similar manner. Despite Isle’s effortless transformation that seems to eliminate the monstrosity of shape-shifting, Esther’s nose job reminds us of what lies beneath the seemingly ‘invisible’ effect of morphing; similarly, Slothrop’s physical struggles are a reminder of the body’s corporeal presence. Thus, in the novel, the body is not merely an illusion or a dispensable medium. It is grounded in the materiality of physical transformation, constantly redefining the characters and framing them in a complex multiplicity. As they struggle through its limitations and embrace its monstrosity, their phenomenological experiences become, in Pynchon’s own words, “their clearest poetry, the endearment of greatest worth.”<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> Scott Bukatman, “Taking Shape: Morphing and the Performance of Self,” *Meta-Morphing: Visual Transformation and the Culture of Quick-Change* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000) 240.

<sup>267</sup> Zélie Asava, “Multiculturalism and Morphing in I’m Not There,” *Widescreen Journal*, 2.1 (2010): 10.

<sup>268</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 279.



**CHAPTER 2**  
**“The Devil behind the Glass”<sup>1</sup>:**  
**Vision and Surrealism in *Against the Day***

Over the staring eyes come cream lids with stiff lashes, slamming loudly shut, the long reverberating of lead counterweights tumble inside her head as Jessica’s own lids now come flying open.<sup>2</sup>

Pynchon, *Gravity’s Rainbow*.

Though I will maintain a similar argument regarding embodiment, there is one significant difference between *Against the Day* and *Gravity’s Rainbow* that justifies analysing them in two different chapters. Beyond the technicalities that underpin the prominent theme of visual technology in *Against the Day*, Pynchon foregrounds an aesthetic dimension to this technology, best understood in light of surrealism and Merleau-Ponty’s theorization of perception. I will argue that Pynchon’s renowned ambiguity presents itself in the conflict between the embodied nature of visual perception and the disembodied phantasms often associated with optical technologies. *Against the Day* is far more accessible than *Gravity’s Rainbow*; however, it nevertheless contains many of the stylistic aspects that prevent one from providing a simple summary of the novel. It is a novel that does not adhere to conventional expectations, but instead contains a plot made of several disjointed story lines that intersect. James Lasdun has perhaps described it best when he argues that “the stories drift apart, their energies dissipate and the book turns into a rambling transglobal picaresque.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, to summarize the plot of this novel is unrealistic; however, one important part of the novel relates to Webb Traverse, a Colorado miner, who is assassinated by orders from Scarsdale Vibe, the capitalist. Webb’s sons Frank and Reef are intent on getting revenge. Interwoven with this revenge plot are several story lines that include the

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<sup>1</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 528.

<sup>2</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 62.

<sup>3</sup> James Lasdun, “The Carnival goes on (and on),” Rev. of *Against the Day*, by Thomas Pynchon, *Guardian Book Review*, 25 Nov 2006, web, 30 Nov 2008.

adventures of the Chums of Chance whose encounters with photographers and magicians create a surreal atmosphere.

In the midst of all its myriads, vision has a prominent place in the novel. What is particularly significant is how the aesthetic dimension of visual technology, namely optical illusions, surrealism, and digital alchemy, are directly related to the potentialities and limitations of the embodied nature of seeing. In contrast to the “nobility of vision”<sup>4</sup> that defines the historical and conventional perspective of sight, the act of seeing is far from this perfect or sacred sense that defies miscalculations or distortions. It is, similar to any other sense, subject to the limitations of the lived body’s experience, confined by its own physicality and prey to the deceptions of illusion. We may believe we see something, but we may be equally uncertain of its existence or believe that there is more to be seen; this is a concept that has bewildered, not just the most profound of thinkers, but anyone who doubts what he sees; it is a question that surrealists made central to their revolutionary art and it is one that often haunts the modern viewer. Martin Jay argues that the tendency to trust our vision often leads us to being “fooled by visual experience that turns out to be illusory.”<sup>5</sup> The characters in *Against the Day* can be viewed as Pynchon’s means of examining the credibility of vision.

It is important to note that the eye’s physical limitations are directly related to the development of optical technology. Thus, before I attempt the second step at abolishing the line between the human and the technological in Pynchon’s fiction, I must briefly reflect on the historical connection between the organ of the eye and visual technology. Though the next sections of this chapter will focus on surrealism, it is necessary to acknowledge that long before the 1920s surrealist movement, there was an interest in the irrationality of the visual

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<sup>4</sup> Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought* (Los Angeles: U of California P, 1994) 298.

<sup>5</sup> Jay 8.

experience. As will be evident in this section, several examples from *Against the Day* reflect the historical connection between vision and phantasmagorias. While I will argue that Pynchon uses phantasmagorias to explore the metaphorical connotations of the mind's eye, I will also examine how he foregrounds the corporeal restrictions of the eye to draw attention to the embodied nature of visual perception. In the seventeenth century, an increasing interest in seeing led to the development of devices such as the microscope, the telescope, and X-rays, that would "reveal worlds hidden from human eyes."<sup>6</sup> Thus, the aim was to utilize these devices for empirical means, enhancing human vision. However, the devices never really succeeded in divorcing vision from the uncanny; instead they "were modelled on pre-existing ideas of the inner eye, the organ of envisioning, and they also reproduced mental imagery, and projected phantasms, dreams, and memories from the dark chamber of the mind into the light of day."<sup>7</sup> Warner argues that the inward eye has been "a practical stimulus to technological invention,"<sup>8</sup> inspiring optical media such as the cinema to "reproduce the mind's capacity to form images with eyes closed, or with eyes open in the absence of empirical data of any kind."<sup>9</sup>

Thus, the invention of the telescope and microscope motivated scientists to utilize these new possibilities in inventive ways. One of the scientists that is especially relevant to my discussion of Pynchon is Athanasius Kircher, who in the 1640s used "magic lanterns,"<sup>10</sup> and mirrors to create images of phantasms. The uses of the magic lantern were developed further after the French Revolution, when the inventor Étienne-Gaspard Robertson staged a *son-et-lumière*, under the name "Fantasmagoria" from the Greek word *phantasmagorie*

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<sup>6</sup> Marina Warner, *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006) 136.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Warner 138.

meaning “an assembly of phantoms.”<sup>11</sup> The props for this show included the fantascop, the projector, the puppet show box, the proscerium arch, and concentrated lighting sources and effects using a large flat screen.<sup>12</sup> The special effects and lighting were used to create images such as the severed head of Danton projected on smoke and gradually fading into a skull. The aim of giving this summary of the history of phantasmagorias is to show awareness of why visual technology is often associated with the disembodied; its link to the uncanny is deeply entrenched in the historical connotations of the mind’s eye. However, I intend to examine how several examples in the novel depict a tension between this disembodied perspective and embodied vision.

The episode where Arturo Naunt transforms Dally Rideout into his muse, his angel, provides a suitable departure point for this discussion. Naunt, an artist whose extraordinary skills are likened to a magician’s, creates statues of what he calls the “Angel of Death.”<sup>13</sup> Each statue is based on a female figure posing, her head covered with a hood, and in the case of Fiona Plush, haunted by her own “pair of predators’ wings emerging from her back.”<sup>14</sup> What is especially striking about these statues is how, when examined closely, they project uncanny imaginings, images that remind one of Dan Burton’s description of darkness as “our true nature and condition.”<sup>15</sup> As soon as Naunt sees Dally, he decides that there is something exceptional about her. He immediately declares, “this one shall be my next angel.”<sup>16</sup> Dally follows Naunt to a cemetery for soldiers who died in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The cemetery is full of quotes from “Vitaī Lampada,”<sup>17</sup> though as the narrator tells us, “what

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<sup>11</sup> Warner 147.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> *Against the Day* 894.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Dan Burton and David Grandy, *Magic, Mystery, and Science: The Occult in Western Civilization* (Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2004) 2.

<sup>16</sup> *Against the Day* 893.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

Arturo had come for was something rather different.”<sup>18</sup> He directs Dally towards a sculpture, and as Dally moves closer, she is drawn to a compelling image. Naunt informs Dally that this is a sculpture of one of his better “A.O.D.’s.”<sup>19</sup> When Dally first looks at the sculpture, she sees a hooded woman with a dying infantryman’s head in her lap. The woman with predatory wings on her back “gently console[s] him, one hand touching his face, the other raised in a curious half-beckoning, half-commanding gesture.”<sup>20</sup> As Jeffrey Severs argues, the statues represent Pynchon’s keen interest in war memorials.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Naunt’s attempt to transform Dally into one of these statues reflects “art’s ability to somehow honor the animate subject while offering her inanimate rendering.”<sup>22</sup> Severs also indicates how this connection between the animate, Dally, and the inanimate, a statue, demonstrates what Pynchon refers to as the “dynamic ambiguity”<sup>23</sup> of a person. I find the phrase “dynamic ambiguity”<sup>24</sup> key to comprehending how Pynchon’s characters seem to depict the supernatural aspect of vision, but are also grounded in the organ’s corporeality. In other words, while the characters’ imagination seems boundless, their visual experience is limited by the eye’s imperfections. For instance, as Dally looks at the statue, it seems to be an angel-like figure with a man dying in her lap. Yet, upon looking closer, the image begins to transform into a range of possibilities. When she peers beneath the hood, she sees “a face you could encounter at any time- the face of a girl this dying boy had dreamed about, the girl who tended the hearth in a home grown impossibly distant, who promised unvoiceably carnal delights, at the same time

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<sup>18</sup> *Against the Day* 893.

<sup>19</sup> *Against the Day* 894.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Jeffrey Severs, “‘The abstractions she was instructed to embody’: Women, Capitalism, and Artistic Representation in *Against the Day*,” *Pynchon’s Against the Day: A Corrupted Pilgrim’s Guide*, eds. Jeffrey Severs and Christopher Leise (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2011) 232.

<sup>22</sup> Severs 232.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

she prepared to conduct his spirit to shores unvoiceably far beyond the sunset.”<sup>25</sup> There is something both mundane and supernatural about this image; on the one hand, the girl has “a face you could encounter at any time,”<sup>26</sup> and on the other hand, it is the face of a woman “prepared to conduct his spirit.”<sup>27</sup> Pynchon infuses the ordinary with the uncanny, associating the adjective “unvoiceably”<sup>28</sup> with both the fleshy state of carnal delights and the mysterious destination of shores “far beyond the sunset.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, what Dally sees reflects both the empirical and the imaginative aspect of vision, what is actually there and what she imagines to be there. Dally, similar to a seventeenth-century audience, witnesses the illusions of Fiona’s sculpture, almost as though the sculpture were haunted by Kircher’s magic lantern. Thus, there seems to be an overwhelming sense of the disembodied in the connotations of light and spirits. It may initially seem as though the corporeal eye is trivialized, while the mind’s eye or imagination is the only facet accountable for Dally’s perception. However, Pynchon then counters the disembodied with the embodied aspect of seeing as the physical eye becomes more central:

There were perverse intentions at work here, procreative as much as mortal. In the complicated drapery of the A.O.D.’s garment, at certain times of day, beneath the duress of the prevailing light, one saw clearly in the shadows of the gown the shape of an infant, or sometimes more than one, clinging to what might have been an indifferent body. When the clouds thickened, drifted or passed, or the day drew to evening, these figures disappeared, or sometimes modulated to something else that likewise did not invite close inspection.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Against the Day* 894.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*



On the one hand, there is something seemingly mysterious about these modulating figures; yet, the statement that when these figures change they “do not invite close inspection,”<sup>31</sup> indicates that the eye, as an organ, is part of the making of the image. In a particular light, the eye can capture the hidden figures; as this light fades, these figures disappear because the eye loses this particular light that facilitates the process of inspecting. What Pynchon does is certainly characteristic of his ambiguous style; he creates an image that is based upon the disembodiment of death and phantasms, an inspiration for the artistic uses of the optical devices, and then foregrounds the eye’s materiality to bring the attention back to the body. One finds here a theme that reflects Merleau-Ponty’s concept of inclusion versus exclusion. Jack Reynolds clarifies this concept best when describing the connection between the subject and object: “What we literally see or notice is not simply the objective world, but is conditioned by a myriad of factors that ensures the relationship between perceiving subject and the object perceived is not one of exclusion.”<sup>32</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, the body is always central to perception; this makes it impossible to exclude the perceiver’s physical being from a visual experience. Thus, when Dally perceives the image of the statue, she wavers between seeing less and seeing more, depending on the light; this involvement of the sense of vision with the object of vision depicts the concept of inclusion. Throughout the novel, we see examples of this as Pynchon portrays vision as taking part in the making of the perceived image, as opposed to being confined to a subject-object divide.

It is useful to consider that this concept of inclusion is not new to Pynchon’s fiction. In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, Rószavölgyi who finds the shadow corner of Pointsman’s room daunting, tells Pointsman, “Mis-ter Pointsman, I-don’t like it in there, at all. What poss-ible

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<sup>31</sup> *Against the Day* 1004.

<sup>32</sup> Jack Reynolds, *Merleau-Ponty and Derrida: Intertwining Embodiment and Alterity* (Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 2004) 9.

kind of a thrill can anyone get, from such an unwholesome experience. Eh?”<sup>33</sup> The corner Rószavölgyi refers to is “the one corner of the room... which is not brightly lit, yes kind of an optic anomaly here, just a straight, square room, no odd-shaped polyhedrons in Twelfth House.”<sup>34</sup> The description of the room as being an “optic anomaly”<sup>35</sup> foregrounds the strangeness of this object that is being perceived. Yet, what is of greater significance is how Rószavölgyi becomes an anomaly himself, as his eyes struggle to adjust to his surroundings. His eyes, as opposed to being detached from the object perceived, physically transform during the encounter:

Rószavölgyi now is nearly invisible in the shadow, and the whites of his eyes are actually glowing white, jittering around in the air, winking-out-coming-back. It is not, at all, his sort of place. For one thing, the rest of the room seems to be at more of a distance, as through the view-finder on a camera.<sup>36</sup>

This example directs the focus away from the representational or imaginative connotations of the eye to its corporeality. One significant aspect of vision that is addressed is the notion of proximity. According to Edward Hall, unlike the sense of hearing where distance significantly affects the communication between the voice and the perceiving ear, the naked eye “sweeps up an extraordinary amount of information within a hundred-yard radius and is still quite efficient for human interaction at a mile.”<sup>37</sup> One of Pynchon’s main concerns in his fiction is how to depict the materiality of the visual experience given the distance between the subject and object. In this example, he foregrounds this concern by describing the eye as “glowing white, jittering around in the air,”<sup>38</sup> a description that

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<sup>33</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 400.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Edward Hall, *The Hidden Dimension* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966) 43.

<sup>38</sup> *Gravity’s Rainbow* 400.

enunciates the eye's motion as opposed to an "atemporal or static"<sup>39</sup> depiction; Pynchon portrays the eye's saccadic movements, a term that originates from the French for "jerk, saccade."<sup>40</sup> The verb jittering is also telling because it reflects, not only a physical irregular movement, but it could also be used to imply a convergence of the senses. There is something visual, tactile, and auditory about a jittering signal, and Pynchon's use of this word foregrounds the wholesomeness of the perceptual experience. The senses, as opposed to being separated from each other, are "integrated with, and transform one another, so that we should think of them as internally related components of a unified perceptual system."<sup>41</sup> This idea of a "unified perceptual system,"<sup>42</sup> is central to my chapter, so I will pause here to address two examples of how Pynchon breaks down the boundaries between the senses.

On one occasion, when Frank looks at Dally, he "tries to make out, against the daylight flowing off the plain, what he could of her face veiled in its own penumbra, afraid somehow of misreading it, the brow smoothed by the uncertain light to the clarity of a girl's, the eyes beneath free to claim as little acquaintance with the unchaste, he guessed, as she might need."<sup>43</sup> He then thinks that "actresses pay for light like this."<sup>44</sup> As opposed to depicting a *theoria*, a concept that originates from Greek thought and asserts a distinction between the perceiving subject and object, Pynchon portrays the eye's engagement with the object. When Frank fears that he may misread Dally's face and makes an effort to decipher her face beneath the particular lighting, it becomes clear that Pynchon is rejecting this notion of a "neutral apprehension"<sup>45</sup> between the subject and the object. Moreover, the reference to

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<sup>39</sup> Jay 6.

<sup>40</sup> Jay 7.

<sup>41</sup> Komarine Romdenh-Romluc, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception* (New York: Routledge, 2011) 67-68.

<sup>42</sup> Romdenh-Romluc 68.

<sup>43</sup> *Against the Day* 205.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Jay 25.

“against the daylight”<sup>46</sup> and “penumbra”<sup>47</sup> are both common terms in photography, implying that Dally is somehow framed in the scene’s lighting; thus, when Frank recognizes that this is an actress’s light, this suggests that characters are aware of light’s ability to manipulate an image. However, what is more important is how Pynchon uses verbs that are often associated with tactility to describe what Frank sees. The face “veiled in its own penumbra,”<sup>48</sup> implies that Frank can almost sense the materiality of the shadow, as though it were a piece of cloth hiding her face. Moreover, the brow is “smoothed,”<sup>49</sup> pressed into a certain shape. Instead of simply using adjectives, Pynchon uses verbs to assert the tactility of visual experience, affirming the interconnectedness of the senses. I will give an in-depth examination of how Pynchon utilizes language to this effect later in the chapter.

It is also notable that Pynchon avoids depicting light merely as a detached object, perceived by the viewer; light is always changing, moving, and continuously altering perception. Light is also Pynchon’s means of abolishing the dichotomy between empirical and imaginative vision. The examples examined thus far reveal that Pynchon is interested in gazing as opposed to any other type of seeing, which makes the prominent use of light justifiable. It is light that allows an experience of *alethia*, a result of the “playful gaze, a gaze which delights in ambiguities, uncertainties, shifting perspectives and shades of meaning.”<sup>50</sup> For Pynchon, vision is always affected by a combination of memory, imagination, and the physicality of the eye. *Alethia*, the vision that results from the play of light, is paramount to Pynchon because it foregrounds an ambiguity as opposed to a definitive reality.

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<sup>46</sup> *Against the Day* 205.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> David M. Levin, *The Opening of Vision: Nihilism and the Postmodern Situation* (New York: Routledge, 1988) 432.

In another significant example, Pynchon transforms an encounter between Webb Traverse and his daughter Lake into the tension between the phantasmal associations of magic lanterns and the corporeal nature of sight. Here, the division between subject and object is subverted as Frank's imagination and memory become part of his visual experience. Moreover, similar to the previous examples, Pynchon constructs a convergence of the senses, where the sight of Lake creates a physical impact on Traverse's body. When Traverse refers to his daughter as "child of the storm,"<sup>51</sup> the narrator describes the incident that led to this name. On a day where lightning is prevalent, Traverse is haunted by Lake's image:

Her young face just so clear to him, the way the fierce light had struck her hair nearly white, streaming back from her small face as if from that wind, though the air in the little shack was still. Under the black apocalyptic sky. He had got something down his spine that he thought meant he was about to be hit by lightning.<sup>52</sup>

When the predatory light strikes Lake's hair, the effect on Frank is tactile. Thus, not only does this "something down his spine"<sup>53</sup> reflect the concept of inclusion, but it also depicts what Sobchack refers to when defining vision as a "'transfer point' of the commerce between and commingling of matter and meaning."<sup>54</sup> There is no boundary between the tactile and the visual as Traverse experiences what seems to be a mere representation as a material effect in the depths of his body. In other words, instead of being depicted on the basis of a subject versus object dichotomy, Pynchon projects vision as "embodied and enworlded in the manner-and matter-of that at which it looks."<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, Pynchon constantly reminds us of the eye's limitations. Not only is the eye easily deceived, it is also easily blinded. When Dally is on her journey down Bleaker street,

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<sup>51</sup> *Against the Day* 190.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts* 100.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

she reaches an Italianate townhouse where “a butler or two bowed them in the door, and they ascended into a ballroom dominated by a huge gas chandelier, blindingly bright.”<sup>56</sup> The walls of the house are described as “being reserved for R.W.’s art collection, which required a tolerant eye and on occasion an educated stomach broadly indifferent to manifestations of the queasy.”<sup>57</sup> Both examples reflect the extent to which vision is not accountable, an idea far removed from the conventional notion of the perfection of vision. And it is because vision is not perfect or detached that it becomes like hearing or touching, subject to the individual’s interaction with the world. Moreover, Pynchon implies that one may have the capacity to adjust their vision accordingly, but only with a patient eye. Thus, for Pynchon, there is an extent to which vision is related to a person’s conscious effort. We are reminded that “eyes which can see may yet be blind.”<sup>58</sup> And at times, whether or not one is blind, may depend on an individual’s character:

What we do with our natural endowment [vision]- how we respond to the gift of nature- constitutes the *character* of our vision. Whether, and how, we take up our visionary project, that is the measure, the test, of our character, our development of self.<sup>59</sup>

Throughout the novel vision is a means of obscuring the boundary between the material and the immaterial. And again, it is Pynchon’s use of shadows and light, aspects of visual experience associated with the disembodied, that enable him to question any categorical reading of the senses. When Dally first arrives in New York, she watches shadows of birds on sunlit walls. The narrator describes the sidewalks as “crowded with men in black suits and white high collars, in the tangible glare of noontide that came pushing

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<sup>56</sup> *Against the Day* 348.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Levin 55.

<sup>59</sup> *Against the Day* 337.

uptown, striking tall highlights from shiny top hats, projecting shadows that looked almost solid.”<sup>60</sup> The narrator also describes the women as different; in contrast to the men, the women “were rigged out in lighter colors, ruffles, contrasting lapels, hats of velvet or straw, broad-angled brims throwing faces into girlish penumbras as becoming as paint and powder.”<sup>61</sup> In both examples, Pynchon uses concrete words to describe the light and the people’s shadows. The noontide, as opposed to an immaterial reflection, has a “tanglibe glare,”<sup>62</sup> physically “pushing [and] striking,”<sup>63</sup> the solid shadows.<sup>64</sup> Even the girlish penumbras, though reflecting a more partial eclipse-like illumination, reflect the existence of a body. According to Marina Warner, what is often overlooked in the idea that light and shadows are immaterial is the fact that the presence of a shadow or a reflection also means the presence of a body. A paradox in this is that the reflections and shadows’ “immaterial and insubstantial presence accompanies the being that casts them and gives evidence of that entity’s materiality”:<sup>65</sup>

Doubled by a form that has no substance, we paradoxically possess a certificate of life. The attenuated darkness of our shadows and the illusion of our mirrored self hold within them the warrant of our existence in solid flesh—strange as it may seem.<sup>66</sup>

Throughout the novel, this is precisely what Pynchon does with the visual experience. He uses light and optical techniques that seem to reflect the mysterious or the supernatural, only to show that embodied vision remains paramount. “Strange as it may seem,”<sup>67</sup> Pynchon succeeds in using light, an immaterial entity, to foreground the tactile and fallible nature of

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<sup>60</sup> *Against the Day* 337.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Warner 175.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

vision. In concluding this section, one may argue that Pynchon views vision as embodied because it is affected by the eye's corporeality and the individual's engagement with the perceived object. This has significant implications on the concept of embodiment as a whole. If vision, the sense that is conventionally associated with placing a barrier between us and the world, is actually far from being a detached sense, then there is no clear boundary between the characters and the world. As opposed to excluding us from the world, our body allows a meeting point. Pynchon seems to agree with Merleau-Ponty's words that "the world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside myself."<sup>68</sup>

### **Bilocation: Introducing Photography**

*I hate cameras. They are so much more sure than I am about everything.*  
*John Steinbeck*

Though Steinbeck's statement may be interpreted in several ways, he makes a clear distinction between his naked eye and the camera lens, asserting that his eye is far less credible than the camera's. The mechanical eye, unlike the human eye, is capable of "fixing its ostensible subject quite literally as an *object* for vision."<sup>69</sup> Thus, there is an empirical quality associated with photography, not only because of its precision, but also because "it reproduces the visible in a *material process*- that like the most convincing of scientific experiments- produces the seemingly same results with each iteration."<sup>70</sup> This question of credibility that I have thus far examined when addressing phantasmagorias is one that is also especially relevant to Pynchon's take on photography. When addressing vision, Pynchon's task becomes even more problematic with photography, a technology that seems to further

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<sup>68</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1962) 474.

<sup>69</sup> Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts* 142.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*



ascertain the conventional boundary between the perceiving subject and object. This boundary may imply a detached vision, divorced from both the physical limitations of the eye and any external factors that may impede perception. Having established Pynchon's attitude toward the corporeality of vision, it is now important to examine how this attitude figures in light of his use of modern technology. My aim in this section is to address how Pynchon manages to keep embodied vision paramount to any disembodied notion of visual perception, even when advancing from the late seventeenth-century optical illusions to the early nineteenth-century invention of photography. Throughout his fiction, Pynchon considers the line between representation and 'reality' that defines photography, but it is not until *Against the Day* that Pynchon seems to have found a way of liberating the technology from its predominantly representational role.

First, it is important to examine how the characters relate to the photographic experience and how this relationship is relevant to several theories on photography. From the very beginning of the novel, when Merle is first introduced to photography, the narrator describes the mystery that underlies the process and thereby captivates Merle. However, despite the initial captivation, Merle become increasingly sceptical of the relationship between 'reality' and photography. Merle at first sees nothing problematic about taking a photograph; it is as easy as an "idiot's game, line them up, squeeze the bulb, take the money."<sup>71</sup> He wonders about what actually happens "during the mysteriously guarded transition from plate to print, but never enough to step across any darkroom's forbidden doorsill to have a look."<sup>72</sup> When Roswell Bounce invites Merle in to see what takes place in the dark room, Merle finds the process striking. As he watches the images appear, they "come

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<sup>71</sup> *Against the Day* 64.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

in out of the plain Invisible, down into the otherwise explainable world, clearer than real.”<sup>73</sup> Yet, while looking at the images again, he notices something strange. The whites of the inmates’ eyes are dark grey and the windows that should have been light-colored are also dark, “as if light had been witched somehow into its opposite.”<sup>74</sup> He asks Roswell to explain why the inmates look like “spirits, or haunts or something.”<sup>75</sup> Thus, Pynchon establishes the mixed feelings that Merle has toward photography; while the images gradually appear “clearer than real,”<sup>76</sup> there is something equally haunting or unreal about them. Though this may initially seem like a contradiction, we begin to understand why Merle feels that there is something deadly about a photograph.

There are two distinct aspects of the connection between death and photography that Pynchon depicts. On the one hand, the connection is linked to the uncanny feeling of looking at an image from the past. On the other hand, Pynchon portrays the photographer as the one who creates this death; eventually, for Merle, being a good photographer is like being a “sharpshooter.”<sup>77</sup> He carries his Kodak and captures images with precision:

Merle could bring it [the camera] anywhere as long as he held everything steady in the frame, and by then—the old glass plate folding models having weighed in at three pounds plus plates—he had learned to breathe, calm as a sharpshooter, and the images showed it, steady, deep.<sup>78</sup>

He is always doubtful regarding the ‘reality’ of a photograph, and Dally and Merle finally agree that no matter how “calm as a sharpshooter”<sup>79</sup> Merle is when taking a photograph, the

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<sup>73</sup> *Against the Day* 64.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Against the Day* 72.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

images were “more real, though never got into ‘real’ that far.”<sup>80</sup> Thus, Pynchon foregrounds a connection between photography and death that reflects a significant theoretical approach to the technology. The idea that photography steals the soul originates in the interactions between the Native Americans and the white men, where the white man seemed “empowered by his camera”<sup>81</sup> while the Navaho “who does not shoot back”<sup>82</sup> appears victimized. Lucy Lippard, a scholar who wrote about owning a photograph of a Native American family in 1906, finds reasons to justify the “photo-steal-your-spirit syndrome.”<sup>83</sup> According to Lippard “[t]he more we know about representation, the more obvious it becomes that photography is a spirit snatcher.”<sup>84</sup> Thus, she explains that since she “owns”<sup>85</sup> a postcard of the Native American Beaver family, this permits her to “have”<sup>86</sup> them in her house. Though photography enables a memory from a particular experience, it is not ‘real’ perhaps because it always resembles the opposite of that experience, a kind of death.

To a certain extent, Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag share a similar approach to photography, especially when considering the relationship between photography and mortality. Barthes refers to photography as a “memento mori,”<sup>87</sup> because taking someone’s photograph is equivalent to taking part “in another person (or thing’s) mortality, vulnerability, mutability.”<sup>88</sup> According to Barthes, the photograph creates “a micro-version of death (of parenthesis),”<sup>89</sup> or a transformation into a spectre. Since the photograph represents both an absence and a presence, one wavers between the certainty that “it is not

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<sup>80</sup> *Against the Day* 72.

<sup>81</sup> Lucy Lippard, “Introduction,” *Partial Recall: With Essays on Photographs of Native North Americans*, ed. Lucy Lippard (New York: New P, 1992) 35.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) 14.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

there,”<sup>90</sup> but also that “it has indeed been.”<sup>91</sup> He argues that this discrepancy that arises when experiencing a photograph indicates that photography is a “bizarre medium, a new form of hallucination: false on the level of perception, true on the level of time.”<sup>92</sup>

It is useful to refer to how Pynchon negotiates with these contradictions that surround the conceptualization of photography in his other work. Making these references helps establish the significance of the ‘camera as weapon’ theme in Pynchon’s fiction, but also foregrounds the difference between *Against the Day* and the other novels. In *Vineland* (1990), the connection is made between the camera and a gun when a group comprised of members of the “Death to the Pig Nihilist Film Kollektive,”<sup>93</sup> refer to the link between the two in their manifesto: “A camera is a gun. An image taken is a death performed. Images put together are the substructure of an afterlife and a Judgement.”<sup>94</sup> Brock Vond attempts to use this relationship to his advantage when he tries to convince Frenesi that carrying a gun instead of a camera is a reasonable and brave choice. When she refuses to carry a gun into the house to help with Weed Atman’s assassination, he tells her that she must be able to carry a gun if she could carry a camera:

But you can bring a camera. Can’t you see, the two separate worlds- one always includes a camera somewhere, and the other always includes a gun, one is make-

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<sup>90</sup> Barthes 15.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Barthes 15. For a detailed analysis of the connection between death and photography in light of Barthes, see Clément Lévy’s “As Far As Pynchon Loves Cameras?” *Against the Grain: Reading Pynchon’s Counternarratives*, ed. Sascha Pöhlmann (Amsterdam: Rodolpi, 2010) 157-166. Lévy considers the need to re-examine photography after the publication of *Against the Day*. He makes an especially insightful point regarding the foreboding nature of a photograph and the political landscape in the novel. Citing an example when Miles Blundell experiences a bicycle ride with Ryder Thorn, Lévy argues that Miles “finds himself in a bright and shiny world, silent, filled with scents, but bearing the anachronistic stain of a future catastrophe that turns out to be World War I.” (164). Moreover, Lévy argues that “Pynchon describes photographic images for the fatality they entail.” (164).

<sup>93</sup> *Vineland* 241.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

believe, one is real? What if this is some branch point in your life, where you'll have to choose between the two worlds?<sup>95</sup>

The choice between “the two worlds”<sup>96</sup> requires a choice between the representational weapon, the camera, and the ‘real’ weapon, a gun. Thus Vond, similar to Merle and Dally, is not wholly convinced with the authenticity of a camera. Pynchon’s fiction constantly wavers between the power and the weakness of the camera; while it is depicted as weak and make-believe in this example with Vond and Frenesi, in *White Noise*, it is responsible for the aura that surrounds the Most Photographed Barn in America. However, it is important to note that there is no general agreement between the characters as to what exactly the camera represents, and thus we find that Pynchon makes his own perspective ambiguous. Does the camera depict the ‘real’? Is it merely an impassive representation? Hannah Möckel- Rieke seems to have some of the answers to these questions as she makes an insightful connection between the metaphorical and physical power of photography in *Vineland*:

The media photography and film are part of a memory dispositif which is associated with specific forms of political control and resistance in the book. Thus, the ideology of the film collective 24ps, the groups in which DL and Frenesi are politically active, centers around the mnemonic function of these media. By using close-up techniques, the film is intended to reveal a physical memory as a kind of visually unconscious truth which can be held against the lie of political discourse. The camera, however, does not merely document this body memory, it rather stimulates a weapon, firing light at the body and thereby, practically at the price of death, forcing its secrets from it.<sup>97</sup>

As aforementioned, Dally and Merle’s conclusion regarding photography seems to mirror Pynchon’s own ambiguous take on the technology. Another aspect of photography

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<sup>95</sup> *Vineland* 241.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> “Media and Memory in Thomas Pynchon’s *Vineland*,” *American Studies* 43.1 (1998): 56.

that figures prominently in Pynchon's fiction is the use of photography for evidence. For example, in *Vineland*, a photograph of Brock Vond is provided as evidence, supported by the official stamps of the FBI:

Her visitor sat down across the table, clicked open an armoured attaché case, and produced a folder with an 8\*10 of a face she knew, a Fresson-Process studio photograph of Brock Vond, looking like he'd just had a buffer run all over him, the high smooth forehead, the cheeks that still hadn't lost their baby fat, the sleek and pointed ears, small chin, and slim little unbroken nose. This photo was clipped to some stapled pages, where she saw federal seals and stampings. 'It's all from the FBI. Perfectly Legit.'<sup>98</sup>

Vond's photograph present an objective portrait of his face, implying the significance of a photograph as factual evidence. However, though critics have noted the objectivity of photography, they do so with several reservations, reservations that are also significant to Pynchon. Moreover, Sontag argues that a photograph is a means of power, because it establishes a certain relation between us and the world.<sup>99</sup> Photographs provide evidence; even if we are suspicious about something, it "seems proven when we're shown a photograph of it."<sup>100</sup> However, despite this connection between the photographic image and reality, Sontag notes that there are several limitations; photographs are representations just as a painting or a drawing is. Thus, even those times when taking a photograph seems objective, they "do not lessen the didacticism of the whole enterprise."<sup>101</sup> Pynchon to a certain extent is sceptical of the apparent certainty of the photographed image, in the same manner that he is certain of the limitations of embodied vision. This is perhaps why we find more examples of the actual technique, the making of a photograph, with all its light play and optical illusions, than the

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<sup>98</sup> *Vineland* 130.

<sup>99</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (1977; Penguin: London, 1979) 3.

<sup>100</sup> Sontag 5.

<sup>101</sup> Sontag 7.

actual finished photograph. To divert our attention back to the embodied nature of vision, Pynchon foregrounds a significant paradox; the seemingly noble or credible camera eye is founded on mechanisms derived from the fallible act of seeing. Pynchon highlights this paradox by using double refraction and bilocation, two aspects often associated with photography, but presents them as inherent facets of embodied being.

Having established that there are conflicting views that pertain to photography in Pynchon's fiction, we can now consider how these conflicting issues figure in *Against the Day*. What I find particularly significant about bilocation is that it allows Pynchon to examine photography on his own terms; in other words, Pynchon uses this technique to bridge the gap between the perceiving subject and perceived object that the photograph seems to impose. According to Sobchack, there is a cost to photography's ability to freeze a moment: "It cannot entertain in the abstraction of its visible space, its single and static *point* of view, the presence of a lived and living body- so it does not really invite the spectator *into* the scene so much as it invites contemplation *of* the scene."<sup>102</sup> Pynchon finds an inventive way to avoid being confined to the "paradoxically thin, insubstantial, and opaque"<sup>103</sup> construction that a photograph leaves us with. He uses the concept of bilocation to depict a human aspect to doubling that transgresses the subject-object divide. Given its prominence in the novel and that a whole section is titled "bilocation," it is not surprising that critics have shown a keen interest in this theme. However, the readings have generally considered two aspects, namely bilocation as a structural framework to the novel and bilocation as symbolic of hybrid identity. Bilocation is a term that Pynchon refers to as originating from mystical cultures such as Shamanism and is used to describe the uncanny ability to be in two different places at the same time. When one examines this concept closely, one finds several connections

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<sup>102</sup> Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts* 144.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

between this mystical idea and mirror technology. Foucault explains it best when he says that “due to the mirror, I discover myself absent at the place where I am, since I see myself over there.”<sup>104</sup> In other words, “I am over there where I am not.”<sup>105</sup> It is often the case in *Against the Day* that the characters’ responses to mirror technologies correspond to their attitudes toward spiritual traditions. The example of Shamansim and bilocation in the novel illustrates this attitude. When Dr.Vormance doubts the possibility of Magyakan’s presence in the same city, when he is supposed to be elsewhere, Throyle tells him that this is possible due to the nature of Magyakan’s powers:

“He can’t actually have come all this way on foot,” said Dr.Vormance sceptically. “Actually, most likely he flew here, and not only is he here visiting with us but also and simultaneously, I’ve no doubt, back in the Yenisei watershed with his people as well.” “You are beginning to worry me, Throyle.”<sup>106</sup>

A glance at the question conversation between Dr.Vormance and Throyle reveals a connection between bilocation and optical illusions. Magyakan, similar to an optical anomaly, is in two places at the same time. Throughout *Against the Day*, characters are perplexed by the idea of bilocation or two people being the same. Another example of this is Lew’s realisation that Renfrew and Werfner are the same person. Lew cannot stop thinking about “the mystery of why Werfner should be in town at all, so far out of his ground, so close to his British adversary.”<sup>107</sup> Lew’s mind is full of thoughts of Werfner’s presence; to Lew, this presence is like “the classic nightmare scene of the man who is standing where he should not be.”<sup>108</sup> A question to pose here is why does Pynchon focus on bilocation, a concept that underlays mirror technology and also photography, as opposed to simply depicting the image

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<sup>104</sup> Michel Foucault, “Different Spaces,” *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. Jame D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Penguin, 1998) 179.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> *Against the Day* 143.

<sup>107</sup> *Against the Day* 683.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.



of a character looking at a photograph? And how does Pynchon use bilocation to show a convergence of as opposed to a dichotomy between the human and the technological? Photography is an *apophainesthai*, “a recording and a writing, a transcription of the lighting of Being as it inscribes itself on the flesh of the world and brings forth a field for our *techné*.”<sup>109</sup> As a result, photography “stops the play of lighting; it materializes the elemental illumination in things which are made to stand *in front of* the camera.”<sup>110</sup> The examples examined in this section, including the inmates’ images, the camera as symbolic of a gun, and Vond’s photograph, all represent this *apophainesthai* aspect of photography. If we consider the theoretical implications of this, we find that Pynchon is faced with a dilemma that figures prominently in his literature- how to foreground the embodied nature of visual experience when using a theme that is mostly associated with detached perception. Photography is “very deeply rooted in metaphysics of reified presence: its impassive gaze projects and reinforces an aggressively ‘frontal’ ontology.”<sup>111</sup> Considering that I have argued that *Against the Day* challenges the subject-object dichotomy of vision, in a manner that is best understood in light of Merleau-Ponty, it is justifiable that Pynchon would not want to merely “stop the play of light.”<sup>112</sup> Bilocation allows a physical connection between the corporeal eye and the object of perception. Unlike simply looking at a photograph, Pynchon focuses on bilocation, a concept that is based upon mirror technology and an *alethia*, a term I referred to previously when discussing the nature of a playful gaze. This becomes Pynchon’s means of engaging the characters with the technology that underpins photography, bridging the gap between the technology and the characters. This connection becomes especially evident when the magician, Luca Zombini, shows his son one of his magic acts; to demonstrate this act, he

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<sup>109</sup> Levin 122.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Levin 123.

<sup>112</sup> Levin 122.

unrolls an expanse of absolute fluid blankness and explains that it is the “magician-grade velvet, perfect absorber of light.”<sup>113</sup> Luca then explains the importance of the perfect light and the perfect mirror:

The perfect mirror must send back everything, same amount of light, same colors exactly-but perfect velvet must let nothing escape, must hold on to every last little drop of light that falls on it. Because if the smallest amount of light you can think of bounces off one single thread, the whole act- affondato, vero? It’s all about the light, you control the light, you control the effect, capisci?<sup>114</sup>

Thus, Luca draws attention to a technique that is dependent on the external manipulation of light. What is especially striking, however, is how this seemingly immaterial technique has a material effect on the characters:

You already know about this stuff here [the Iceland Spar] Doubles the image, the two overlap, with the right sort of light, the right lenses, you can separate them in stages, a little further each time, step by step till in fact it becomes possible to saw somebody in half optically, and instead of two different pieces of one body, there are now two complete individuals walking around, who are identical in every way, capisci?<sup>115</sup>

The crystal, Iceland Spar, is one of the means of creating bilocation in the novel, and a method that has a scientific basis. The Iceland spar is in fact a crystal composed of a transparent variety of calcite used in the polarization of light. In 1669, the scientist Erasmus Bartholin, who was sent an Iceland spar, rotated the crystal to find that objects seen through it appeared doubled. Through examining the crystal, he understood that the light travelling through the crystal was refracted at two angles. After Bartholin’s experimentation with the crystal, many other scientists conducted experiments to discover exactly how this refraction

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<sup>113</sup> *Against the Day* 354.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Against the Day* 355.

occurred. Finally, the scientist and inventor Edwin Land advanced the experiment of light polarization by inventing the first synthetic polarizing film which led to his famous invention, the Polaroid camera. Thus, the Iceland spar used to double people in the novel is the crystal that eventually led to the invention of a Polaroid camera. By creating doubles from the Iceland spar crystal, Pynchon creates characters that embody the Polaroid technology. The identical characters that Zombini creates with the Iceland spar exemplify an embodied technology. This scientific approach to doubling, in the sense of polarization or the asymmetry of light, is merged with a spiritual dimension; this dimension is rooted in mythology and identity issues that surfaced with the story of Narcissist's reflection and later the technology of the mirror. Thus, the ability to "saw someone in half optically"<sup>116</sup> is based upon the eye's interaction with light, an idea that foregrounds the extent to which vision is embodied.

How does Pynchon further undermine photography's frontal ontology and draw attention to embodiment? Earlier in the novel when Merle and Roswell discuss Blinky Morgan's picture, there is a direct reference to the embodiment of double refraction. What is peculiar about Blinky's picture is that each of his eyes "saw the world differently, the left one having undergone an obscure trauma, either from a premature detonation during a box job or from a naval howitzer while fighting in the Rebellion."<sup>117</sup> Another character Ed Addle suggests that Blinky is "a walking interferometer."<sup>118</sup> Roswell adds that Blinky is a double refractor, since, as Merle adds, he represents "an asymmetry with respect to light."<sup>119</sup> Pynchon abolishes the boundary between the perceiving subject and perceived object using the very technique, double refraction, that underpins the seemingly impassive technology of

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<sup>116</sup> *Against the Day* 355.

<sup>117</sup> *Against the Day* 61.

<sup>118</sup> *Against the Day* 62.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

photography. The characters begin to increasingly embody the vision of asymmetry and refraction. This becomes especially evident when Dally, even without using a view-finder or any technology, begins to think that “there might in fact be more than one of the Princess.”<sup>120</sup> The Princess’s appearances were strange to the extent that “Dally could swear her appearances were multiple and not consecutive, though what went on at the corner of Dally’s eyes had always enjoyed with her about the same status as dreams.”<sup>121</sup> Dally then considers that these might be “mirror tricks,”<sup>122</sup> and thinks that “Luca would know.”<sup>123</sup> Dally’s vision embodies the mirror technology of photography, allowing her to see multiple images of the Princess.

Dally is right when she assumes that mirror tricks are responsible for these visions; one can even say that the whole novel transforms into Pynchon’s fictional Isle of Mirrors. The specialists at the Isle of Mirrors, immersed in mirror images and witnessing the mirror’s capacity to transform a distorted picture into a ‘normal’ one, certainly experience this generally haunting nature of mirrors. In the Isle of Mirrors, these mirrors do not actually ‘mirror’ in the sense of replicating images; on the contrary, they transform images to their opposite; this inauthenticity of the doubled image creates a strangeness that is perhaps attributed to the idea that a mirror should replicate, exactly. Professor Svegli speaks about the Isola Degli Specchi, the Isle of Mirrors, where specialists worked with anamorphoscopes, “mirrors, cylindrical or conical, usually, which when placed on or otherwise near a deliberately distorted picture, and viewed from the appropriate direction, would make the image appear ‘normal’ again.”<sup>124</sup> According to the Professor, a percentage of these specialists had to go to mental asylums and could not bear to look at any sort of mirror again,

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<sup>120</sup> *Against the Day* 583

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *Against the Day* 249.

and were kept “scrupulously away from reflective surfaces of any kind.”<sup>125</sup> The word “scrupulously”<sup>126</sup> summarizes the relationship between the characters and mirror technology; there is a constant engagement between their eyes and the mirror that subverts the seeming objectivity of photographic technology. Pynchon, by exploring the techniques that underlay photographic technology, seems to engage with Steinbeck’s statement; perhaps photography does give us a more precise view of the world. It does enhance vision. However, Pynchon also reminds us that embedded in this technology, in its very origins, is a far more complex relationship between the eye and ocular techniques that reflects the more chaotic and corporeal nature of human perception.

#### **“Jamais Vu”<sup>127</sup>: Photographic and Linguistic Surrealism**

Having established Merleau-Ponty’s significance to my reading of embodied vision in *Against the Day*, I will now address how surrealism can add another dimension to this reading. Photography, as I have examined, can be problematic because it may mislead one to believe that visual perception is based merely on a chasm between the perceiving subject and the object of perception. The surrealists, however, were intent on using photography to mirror the haphazard nature of human perception. Thus, I will focus on how Pynchon uses Andre Breton’s “jamais vu”<sup>128</sup> or virginal sight, a concept that draws attention to the chaos of the senses to emphasize the corporeality of the visual process. I will begin by briefly defining surrealism before addressing the connection to Pynchon’s fiction. Pynchon, like the surrealists, constantly suggests that photography should be depicted as an ‘instrument of revelation.’

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<sup>125</sup> *Against the Day* 249.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Jay 238.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

A surreality is the term surrealists use to describe an ultimate form of reality that merges the conscious and unconscious. As Andre Breton formulates it, surrealism was a response to the dichotomy that society had firmly established between the inside world and the outside world, or the conscious and unconscious. Surrealism was created on the basis of a “desire to deepen the foundations of the real, to bring about an even clearer and at the same time ever more passionate consciousness of the world perceived by the senses.”<sup>129</sup> As a result of this, a unification of interior and exterior reality could finally take place:

We have attempted to present interior reality and exterior reality as two elements in process of unification, of finally becoming one. This final unification is the supreme aim of surrealism: interior reality and exterior reality being, in the present form of society, in contradiction (and in this contradiction we see the very cause of man's unhappiness, but also the source of his movement) we have assigned to ourselves the task of confronting these two realities [in] their reciprocal attraction and interpenetration.<sup>130</sup>

The key to the relationship between Pynchon and surrealism lays in the word “interpenetration.”<sup>131</sup> Pynchon’s fiction presents a clear rejection of the autonomous subject, and surrealism is one of the many gateways to unifying the subject with the world. Several critics have noted the relevance of the laws of surrealism to Pynchon’s work. Kathleen Ludicello provides an insightful analysis of surrealism in *V*. In one of his dreams, Profane walks on a street surrounded by inanimate objects: neon signs, street hydrants, and manhole covers; according to Ludicello, the fact that Profane cannot recall the words spelled by the neon sign reflects “the Word's loss of sacredness, blaring rudely and embodied in a

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<sup>129</sup> André Breton, *What is Surrealism?* trans. David Gascoyne (London: Faber and Faber, 1936)

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Kathleen Ludicello. "Intruding Worlds and the Epileptic Word: Pynchon's Dialogue with the Laws of Surrealism and New Physics," *Oklahoma City University Law Review* 24.3 (Fall 1999): 505.

mechanical device, and Profane's inability to get the message.”<sup>132</sup> Ludicello argues that Pynchon uses such surrealistic dream perception to foreground the twenty-first century world where technological advancement has brought the world “dangerously close”<sup>133</sup> to the inanimate. Critics have often referred to this connection between dream perception and surrealism in Pynchon’s work. Moreover, Pynchon acknowledges the influence of surrealism on one of his early short stories, “Under the Rose”:

Another influence in "Under the Rose," too recent for me then to abuse to the extent I have done since, is Surrealism. I had been taking one of those elective courses in Modern Art, and it was the Surrealists who'd really caught my attention. Having as yet virtually no access to my dream life, I missed the main point of the movement, and became fascinated instead with the simple idea that one could combine inside the same frame elements not normally found together to produce illogical and startling effects.<sup>134</sup>

Emphasizing the inextricable connection between the subject and object, Pynchon uses surrealism to depict the confusion of the senses that often defines perception. A good example of this occurs when the Chums of Chance gather in a room “where translucent screens glowed at various colors and intensities.”<sup>135</sup> I will examine how the *camera lucida* depicted in this image exemplifies the connection between photographic surrealism and embodied vision. The scene reflects a struggle between the *camera lucida* and the Chums of Chance’s eyes as they attempt to find meaning in the midst of the blur:

At first all was a blurry confusion of strange yellowish green, in which areas of light and dark moved in a squirming restlessness, seeming in their slow boil to penetrate, while at the same time to envelop, one another. But once taken into that serpentine hypnosis, we became aware that the frame of visibility was moving ever downward,

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<sup>132</sup> Ludicello 505.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Pynchon, *Slow Learner* (1984; London: Vintage, 2007) 20.

<sup>135</sup> *Against the Day* 141.

even as the glaucous turmoil began, here and there, to coalesce into a series of inscriptions, rushing by, that is, upward, too fast to read, even had the language been familiar.<sup>136</sup>

The language in this passage is especially telling; far from depicting a detached, impassive gaze, Pynchon uses verbs to reflect a movement in “the frame of visibility”<sup>137</sup> that bridges the gap between the perceivers, the Chums of Chance, and the perceived image. He depicts in detail the characters’ visual engagement with a chaotic image. What is especially significant is that he uses adjectives that reflect the material aspect of this engagement. The “blurry confusion”<sup>138</sup> contains a “squirming restlessness,”<sup>139</sup> that reflects a physical struggle. The “downward”<sup>140</sup> and “upward”<sup>141</sup> movement of visibility in the midst of the “turmoil”<sup>142</sup> foregrounds the role that vision has in the making of the perceived image. Moreover, throughout the novel, visibility is central to the setting; when characters experience the world through a whiteness that is “unbearable,”<sup>143</sup> the surrounding luminosity affects their perception.

Pynchon uses this luminosity to foreground both the limitations and the possibilities of sight. He depicts a kind of power struggle between the perceiver and perceived. We are reminded that “staring is an attempt to dominate; but in the end, it always compels us to see spontaneous, uncontrollable changes in the field of visibility: changes that occur whether we will them or not.”<sup>144</sup> As the Chums of Chance attempt to capture an image in the midst of the blur, the image leads to this struggle. What they find is, in Levin’s words, “the chaos of

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<sup>136</sup> *Against the Day* 141.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> *Against the Day* 58.

<sup>144</sup> Levin 69.



shifting, jerking forms,”<sup>145</sup> as the object refuses to submit to the gaze. While the daunting image gradually appears “like a fateful dawn none await with any eagerness,”<sup>146</sup> the turmoil of the image materializes into an aggressive serpent-like being that epitomizes this struggle. The climactic moment occurs later when the Chums of Chance attempt to move this serpent-like object they find on their ship; the stowing is described as “cursed from the beginning.”<sup>147</sup> The object refuses to submit to their attempts. The struggle of capturing an image in the midst of the *camera lucida* materializes into an actual physical struggle as the Chums of Chance seem to find “no way to get the object through any of the ship’s hatches.”<sup>148</sup> Moreover, the objects’ eyes are described as “set closely side by side like those of humans and other binocular predators, its gaze had remained directed solely, personally, to each of [them] no matter where [they] stood or moved.”<sup>149</sup> Ironically, it is this object that succeeds in dominating them with its gaze, undermining their relative imperfect human vision.

This is not an attempt to argue that light cannot be used to enhance human vision; but when it is used to this effect, it must be done in a particular manner. For example, in the novel *Dr. Mikimoto* produces his first cultured pearls. In the process of creating these pearls, “portions of the original aragonite- which made up the nacreous layers of the pearl- were selectively changed to microscopic crystals of the doubly refracting calcite known as Iceland spar.”<sup>150</sup> Thus, “(w)hen illuminated in a certain way, and the intricately refracted light projected upon a suitable surface, any pearl so modified could thus be made to yield a message.”<sup>151</sup> This process is similar to the manner that refracted lighting from a camera produces images. The example shows that photographic technology is required to reveal what

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> *Against the Day* 141.

<sup>147</sup> *Against the Day* 144.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> *Against the Day* 114.

is already there. In this case, the messages on the pearls can only be visible through this process of light refraction.

Now that I have addressed all elements of vision in this episode, the question is how do these elements relate specifically to the surrealists' perspective on vision? Surrealist art often depicts the eye as "mutilated."<sup>152</sup> It was seen by many of the artists to be "less an object to be revered, less the organ of pure and noble vision, than a target of mutilation and scorn, a vehicle of its own violence."<sup>153</sup> The encounter between the Chums of Chance and the serpent-like figure projects vision in a similar light. As the crew struggles to capture the image both metaphorically and physically and as the serpent-like figure succeeds in dominating them with its gaze, forcing them to look away, the human eye is depicted as a target for contempt. Contempt is also the word that Pynchon chooses to describe the figure's threatening gaze. On the other hand, Dr. Mikimoto's pearls are a reminder that photographic technology, when used correctly, can help off-set the effect of a blinding light.

Thus far, I have noted how Pynchon depicts the imperfections of embodied vision, my aim being to explore this organ beyond its noble status. However, this reading would be incomplete if it were only focused on the eye's physical imperfections. Surrealism was equally interested in the imaginative possibilities of the eye. It is important to note here that the eye's imperfections could also be seen as inspiring the chaotic imagery of the surrealists, and it is this convergence of the imperfect and the imaginative that I will now examine. The following two examples of Frank's trance-like state reflect the visionary perspective that inspired photographic surrealism. When Frank is in Tapachula, a town in Mexico, he stares at

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<sup>152</sup> Jay 259.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

the “luminous beetles known as cucuji,”<sup>154</sup> lighting up the jungle trees. The narrator describes how Frank loses his sense of place as he stares intently:

[The cucuji] rounded a corner and there was a fig tree, with near as Frank could tell thousands of these big luminous beetles, flashing brightly and then going dark, over and over, all in perfect unison. He found if he stared too long into the tree, he tended to lose his sense of scale and it became almost like looking into a vast city, like Denver or the Mexican capital, at night. Shadows, depths...<sup>155</sup>

There are two distinct points that need to be examined here. On the one hand, the narrator implies that the physical imperfection of the eye makes it difficult for Frank to stare at the object without “losing his sense of scale.”<sup>156</sup> As noted previously, staring can have a paradoxical effect. In other words, “if we stare at a fixed point on a distant hill, that hill will start to stretch; and it will rotate ‘endlessly’ along the horizon.”<sup>157</sup> On the other hand, it is this imperfection that inspires Frank’s and the surrealists’ imagination. After Frank experiences this trance, he passes beneath a ceremonial arch of pale limestone “with a triumphal sculpture on top, a sinister figure, all curves, tresses, wings, drapery, standing in a chariot.”<sup>158</sup> As Frank passes beneath it, it begins to “take on a ghostly light and to grow taller and more substantial.”<sup>159</sup> Feeling uneasy with his surroundings, Frank imagines what it would be like to wait for darkness to pass until “the sky slowly retained more and more light, perhaps revealing in silhouette, on the jagged rooftops, human figures who might have been there all along.”<sup>160</sup> The ghostly light and the silhouette human figures both depict a *countre-joure*; these silhouettes give more emphasis to the structure or shape of the figures resulting in

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<sup>154</sup> *Against the Day* 991.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> Levin 69.

<sup>158</sup> *Against the Day* 1115.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> *Against the Day* 994

supernatural overtones. Thus, Frank's vision, similar to the virginal sight of surrealism, foregrounds the obscure boundary between imagination, illusion, and sight. Pynchon, similar to the surrealists, highlights the eye's fallible nature, breaking down the conventional boundaries between sight, imagination, and memory; virginal sight is always engaged with the world and with all the aspects of the perceiver's being.

Given the keen interest in Pynchon's imagery, critics have analysed the connection between the Pynchonesque collage and the absurdity and randomness that defines surrealist art. While at times the relationship between Pynchon's language and surrealism is subtle, other times it is far more explicit. For example, when the narrator introduces one of the many childish songs in the narrative, we are told that the song is "to be sung Gilbert and Sullivan style by a chorus of constables to a marching number of streetwalkers."<sup>161</sup> W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan who worked on comic operas together, based these operas on bizarre imagery and are often referred to as proto-surrealist. This is only one of many examples where the narrator foregrounds a surrealist concept, image, or style. Critics have given a thorough examination of how Pynchon uses absurd and frivolous imagery in a surreal manner. However, the readings are limited to these overt references.

It is essential to this discussion to explore how Pynchon uses language to depict the relationship between the subject and the perceived object. I will argue that Pynchon uses surrealist linguistic techniques to depict an integrated relation between the subject and object. The connection between Pynchon and surrealism lay in 'le message automatique' or automatic writing, a linguistic technique inspired by the Freudian concept that "identity is rooted in the unconscious."<sup>162</sup> Freud applied this idea when interacting with his patients, encouraging them to express their innermost feelings and thoughts through a technique called

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<sup>161</sup> *Against the Day* 800.

<sup>162</sup> Katharine Conley, *Robert Desnos, Surrealism, and the Marvelous in Everyday Life* (U of Nebraska P: NK, 2003) 20.

free association. In 1913, Freud discussed this technique in his book *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), a significant contribution to the study of the unconscious. He describes a successful analysis of a patient as one that allows the patient to freely express himself without the constraints of self-criticism:

We must aim at bringing about two changes in him [the patient]: an increase in the attention he pays to his own psychical perceptions and the elimination of the criticism by which he normally sifts the thoughts that occur to him. In order that he may be able to concentrate his attention on his self-observation it is an advantage for him to lie in a restful attitude and shut his eyes.<sup>163</sup>

The key to this Freudian analysis is to enable the patient to escape the conventional mode of thinking, where one attempts to evaluate or organize thoughts. Free association had a great impact on surrealism generally, and particularly on the literature produced by well-known surrealists such as Breton and Robert Desnos. Breton and Desnos experimented with hypnotic trances and automatism in an attempt to foreground the unconscious. The surrealists held séances to explore their unconscious minds; during these séances, they produced oral utterances and written texts known as “magic dictation.”<sup>164</sup> Their goal was to depict the actual functioning of thought which was later reflected in surrealist poetry through a process of automatic writing. In Breton’s essay “Words without Wrinkles,” Breton refers to Desnos’s ability to create poetry where “words are making love.” According to Breton, “[w]hen words meet automatically on the page as a result of that ‘magic dictation’ called surrealism, they generate meanings of their own, propelled not by logic but by the unconscious.”<sup>165</sup> However, this should not be mistaken with a Cartesian split of mind and body. Instead, for surrealists, experience is unified since it is the eye’s interaction with the perceived object that

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<sup>163</sup> Conley 20.

<sup>164</sup> Conley 21.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

constitutes perception. Thus, automatic writing implied simply revealing one's thoughts and engagement with the world at the very moment of experiencing it. As a result of this instantaneous experience, surrealist art and writing used details to depict the contradictions and chaos of the senses. This is especially evident in Breton's art; to experience the art, one has to "scan"<sup>166</sup> the with "a degree of general enthusiasm, registering the recurrence of extravagant features such as extravagant repetition, punctilious finish, a fondness for arabesques, organic shapes, and proliferating detail."<sup>167</sup> The art is based on Da Vinci's perspective that one should "gaze" to find inspiration.<sup>168</sup> Surrealist writing depicts this attempt to embrace discrepancies in a manner that is likened to an "alchemical transformation, a process of harmonisation in which multiple contradictions and anomalies are subsumed within a unitary vision."<sup>169</sup> Though my next section will focus on alchemy in more detail, a major theme in the novel, it is important to consider how Pynchon's attempt to eliminate the line between perceiver and perceived is enunciated through an "alchemical transformation"<sup>170</sup> of language. This is especially evident in how Pynchon's fluid imagery, composed of contradictory aspects, creates a continuity that defines perception. There is no space for the character to pause and think about his or her surroundings; he or she lives the experience, spontaneously, through the body.

Lew Basnight is a suitable example of a character that Pynchon constructs through a kind of automatic writing. At one point, Lew walks around and is uncertain of whether he is still in Chicago, though we are told in a previous conversation between Lew and Lindsay that Lew is actually in Chicago. As his surroundings seem increasingly alien to him, he is lost in the matrices of the setting:

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<sup>166</sup> Romana Fotiade, *Andre Breton: The Power of Language* (Exeter: Elm Bank, 2000) 32.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

Lew looked around. Was it still Chicago? As he began to walk, the first thing he noticed was how few of the streets here followed the familiar grid pattern of the rest of town- everything was on the skew, narrow lanes radiating starwise from small plazas, tramlines with hairpin turns that carried passengers abruptly back the way they'd been coming, increasing chances for traffic collisions, and not a name he could recognize on any of the street-signs, even those of better-travelled thoroughfares...foreign languages, it seemed.<sup>171</sup>

In this example, the structure itself depicts a subjectivity of embodied vision; Pynchon uses long sentences, ellipses, and fragments to portray Lew's instantaneous perception. The centrality of vision is evident in the reference to everything being "on the skew."<sup>172</sup> The confusion is immediately described in terms of angles, and as the passage unfolds it becomes clearer that the "skew"<sup>173</sup> is accountable for the feeling of alienation. The city streets, a recurrent theme in surrealism, play a significant role in the novel. Pynchon uses language that depicts an "experimentation,"<sup>174</sup> a subjectivity in the making. The street is the surrealists' field of experimentation. Breton describes it as "capable of transferring to [his] life its surprising detours, the street with anxiety and glances: there, as nowhere else, I felt the wind of possibility."<sup>175</sup> As Lew suddenly fails to recognize his surroundings, he experiences a kind of "waking swoon, which not so much propelled as allowed him entry into an urban setting, like the world he had left but differing in particulars which were not slow to reveal themselves."<sup>176</sup> This description of Lew's movement reflects a kind of fluidity as opposed to a forced effort. I quote the following passage in length to foreground the striking resemblance between Lew's experience and the essence of surrealism:

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<sup>171</sup> *Against the Day* 38.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> Conley 47.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>176</sup> *Against the Day* 38.

One cannot step twice onto the same street, because it is never the same street: from one moment to the next it is four, five, six, a thousand different streets. And yet, on the affective plane, everything depends on a few salutary temptations, scattered here and there like dice, but which we do not hesitate to qualify as *a permanent* [...] These defiant signals offered on the run convey the certainty that they are meant for us alone. They are signals of ‘something else’, premonitory glimmers of *that which will be perceived darkly and hazardously through the cracks and fissures in the repressive structure of everyday life.*<sup>177</sup>

The key to the similarity is that one street cannot be experienced in the same manner twice. When this idea is examined closely, one finds that there are significant implications regarding embodiment. It is because perception is embodied that Lew is able to experience things instantaneously through the spatiality of his body. Lew ‘happens’ to find himself in certain places, with no memory of how he reaches that place; he happens to find himself on a public conveyance, “head and eyes inclined nowhere in particular, when he entered, all too briefly, a condition he had no memory of having sought, which he later came to think of as grace.”<sup>178</sup> Pynchon uses language to depict the body’s fluid mobility. What Lew thinks of as a condition of “grace”<sup>179</sup> is not as disembodied or as spiritual as it may initially seem. Instead, Lew’s body becomes, in Merleau-Ponty’s words, his “anchorage in a world.”<sup>180</sup> Perhaps Lew happens to find himself moving through the city because it is an action that he has done before. According to Merleau-Ponty, “habit expresses our power of dilating our being-in-the-world, or changing our existence by appropriating fresh instruments.”<sup>181</sup> For instance, when one is typing, one does not think of the measurements or places of the keys. It is an action

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<sup>177</sup> Conley 48.

<sup>178</sup> *Against the Day* 42.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* 167.

<sup>181</sup> Merleau-Ponty 166.



that is instead based on an “adjustment of motility,”<sup>182</sup> a bodily effort that is evident in the hands and cannot be explained “in detachment from that effort.”<sup>183</sup>

Moreover, as Lew experiences this “waking swoon,”<sup>184</sup> he begins to see extraordinary things, although Pynchon specifically describes the day as one “mild and ordinary work-morning in Chicago.”<sup>185</sup> This contradiction between the ‘ordinary’ and the ‘extraordinary’ is characteristic of surrealism. As opposed to an ‘ordinary’ description of a city, Pynchon creates a city of dreamers. The narrator describes the girls on the street “with huge shoulders that took up more room in the car than angels’ wings.”<sup>186</sup> The passengers in carriages “imagined that they could get back to some kind of vertical sleep.”<sup>187</sup> Later we are told that he “must have descended to the sidewalk.”<sup>188</sup> Finally, Lew finds himself “surrounded by a luminosity new to him, not even observed in dreams, nor easily attributable to the smoke-inflected sun beginning to light Chicago.”<sup>189</sup> Throughout the novel, Pynchon creates such extraordinary images triggered by ordinary stimuli. Pynchon’s characters have imaginations that run wild. In their fictional writing, Desnos and other surrealists allowed their “imagination to run wildly from the most ordinary and trivial of stimuli.”<sup>190</sup> For instance, in “Mourning for Mourning,” Desnos “allows the sound of water dropping steadily into the poet-narrator’s sink to accelerate until it becomes an absolute flow rushing beyond the city where he lives, all the way to the fantasized bodies of mermaids and battleships in the ocean.”<sup>191</sup> This particular image of a drop of water transforming into these fantasized bodies of mermaids is relevant to *Against the Day* where Pynchon allows Lew’s spontaneous

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<sup>182</sup> Merleau-Ponty 166.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> *Against the Day* 38.

<sup>185</sup> *Against the Day* 42.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Conley 22.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

hallucinations to enhance his imagination; the most trivial images, such as a pattern on a wallpaper, transform into surreal imaginings.

Moreover, Lew is always lost between a past he cannot remember and a present he cannot comprehend. When Lew attempts to remember his past in order to comprehend his present situation, “all he could produce was this peculiar haze.”<sup>192</sup> He sees experts for advice, but all they say to him are words that do not result in any clarity:

It would've helped if he could remember, but all he could produce was this peculiar haze. The experts he went to for advice had little to tell him. “Past lives,” some assured him. “Future lives,” said other confident swamis. “Spontaneous Hallucination,” diagnosed the more scientific among them. “Perhaps,” one beaming Oriental suggested, “it was hallucinating you.”<sup>193</sup>

These examples reflect Lew's confusing existence by drawing attention to dreams and hallucinations. Whether or not Lew is hallucinating or dreaming, we never really know, and it is precisely this uncertainty that makes Lew's world a kind of virtual reality. Another character, Miles Blundell, leads a similar ambiguous existence. Mile tells Lindsay that he is sometimes surrounded by peculiar feelings, “like the electricity coming on-as if I can see everything just as clear as day, how...how everything fits together, connects.”<sup>194</sup> However, this feeling is only temporary and it is not long before he is back “tripping over [his] feet again.”<sup>195</sup>

What is important to note about the nature of hallucination is that it is not very different from actual perception. Hallucination is similar to any percept-like experience and “occurs in the absence of an appropriate stimulus [with] the full force and impact of the corresponding actual (real) perceptions and is not amenable to direct or voluntary control by

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<sup>192</sup> *Against the Day* 37.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> *Against the Day* 24.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

the experience.”<sup>196</sup> Surrealists were particularly interested in examining symptoms of madness that disrupt normality and challenge the standard definition of sanity. Thus, surrealists celebrate such conditions which are different from the norm and pay particular attention to these altered states of consciousness such as dreams, déjà vu, objective chance, and hypnotic trances. In the novel, Pynchon is interested in these altered states of consciousness; by constantly obscuring the line between dream or hallucination and reality, Pynchon suggests that ‘reality’ is actually an accumulation of these states of consciousness, and that understanding the novel and the characters entails an understanding of this ‘surreality’.

In another example, Lew looks out the window at what seems to be a mundane setting; however, the image transforms to far more than an ordinary downtown scene. The narrator describes Chicago “ascend[ing] to a kind of lurid acropolis, its light as if from nightly immolation warped to the red end of the spectrum, smoldering as if always just about to explode into flames.”<sup>197</sup> The “lurid acropolis”<sup>198</sup> the “nightly immolation,”<sup>199</sup> and the “smoldering light”<sup>200</sup> reflect a gruesome image of a city on the verge of explosion, an image that Lew creates in his imagination as he enters a trance-like state. Similarly, as Dally walks around a department store, she drifts into a “kind of daze.”<sup>201</sup> The daze is described in one long, flowing sentence that begins with an image of the mannequins and transforms into an image of the ‘Hereafter’:

It was nothing, really, almost nothing, could have been another clothes dummy at this distance, sighted across the deep central courtyard that ran vertiginously up through all twelve floors, with only a filigreed ironwork railing between shoppers and a

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<sup>196</sup> Andre Aleman, *Hallucinations: The Science of Idiosyncratic Perception* (APA, 2008) 17.

<sup>197</sup> *Against the Day* 41.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> *Against the Day* 700.

<sup>201</sup> *Against the Day* 514.

plunge to the main floor, past the tranquillity ascending diagonals of moving staircase and a scale replica of Yosemite Falls, down to where a tiny harpist in shadows thrown by palm trees seemed from here part of the realm of the Hereafter.<sup>202</sup>

As mentioned previously, Pynchon often uses words such as ‘nothing’ or ‘ordinary’ when beginning to describe an image that gradually transforms into the extraordinary realm. In this description of Dally’s experience at the department store, the very ‘ordinary’ department store with its mannequins, stair case, and scale replica of Yosemite Falls seems like “part of the realm of the Hereafter.”<sup>203</sup> It is important to note that the Yosemite Falls, the highest measured waterfall in North America, is also associated with spirits; the people of Yosemite Valley tell the story of a woman, a stranger, who trespassed the Yosemite Valley and was drowned in the Yosemite Valley plunge pool by spirits. Pynchon often includes such allusions to the occult by referring to a factual place or person that is associated with magic or spirits.

After spending a day in the desert oasis of Los Faqtzos handling explosives, Lew experiences a very strange mental state. Lew believes that he must have forgotten to wear gloves while handling the explosives and later forgot to wash his hands before eating. The result of this is that “he [experiences] the hotel dining room in a range of colors, not to mention cultural references, which had not been there when he came in.”<sup>204</sup> He begins to see in the wall paper a land “very far away indeed, perhaps not even on our planet, in which beings who resembled-though not compellingly-humans went about their lives- in motion, understand, beneath the gigantic looming of a nocturnal city full of towers, domes, and spidery catwalks, themselves edged by an eerie illumination proceeding not entirely from

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<sup>202</sup> *Against the Day* 347.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> *Against the Day* 182.

municipal sources.”<sup>205</sup> Similar to Desnos’s writing that reflects the surrealists’ technique of imagination running wild, Pynchon depicts an image that begins with what seems to be an ordinary wall paper and transforms into an eerie space where human like creatures are in motion, their surroundings framed in a mysterious illumination.

Later that day, Lew goes to a restaurant; when his food arrives, he begins to see things that are not actually there. He begins to see that each section of the steak that he made with his knife revealed “new vistas, among the intricately disposed axes and polyhedral, into the hivelike activities of a race of very small though perfectly visible inhabitants who as they seethed and bustled about, to all appearances unaware of his scrutiny, sang.”<sup>206</sup> One is reminded here of the Da Vinci gaze that surrealists used for inspiration; it is when Lew gazes at the piece of steak, that he loses himself in the imagery that begins to unravel. The ambiguity of Pynchon’s fiction is certainly evident in this example where it is not clear whether Lew is actually under the influence of chemicals or drugs or if these images are the images of a dream. The characters are often in such ambiguous states to the extent that it is difficult to point out moments when they are actually awake or dreaming. However, we can conclude that Pynchon foregrounds a surrealist eye, an imperfect embodied eye that paves the path to ingenuity.

Having examined surrealism, I will now conclude this chapter with the current cutting-edge technique of photosynthegraphy, using it as a metaphor for the chaos of the senses in *Against the Day*. Throughout this chapter, I attempted to draw attention to the physical limitations of the eye, while foregrounding the embodied state of visual experience. This embodied state implies that the relationship between perceiver and perceived is one of integration as opposed to separation and that perception comprises of a cross-over instead of

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<sup>205</sup> *Against the Day* 182.

<sup>206</sup> *Against the Day* 183.

a division of the senses. Thus, I have found that regardless of the time period that Pynchon's encyclopaedic novel examines, seventeenth-century magic lanterns or twentieth-century surrealism, perception for Pynchon is always rooted in these concepts. I will now focus on the implications of Merle's use of the Integroscope, a device that transforms the static photograph into a world of real-time motion. Jeffrey Severs argues that when Pynchon uses this device in the novel, the "stillness of the medium [photography] is damned."<sup>207</sup> I agree with that Pynchon is "interrogating methods of aesthetic froziness,"<sup>208</sup> though I will offer a different reading of why Pynchon questions these methods.

It is through the Integroscope that Pynchon completely abolishes the distinction between the subject and object, a relationship that mirrors the human and the technological. Because photography is often depicted as an act of domination and death, it can be linked with the inanimate. This could be seen as one of the reasons why Pynchon makes the connection between photography and alchemy; the association allows him to take photography beyond the inanimate to the sensual and from the static to the moving image. How exactly does Pynchon do this and how does it reflect an even clearer connection between Pynchon and Merleau-Ponty?

In the novel, the photographer is not only depicted as a sharpshooter, but also an alchemist. To Merle, there is something uncanny in both photography and alchemy; he is visited by a strange feeling that "photography and alchemy [are] just two ways of getting at the same thing-redeeming light from the inertia of precious metals."<sup>209</sup> Thus, he thinks of his photography equipment as "alchemist's stuff."<sup>210</sup> Moreover, Merle's way of life, moving from one place to another and his dependence on day jobs, exemplifies the unstable life of an

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<sup>207</sup> Severs 45.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> *Against the Day* 80.

<sup>210</sup> *Against the Day* 76.

alchemist. After Merle's daughter leaves the house, Merle decides that "from here on, the alchemy, the tinkering, the photography would be relegated to day jobs of one kind or another."<sup>211</sup> As Merle engages in these day jobs that often require seclusion and mysterious tasks of capturing light, he begins to resemble the mystery of the alchemist.

The founders of surrealism noted the significant connection between alchemy, magic and surrealism; acknowledging the similarities between the unconscious and magic, Antonin Artraud referred to the surrealist vision as 'the new kind of magic,' and Breton pointed out the relationship between the unconscious and alchemy. Breton argued that "the Surrealist research presents along with alchemical research a remarkable analogy of aim."<sup>212</sup> In a passage from the *Second Manifesto*, Breton argues that "the philosopher's stone is nothing other than that which was supposed to permit the imagination of man to make a splendid requital of everything, and here we are again, after centuries of spiritual domestication and foolish resignation, trying to set this imagination free by means of the 'long immense, deliberate derangement of all the senses.'<sup>213</sup> Both surrealists and Merleau-Ponty's theories reject Cartesian thought. According to Descartes, our experience of the world is not based upon the senses but upon our preconceived notions of the object being perceived:

We must allow that corporeal things exist. However, they are perhaps not exactly what we perceive by the senses...but we must at least admit that all things which I conceive in them clearly and distinctly, that is to say, all things which, speaking generally, are comprehended in the object of pure mathematics, are truly to be recognised as objects.<sup>214</sup>

However, Merleau-Ponty's perspective contrasts with this Cartesian perspective, giving priority to the perceptual experience in the making:

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<sup>211</sup> Strand 202.

<sup>212</sup> Breton, *Second Manifeste du Surrealism* 60.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Herman R.Reith, *René Descartes: The Story of the Soul* (Los Angeles: UP of America, 1986) 30

I must see the existing world appear at the end of the constituting process, and not only the world as an idea, otherwise I shall have no more than an abstract construction, and not a concrete consciousness, of the world. Thus, in whatever sense we take 'thought about seeing'. it is certain only so long as actual sight is equally so.<sup>215</sup>

What unites surrealism, alchemy, and Merleau-Ponty's thought is the priority that is given to the senses, to the actual bodily making of an experience as opposed to an intellectual process. Having established this connection, I can now return to the final two scenes in the section "Against the Day." Lew takes a picture of Troth, "an old silver-gelatin studio portrait"<sup>216</sup> that he saved in an "old alchemy primer."<sup>217</sup> He tells Merle that there he feels like a "down-and-outer"<sup>218</sup> who hopes for a genie and three wishes. Merle, comforting Lew, tells him that he could use a transparency and light to show him the moment when this picture was taken, in motion, or even "send it back even earlier" then.<sup>219</sup> Lew, however, is looking for something different. He wants to send the picture "onto different tracks...other possibilities."<sup>220</sup> It is then that Merle discusses an alchemical process that involves a mixture of silver, quick silver, and nitric acid to create a steady and fast transformation: "Damn it pretty soon it won't start to put out branches, just like a tree only faster, and after a while even leaves."<sup>221</sup> Thus, this alchemical process promises life to the otherwise inanimate picture: "Right before your eyes-or lens,' cause you do need some magnification. Doddling said it's because silver is alive. Has its own forks in the road, choices to make just like the rest of us."<sup>222</sup> As images of Dally begin to appear Merle uses a radio receiver, "its tubes blooming in an indigo haze, finding the

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<sup>215</sup> Merleau-Ponty 437.

<sup>216</sup> *Against the Day* 1059.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> *Against the Day* 1060.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> *Against the Day* 1060.



band and frequency, and all at once the image of her silent lips on the wall smoothly glided into synchronization, and her picture was speaking.”<sup>223</sup> He looks at her and she returns the gaze and speaks.

This example can certainly be interpreted as a shift from the still photograph to the moving-images of the cinema. However, the example is also related to computer simulations of photographs which merge conventional photography with digital encoding to produce simulated images; Merle and Roswell’s invention does change the nature of photography by creating a simulated world that is based on the photograph. According to Steven Bode, “[t]echnological innovations are shifting photography from its original chemical basis towards electronics.”<sup>224</sup> Thus, “[i]t is not overstating it to say that the advent of this new technology is changing the very nature of photography as we have known it.”<sup>225</sup> This shift is attributed to the encoding of photographs as “units of electronic information,”<sup>226</sup> which also defines a shift in the location of photographic production from the “chemical darkroom”<sup>227</sup> to the “electronic darkroom”<sup>228</sup> of the computer.<sup>229</sup>

Moreover, Celine Guedson describes photosynthegraphy as “the fruit of a hybridization of photography and the virtual world of the three-dimensional synthesized image.”<sup>230</sup> The process questions the immobility of photography by giving a “single body”<sup>231</sup> to the photograph and the three-dimensional image. Yet what is especially striking about Guesdon’s description of the process is her use of the term ‘flesh’ to describe the

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<sup>223</sup> Steven Bode and Paul Wombell, “Introduction: In a New Light,” *PhotoVideo: Photography in the Age of the Computer* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1991) 46.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Céline Guesdon, “3DVisA Index of 3D Projects: Digital Arts. 3D Photography,” 3DVisa <<http://3dvisa.cch.kcl.ac.uk/project8.html>>

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Guesdon “3DVisA”

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

photographic image. The 2d photograph is the “trans-situation, a kind of enveloping membrane, an organism in its reversible transfer from 2d to 3d, like a skin, a flesh covering the organism with a synthetic gestation that invites one to bore or see through its body.”<sup>232</sup> For Pynchon, photography seems to be this trans-situation, not an end, but a means to an end; it is through the techniques associated with photography that one captures the essence of perception in *Against the Day*. Pynchon succeeds in exploring a seemingly perfect and impassive technology by drawing attention to other interconnected aspects, such as surrealism, that foreground embodied vision. Thus, when we look closer, we find that beneath the apparently or conventionally flawless sense of sight and the precision of photography is a chaotic perceptual experience.

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

### CHAPTER 3

#### “The Body in the Voice”:

#### *Underworld, the Body Artist, and White Noise*

Critics of DeLillo’s fiction have generally overlooked the significance of voice and hearing, aspects of sensory experience that are essential to DeLillo’s perspective on embodiment. When considered, voice and hearing are usually associated with the disembodied or the supernatural as opposed to the material. The prosthetic voice is certainly a central theme in DeLillo’s fiction where the radio, television, tape recorder, and a ghostly figure are the sources of uncanny voices. Yoshiki Tajiri defines auditory prosthetics in terms of a “voice that is mediated by machines or technology—the voice coming from the tape recorder, telephone or radio.”<sup>1</sup> Since this voice is physically detached from the body, critics also refer to voice that emanates from machines as disembodied. It is this particular voice that is prominent in DeLillo’s fiction; thus, DeLillo critics have provided a thorough analysis of the connection between the disembodied voice and the pervasiveness of technology. For example, Joseph Conte suggests that in *White Noise*, a discussion about the radio between Jack Gladney and his son Heinrich reflects the significant difference between Jack and Heinrich’s perspective on modern technology. While Heinrich believes that “our senses are wrong a lot more often than they’re right,”<sup>2</sup> Jack argues that “just because [the weather forecast] is on the radio doesn’t mean we have to suspend belief in our senses.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, Conte finds that Gladney’s statement is an attempt to affirm the importance of the material in an age

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<sup>1</sup> Yoshiki Tajiri, *Samuel Beckett and the Prosthetic Body: the Organs and Senses in Modernism* (Palgrave: New York, 2007) 138.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph M. Conte, “Conclusion: Writing amid the Ruins: 9/11 and Cosmopolis,” *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo*, ed. John N. Duvall (Cambridge University Press, 2008) 7.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

where technology is disembodied;<sup>4</sup> on the other hand, “Heinrich is born to the Information Age and scoffs at his father’s attachment to material causes.”<sup>5</sup> It is often the case that critics such as Conte acknowledge that DeLillo’s work should not be read simply as futuristic or as work that denies the body’s materiality; critics often cite examples of dialogue to show that there are characters with dissenting views who attempt to grasp to materiality in the midst of a technologically mediated world. In *White Noise*, *The Body Artist*, and *Underworld*, there are characters that certainly reflect these conflicting perspectives; yet, a closer examination of the unstable nature of the human voice in the novels, and the manner in which the voices carry resonances of the body, can provide another reading of DeLillo’s work.

While I share Jesse Kavadlo’s view when commenting on *White Noise* that “we are tempted to eliminate the human, and humane, elements of a novel that seems to be about the media and technology but that ultimately suggests more than mere aspects of the way we live now,”<sup>6</sup> I find it possible to examine the ‘humane’ through a closer analysis of technology. I agree with Kavadlo that there is a need to reconsider DeLillo’s texts through a more human perspective and to read them beyond disembodied theories; however, my focus is not on questions of moral balance or belief in the novel, but on how DeLillo depicts modern auditory technology as a mirror to the human body. Several of the characters, including Mr. Tuttle, Jack Gladney, and Lenny Bruce, exemplify a connection between the body and auditory technologies such as the phonograph and the radio; their voices vary, crackle, and at times depict the fluidity and disturbances of auditory prosthetics. As opposed to a boundary that divides the human voice from the prosthetic voice, DeLillo obscures the difference between the two. We are reminded of Charles Grivel’s words that “we only invent machines that are bodies; we invent machines after our bodies; we recognize ourselves through them, in

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<sup>4</sup> Conte 7.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Jesse Kavadlo, *Don DeLillo: Balance at the Edge of Belief* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004)

them, in their form: machines.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, these machines are constructed as duplicates of the human body’s form; they are prosthetic devices that mimic and enhance certain organs such as the ear. For example, the manner in which a human articulates and creates sound is similar to the phonograph’s horned mouth, “the twisted mouth of someone expressing himself.”<sup>8</sup> Additionally, the passage of sound through the phonograph echoes the production of voice in the human body, particularly the “sort of spasm that the production of sound”<sup>9</sup> creates in the human.

It may seem unsuitable to this argument to use voice as a means of foregrounding the body’s corporeality, for voice is often associated with the metaphysical and the uncanny, merely reinforcing the already-established connections between disembodiment and DeLillo’s characters. It is not uncommon to link disembodiment with the voice; as early as ventriloquism in classical Greece, one finds a seemingly displaced voice emanating from somewhere other than the speaker.<sup>10</sup> This kind of speech was used both as a form of entertainment and “divinatory practice.”<sup>11</sup> Ventriloquism is often linked to modern forms of technology, particularly when considering the supernatural that is often referred to in connection with twentieth and twenty-first century disembodied technology, such as the cinematic voice-over that displaces the body. However, DeLillo’s texts are not merely a continuation of a tradition that has long identified voice with disembodiment and modern acoustic technologies with séances. Instead, I will argue that DeLillo’s fiction depicts the body in the voice; Connor’s insightful description of the materiality of the voice is especially relevant to this argument:

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<sup>7</sup> Charles Grivel, “The Phonograph’s Horned Mouth,” *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, and the Avant-Garde*, ed. Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1992) 31.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000) 50.

<sup>11</sup> Connor, *Dumbstruck* 50.

My voice comes from me first of all in a bodily sense. It is produced by means of my vocal apparatus- breath, larynx, teeth, tongue, palate, and lips. It is the voice I hear resonating in my head, amplified and modified by the bones of my skull, at the same time as I see and hear its effects upon the world.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the physical production of voice, the reception of voice is also a physical process; sounds must physically touch your ears before you can hear them, similar to the touch of textures on the skin.<sup>13</sup> Thus, even when a sound seems disembodied, detached from its source, it must penetrate our bodies before we can perceive or assign meaning to it. Additionally, it is possible to shut one's eyes to avoid an image, but one cannot do so with the ears because "the human ear offers not just another hole in the body, but a hole *in the head*,"<sup>14</sup> quite significantly different from the eye in its lack of "obstructive anatomical features such as earlids."<sup>15</sup> Thus, it is only plausible that such a feature would enable direct contact between sound and the human body.

Since the aim of this chapter is to reflect on the connection between the prosthetic and the human in relation to voice and hearing in DeLillo's fiction, it is suitable to begin by addressing the radio, a technology that has significant impact on the imagination and the senses of the characters. In this section, I will briefly consider DeLillo's depiction of several radio broadcasts, using this as a departure point for an analysis of how the characters' voices reflect the various possibilities of the radio voice. To understand the revolutionary role that radio has played in history and to connect it to *Underworld*, it is useful to consider the events that led to the creation of this device and the invention of wireless technology. By the late 1800s, the telegraph had given the Americans fifty years of communication or "writing at a

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<sup>12</sup>Connor, *Dumbstruck* 3.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Gregory Whitehead and Douglas Kahn, "Preface," *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1992) i.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

distance.”<sup>16</sup> This led to Alexander Graham Bell’s creation of the electrical speech machine. However, all the devices created in this time period shared a disadvantage; communication took place only as far as the wires could go.<sup>17</sup> When the Italian inventor Guglielmo Marconi made a radio transmission, it brought about a belief in the possibility of effective wireless communication. As a result of the advancements to this communication, the human voice could travel over air waves. The significance of this wireless technology, particularly the communication of a disembodied voice over a distance, is what makes the radio a bewildering device in *Underworld*. The radio is depicted as a medium that is capable of assimilating and amplifying sounds and voices that dominate the listeners’ senses. It communicates the scene with all its heat and intensity, with a presence that reveals the very meaning of the word. Radio is derived from the Latin “radius: ray, emanating from a center; radians: beaming, filled with light, radiation; irradiatus: to illuminate, to brighten, to heat with radiant energy, to enlighten intellectually.”<sup>18</sup> In *Underworld*, the radio is the medium that acts precisely as this illuminating and energetic source that directly affects the imagination and intellect of the listeners.

The radio’s pervasiveness is highlighted through its presence in various locations. A glance at different scenes from *Underworld* shows how the radio is at times an integral part of the setting. This is especially evident when the narrator pays particular attention to background sounds: “We listened to the music, a cash register ringing at the end of the bar and a trace of a radio voice, radio or TV, coming from a backroom somewhere.”<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the radio seems to draw the listeners’ attention to a range of sounds that are not as prominent when simply heard through the human ear. In the opening of *Underworld*, where the radio

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<sup>16</sup>“The ideas that made Radio Possible,” *Federal Communications Commission*, 21 Nov. 2005, 15 Sept. 2007 <<http://www.fcc.gov/omd/history/radio/ideas.html>>.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Frances Dyson, “The Ear That Would Hear Sounds in Themselves,” *Wireless Imagination*, 380.

<sup>19</sup> *Underworld* 330.

announcer Russ Hodges broadcasts the Dodgers' and Giants' games, the announcer's "presence shows that even in DeLillo's evocation of a more innocent America, the country was already becoming postmodern in its relation to the electronic media."<sup>20</sup> The radio plays a central role, as it shapes the readers' experience regarding the baseball games. Criticism of the media's role in *Underworld* has highlighted radio and television's role in enacting, and thereby engraving historical moments in people's minds. Duval argues that "the home run ball becomes a symbol for Cold War America's desire to recreate perpetually the conditions for its own cultural innocence,"<sup>21</sup> while "the recording of Hodges' radio transmission becomes the narrative mechanism" that enforces this "illusion."<sup>22</sup> When Nick listens to Hodges, he hears his voice but also "the crowd noise behind the voice, the incessant smash and tension, the thickness, the sort of bristle and teem that deepened at a turn in play."<sup>23</sup> Nick recalls Russ Hodges' voice as "the old radio voice, dead now twenty years or more, disbelief and thrill, the force of a single human voice coming out of a box."<sup>24</sup> Moreover, Hodges' voice always carries within it strong evidence of the body:

Days of iron skies and all the mike time of the past week, the sore throat, the coughing, Russ is feverish and bedraggled- train trips and nerves and no sleep and he describes the play in his familiar homey ramble, the grits-and-tater voice that's a little scratchy today."<sup>25</sup>

DeLillo suggests that the radio's ability to detach a body from voice does not imply that it is capable of eliminating the resonance of the body. When Nick hears the thickness of sounds and voice from the radio, a cross-over of the senses occurs where the seemingly disembodied sense of hearing reflects a tangible touch.

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<sup>20</sup> John Duval, *Underworld: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Continuum, 2002). 40

<sup>21</sup> Duval 41.

<sup>22</sup> Duval 42.

<sup>23</sup> *Underworld* 132.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*



In another scene, Brian is listening to the radio that is “ablast with call-in voices, their griping, spraying spit, and he imagines a long queue waiting to enter the broadcast band and speak the incognito news.”<sup>26</sup> The radio enables a relationship between sound and imagination that allows the listener to visualize that which is so acutely transmitted through radio waves. In *Underworld*, it is an unrivalled technology, inextricably interwoven with the characters’ lives. The three examples also depict a significant difference between sound, noise, and voice. In the first example, “the trace of a radio voice, radio or tv,”<sup>27</sup> exemplifies a playback sound, one that Paul Rodaway would define as “broadcast and recorded sounds- the 24 hour radio stations left on as background in public places, factories and, for much of the day in homes.”<sup>28</sup> Moreover, there is a distinction made between the effect of listening to Hodges’ powerful voice and hearing the crowd’s background noise. While hearing is a “passive sensation,”<sup>29</sup> listening enables an “active attentiveness”<sup>30</sup> that aims at finding meaning.<sup>31</sup> The crowd’s noise exemplifies “human generated sounds, synthesized and repeated incessantly.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, it is evident that DeLillo uses the radio to explore the various elements of the hearing experience. I will address these elements again later in the chapter when I consider the hearing aspects of embodiment.

In addition to these elements, the radio’s role is complex, for it constitutes several contradictions in the manner in which it communicates with the listener. To analyse how these contradictions are portrayed in *Underworld*, it is useful to note the radio’s aesthetic purpose. Gregory Whitehead addresses the radio’s role as art or an “industrial artefact.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *Underworld* 167.

<sup>27</sup> *Underworld* 330.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Rodaway, *Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense, and Place* (London: Routledge, 1994) 156.

<sup>29</sup> Rodaway 89.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Rodaway 158.

<sup>33</sup> Whitehead 255.

Though in *Underworld* the radio is not directly used as this artefact, it nevertheless portrays the various possibilities of the medium:

Incorporating the promise of universal communication bound together with the more immediate prospect of irreversible decay, the radiobody is a composite of opposites: speaking to everyone abstractly and to no one in particular; ubiquitous but fading without a trace . . . Radio is a medium voiced by multiple personalities, perfect for pillow talk, useful as an antidepressant, but also deployable as a guiding beam for missile systems.<sup>34</sup>

In the novel, the radio assumes these multiple identities, changing instantly from a simulated broadcast of a riot to a tool of propaganda when attackers take control. The radio's "multiple personalities"<sup>35</sup> figure prominently in a scene where Marian returns home to pack and turns on the radio. DeLillo places Marian in the midst of Dow Day, a 1967 student protest against Dow Chemical Corporation at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. The students protest against the corporation's production of napalm, an additive that grips to human flesh. As Marian listens to the radio, she realizes that the riot she hears outside on the street is the same as the one that is being broadcast.

When Marian turns on the radio, it is "because she wanted to know what was going on out there, just as a point of exasperated interest and because the noise was getting louder."<sup>36</sup> In this episode, the radio is referred to as a speaker. We are told that "the radio said, Dow Day Dow Day Dow Day Dow Day."<sup>37</sup> It is not merely "reporting Dow Day"<sup>38</sup> but is "seemingly taking part."<sup>39</sup> The radio says, "[t]ake your belt and wrap it around your fist."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Whitehead 256-257.

<sup>35</sup> Whitehead 256.

<sup>36</sup> *Underworld* 598.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

The radio then says, “[t]here’s an ANFO bulletin coming up.”<sup>41</sup> Marian starts making the connection between the riot “out there”<sup>42</sup> and what she hears on the radio. The riot “was being augmented and improved by a simulated riot on the radio, an audio montage of gunfire, screams, sirens, klaxons, and intermittent bulletins real and possibly not.”<sup>43</sup> This riot scene is particularly telling, portraying the difference between what seems to be a ‘real’ riot and a simulated one. The narrator refers to the radio’s montage of the riot versus the ‘real’ riot as “the dialogue between what was real and what was spliced and mixed and processed and played.”<sup>44</sup> However, it is misleading to assume that the surrogate or virtual world overcomes the materiality of this riot. As is often the case in many instances of DeLillo’s texts, DeLillo places the reader between a world that seems to transgress the materiality of the body only to lead us back to it. After a while of confusion, of wavering between the material and the obsolete, Marian’s mother affirms the corporeality of the riot as she speaks about “the broken bones of the demonstrators, the students with head wounds, clubbed, gassed, bleeding.”<sup>45</sup> In this example, the radio not only recreates the riot scene as an event but also as a space. The riot is no longer merely outside in the material world but is also part of a virtual and surrogate world, a characteristic of radio broadcasting.

Having established the importance of the radio in the novel, both as a surrogate world to reality and as a medium that has a significant impact on the listeners’ imagination, I will now consider the connection between the radio voice and the ‘human’ voice. Though critics have referred to the historical and aesthetic significance of the radio in the novel, they have not addressed the connection between the multiplicity of the radio voice and embodied voice. A close examination of how the radio’s multiple voices mirror the human voice is necessary

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<sup>41</sup> *Underworld* 599.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Underworld* 601.

<sup>45</sup> *Underworld* 602.

to enhance our understanding of how DeLillo subverts the dichotomy of the ‘natural’ versus the prosthetic. Throughout *Against the Day*, the characters’ voices embody the fluidity of the radio voice. The radio’s multiple personalities is especially striking when considering the stark contrast between a woman’s on air “sexy voice”<sup>46</sup> repeating the Du Pont chemical company’s slogan, “better things for better living...through chemistry,”<sup>47</sup> and the abrupt disruption of the broadcast when a an anonymous person or group take control of the radio and tell listeners how to make a fertilizer bomb; when the radio finally returns to its broadcast, instead of the woman’s voice, there are three voices “liturgically reciting”<sup>48</sup> the “better things for better living”<sup>49</sup> slogan. Critics have noted the significance of the radio voice’s multiplicity, contrasting radio technology with other mediums such as photography. For instance, radio voices allow an intimacy and an emotional response that surpasses photography. In an insightful analysis of Gertrude Stein’s radio performances, Sarah Wilson considers how the fluidity of the radio self allows a “supple and ever-changing performance.”<sup>50</sup> One can read the radio in *Underworld* in a similar manner; the striking difference between the intimacy of the woman’s voice and the urgency of the propaganda voice reflect the “ever-changing performance”<sup>51</sup> of the radio self. Thus, it is evident that in DeLillo’s world, the radio exemplifies a composite identity, made of various and often contradictory voices.

However, DeLillo does not present this multiplicity as exclusive to the radio voice. A closer examination of the characters’ voices and sounds reveals an inherent connection between the mechanical radio voice and the human embodied voice. In the novel, several

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<sup>46</sup> *Underworld* 602.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Sarah Wilson, “Gertrude Stein and the Radio,” *Modernism/Modernity* 11.2 (2004): 268.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

characters exhibit a striking correspondence to vibroacoustic technologies and methods of sound amplification. The characters seem to be walking radios, their voices “staticky”<sup>52</sup> and interrupted carry a resonating sound that vibrates in their own bodies and jolts the listeners. They are intrinsically related to these technologies; the radio does not simply function as an external other, but an inherent part of the characters. Before I address specific examples, I will briefly examine the kind of inherent connection that I am suggesting. The idea that humans are machines is found as early as antiquity. For example, in the second-century, Aelius Galenus based his pneumatic model of the human body on the hydraulic technologies of the time.<sup>53</sup> In these models and interpretations of the human body, it is implied that there is a ‘natural’ relationship between corporeality and technology, as opposed to an otherness that is often associated with the externality and the instrumentality of technology. Such an interpretation foreground an intrinsic connection between the human and technology, one that figures prominently in DeLillo’s *Underworld*, especially when considering the connection between sound technology and the human voice.

To examine how DeLillo uses sound technology to foreground this fundamental relationship between humans and technology, I will begin with an example that critics often refer to, the Texas Highway Killer’s call to the TV station. Jeremy Green describes the killer’s voice as an example of disembodied voice, a voice that is not attached to a body. He emphasizes the anonymity that defines certain characters in DeLillo’s work, referring to the Texas Highway Killer who “in [a] phone call he makes to a television station, following the appearance of the videotape one of his murders [...] is able to achieve a particularly charged identity while remaining, literally, faceless: the viewer sees only the face of the anchor

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<sup>52</sup> Wilson 267.

<sup>53</sup> Ken Goldberg, *The Robot in the Garden: Telerobotics and Telepistemology in the Age of the Internet* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000) 227.

woman listening to the killers' voice."<sup>54</sup> Green argues that the killer's broadcast voice and the anchor woman's body create an "imagined intimacy between anonymous viewer and public face"<sup>55</sup> Indeed, disembodiment figures significantly in this example, especially if we were to consider the obvious visual absence of the actual source of sound. However, despite the medium used to broadcast this voice, DeLillo uses language that implies the body's material presence. We are told that the voice is "electronically toned but not without human quality, jerkwater swerve, the struggle to speak-the bare insides of the simplest utterance."<sup>56</sup> It sounds like "someone [is] trying to make a human utterance out of itemized data,"<sup>57</sup> and as time passes, "the altered voice [is] actually chatting now- getting the feel of the medium."<sup>58</sup> In this example, the absence of the body image does not imply the lack of the vocalic organs that actually produce the sound of the voice. The references to the "struggle to speak"<sup>59</sup> and the "bare insides of the simplest utterance"<sup>60</sup> reflect a corporeal quality that remains even when the speaker's voice is merged with the medium. Thus, though the example seems to initially focus on a broadcast or mechanized voice, DeLillo does not dichotomize a 'natural' or 'human' voice with a mechanized voice. A close analysis of the text shows a subversion of this dichotomy as DeLillo attempts to highlight the intrinsically mechanized quality of the human voice.

While the Texas Highway Killer's voice certainly depicts the effect of a technological medium on the sound of the voice, given that the radio "reduces [the voice] to certain frequency range and alters the character of the sound,"<sup>61</sup> I will examine how this

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<sup>54</sup> Jeremy Green, "Disaster Footage: Spectacles of Violence in DeLillo's Fiction," *Modern Fiction Studies* 45.3 (1999): 576.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> *Underworld* 216.

<sup>58</sup> *Underworld* 217.

<sup>59</sup> *Underworld* 216.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Rodaway 156.

characteristic of the technologically mediated voice is always, already similar to embodied voice. When considering this mechanized quality of the human voice, we are reminded of Grivel's explanation of how the human voice is produced. Grivel describes the strangeness of one's voice to oneself, noting the process that takes place for voice to emanate from the body:

Someone else who speaks is inside me. I can hear the mechanism he starts up, the tick tock and the key winding up, the sound of chains and wheels, elongation, spring, song yet the censure of song, the abruptness committed, inside the flesh. From a rupture to the body, by way of its ear.<sup>62</sup>

This mechanism that takes place on the inside of the body, that Grivel describes as the presence of a speaker within us, corresponds to the struggle that surfaces in the Texas Highway Killer's voice until he adapts to the medium; it takes time for the voice to begin to exhibit a familiarity. However, when comparing other examples to the Texas Highway Killer's call, we find that DeLillo suggests that even without speaking through a medium, there is something alien about our own voices. This is implied in other instances in *Underworld* when characters do not actually speak through a medium, such as the TV or radio, but their voices carry the "feel of the medium."<sup>63</sup> These voices carry a stutter, a disturbance or a staticky sound, that makes their speech seem impeded. For example, Marvin, who is obsessed with finding the missing baseball from the Giants' game, is described at one point as having a voice with "a slight crackle [...] that sounded like random radio noise produced by some disturbance of the signal."<sup>64</sup> Marvin "[fills] Brian's head with that staticky voice that seemed to come out of a surgical slit in his throat."<sup>65</sup> The static and crackle in Marvin's voice is one of several examples where characters' voices appear to be

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<sup>62</sup> Grivel 32.

<sup>63</sup> *Underworld* 217.

<sup>64</sup> *Underworld* 185.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

mechanized. It is almost as though Marvin has had a laryngectomy, a surgery where the larynx is removed. One of the methods of replacing the larynx is an electrolarynx, a device that works through vibrating against the throat and usually makes the sound mechanical. Advancements in technologies of the prosthetic voice promise an elimination of the mechanical qualities of an electrolarynx produced voice to make this voice more ‘natural’. DeLillo often portrays characters who may possibly have a prosthetic device in or on their bodies, but does not always confirm this possibility. Considering this uncertainty, DeLillo seems to be making a significant correspondence between voice technology and human speech; the overlaps between the two, and the disconcerting nature of the human voice, makes a prosthetic device a technological embodiment of obstructions and limitations that are already part of the human voice.

This idea is also evident when considering Eric and Lenny Bruce. Eric, who works with Matt at the nuclear plant, The Pocket, daunts Matt with information about nuclear tests that use “children, infants, fetuses, and mental patients.”<sup>66</sup> Matt questions this, but Eric replies to this saying, “I believe mistakes were made.”<sup>67</sup> He uses a “stutter”<sup>68</sup> that manipulates his voice, “You keep mi,mi,missing the point.”<sup>69</sup> The voice is described as “cut and edited, [the] words in stop-start format.”<sup>70</sup> DeLillo uses these audio-technology related terms to describe Eric’s seemingly ‘natural’ voice, drawing attention the problematic definition of the ‘natural.’ Similar to the static and crackle in Marvin’s voice, Eric’s voice sounds prosthetic, resembling a merge with an audio technology.

These examples imply that the voice does not necessarily need a medium to be defined as prosthetic. It contains the human and mechanical within it. Moreover, the

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<sup>66</sup> *Underworld* 417.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*



characters are especially sensitive to each others' voices, aware of the intonations and the stammers. They seem bewildered by any voices that sound different or reflect some sort of speech impediment. Reconsidering the distinction made earlier between the radio's noise and voice, we find that the noise in Marvin and Eric's voices exhibit this difference. It exhibits a kind of "noise pollution,"<sup>71</sup> an unnecessary sound that impedes communication. Connor highlights the effects that such transmissions have on peoples' ears, especially given that "the ear is more sensitive to overload than any other organ."<sup>72</sup> It is especially telling that Connor refuses to categorize this noise:

The instability of radio signals, especially before the development of FM broadcasting, has accustomed us to the terrible fragility of the broadcast word, its tendency to drift into or be overcome by noise. What is this noise? It is neither our own, nor nature's. It is more strange to us than the nonhuman world.<sup>73</sup>

Moreover, Connor describes the history of broadcast sound as a "struggle against noise, a struggle for cleanliness."<sup>74</sup> This was essentially an attempt to eliminate "the evidence of the body in the word."<sup>75</sup> The characters' voices in *Underworld* portray these transmission impediments and the "sound of the body in the word."<sup>76</sup>

DeLillo makes this especially evident in Lenny Bruce's role; Bruce, a stand-up comedian in the 1950s appears as a fictional character in *Underworld*. Critics often refer to Bruce as a ventriloquist; his impersonations are similar to the ventriloquists' use of voice to assume other identities in their own bodies. Timothy L. Parrish identifies this ventriloquist speech with DeLillo's own writing. Parrish suggests that "as Bruce speaks, DeLillo writes -

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<sup>71</sup> Rodaway 156.

<sup>72</sup> Stephen Connor, "Noise (5) Megaphonics," *Stephen Connor*, 1997, Web, 10 Jan 2008 <<http://www.stevenconnor.com/noise/>>.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Timothy L. Parrish, "From Hoover's FBI to Einstein's *Unterwelt*: DeLillo Directs the Postmodern Novel," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 45.3 (1999): 713.

<sup>76</sup> Connor "Noise."

moving in and out of voices, channelling through the cross currencies of American speech and consciousness.”<sup>77</sup> According to Parrish, DeLillo, similar to Bruce, is a “mimic, an impersonator, a ventriloquist.”<sup>78</sup> Additionally, as critics have noted, Bruce has a compelling effect upon the audience through a striking use of the intonations of his voice. For example, the line “We’re all gonna die!”<sup>79</sup> that Bruce repeats “absorbs his audience into a temporary and unthinkable allegiance”;<sup>80</sup> they experience his voice sensually.

Yet Bruce seems to be more than just a ventriloquist whose only purpose in *Underworld* is to manipulate an audience. A closer look at the relationship between Lenny and his use of sound reveals a striking correspondence to vibroacoustic technologies that are used to aid the deaf and enable them to hear speech. Connor surveys the history of the talking automaton, establishing a specific connection between this automaton and ventriloquism. According to Connor, both ventriloquism and the traditions of talking heads are an “attempt to take the voice out of one body- or in the cases of earlier forms of ventriloquism, out of one part of the body- - and put it (back) into another.”<sup>81</sup> Hence, we find examples from history of attempts to place speech inside deaf peoples’ bodies, allowing them to feel the sounds on the inside of their bodies. Connor refers to some of the systems used as hyper-talking heads for “convert[ing] the heads of the deaf into talking bodies.”<sup>82</sup> More recently vibroacoustic technology has allowed people with hearing deficiencies to sense music through sound vibrations on their skin:

Vibration systems are developed to help such people perceive musical rhythms on different parts of their bodies [...] Headphones linked to a normal hi-fi system are

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<sup>77</sup> Parrish 713.

<sup>78</sup> Parrish 714.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> *Dumbstruck* 342.

<sup>82</sup> *Dumbstruck* 346.

located in a piece of vibroacoustic furniture covered with plastic or fabric cloth to help the body perceive the resonance of the sound.<sup>83</sup>

Thus, whether it were in the past or the present, the basic characteristics of sound, resonance and permeation, are used as a means of amplifying the feeling of sound, especially within the bodies of the deaf. Moreover, Rodaway argues that there is “an increasing obsession with ever louder sounds, that is sonic *amplification*.”<sup>84</sup> DeLillo uses Bruce to depict the mergence of the voice with technology for the purpose of this amplification. When he shouts “We’re all gonna die,”<sup>85</sup> it is intensely sensual to both Bruce and the audience:

Yes, he loved saying this, crying it out, it was wondrously refreshing, it purified his fear and made it public at the same time- it was weak and sick and cowardly and powerless and pathetic and also noble somehow, a long, loud and feelingly high-pitched cry of grief and pain that had an element of sweet defiance.<sup>86</sup>

Bruce’s cry is experienced as a touch for both him and the audience. Though some of the audience is familiar with Bruce’s voice, the impact is still significant, transforming the power of sound into touch; the audience can physically feel Lenny’s voice: “And even those in the audience who were familiar with Lenny’s habitual scat, the vocal apparatus with its endless shifts and modulations and assumed identities, the release of underground words and tensions-they felt a small medicinal jolt at the pitch of the decorator’s voice.”<sup>87</sup> Again, this “medicinal jolt”<sup>88</sup> reflects the ambiguous boundary between voice and touch, foregrounding the connection between Bruce and vibroacoustic technologies that aid the deaf.

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<sup>83</sup> Oguzhan Ozcan, “Feel-in Touch! : Imagination through Vibration: A Utopia of Vibro-Acoustic Technology, Puppetry and Multimedia Art,” *Leonardo*, 37.4 (2004): 327.

<sup>84</sup> Rodaway 150.

<sup>85</sup> *Underworld* 506.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Underworld* 527.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

Moreover, one of the reasons that this voice is disturbing is the noise that it carries within it, a noise that Bruce intentionally creates through impersonating and through utilizing the microphone. This creates a crackle that is similar to the disturbances of a radio transmission. Additionally, it is related to technology in that it is actually felt at a physical level. At the end of one of the performances, Lenny “[lifts] the dangling mike and put it to his face and it began to screech and crackle,”<sup>89</sup> leaving them bemused. At another performance, he “practically stuck the mike down his throat”<sup>90</sup> yelling “We’re all gonna die!”<sup>91</sup> The effect of this is so powerful that it “sent a weird thrill shooting through the audience. They felt the cry physically.”<sup>92</sup> The voice is materialized as it resounds in the audience’s body. The image of Lenny sticking a microphone down his throat and the physical effect this has on the audience foregrounds the material presence of sound. Through Lenny’s exaggerated performance, DeLillo foregrounds the production and reception of the sound of the voice as an embodied act.

Moreover, Lenny exemplifies the otherness that defines a voice and a body as prosthetic. His voice is never simply his; it is described as a “cross-over”<sup>93</sup> of voices, both internal and external. For instance, at a certain point Lenny loses the ability to control his voice. This makes the audience feel “uncomfortable because he could not seem to stop doing the voice.”<sup>94</sup> Lenny feels “as if the voice had been crossed with his own.”<sup>95</sup> The lack of a specific identity to define the voice bewilders Lenny:

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<sup>89</sup> *Underworld* 527.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Underworld* 530.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

It was as if cross-voices were unavoidable, whether you knew it or not, whether you liked it or not, and maybe this old black man spoke in Lenny's voice at times, alone, unknowing, in his room."<sup>96</sup>

This is an especially striking example of the inauthenticity of the 'natural' voice. In this example, Lenny loses control over his voice without using a technological medium. The statement that "whether you knew it or not, whether you like it or not a cross-over of voices is unavoidable,"<sup>97</sup> is especially telling. It reflects the natural instability of the human voice that Ree refers to and the otherness of voice that Grivel characterizes; it is as though someone else is speaking inside Lenny. By questioning the authenticity of Lenny's voice, DeLillo questions the originality of any voice; thus, Lenny's theatrical performance dramatizes the question of an original voice and draws attention to the problem of dichotomizing a prosthetic voice versus a 'natural' voice; is there a 'natural' voice when voice already carries within it the otherness that defines the prosthetic? According to Connor, voice is a benign monster because it carries within it various inconsistencies and complexities:

The voice may perhaps be thought of as one such benign monster. Always standing apart from or non-identical with the body from which it issues, the voice is by definition irreducible to or incompatible with that body. And yet the voice is always in and of the body. The continued coexistence of the voice and the body under these conditions of incompatibility provides an image for the new dynamic complexity of the body itself.<sup>98</sup>

It is this complexity of the body that is especially pertinent to DeLillo's perspective on the body and technology. Klara Sax, a character who is constantly defined by the materiality of

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<sup>96</sup> *Underworld* 530.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Connor, *Dumbstruck* 208.

her voice, exemplifies this “incompatibility”<sup>99</sup> that Connor refers to. Her voice is described as having “a slight rasp and a kind of wobble, the loose liquid texture of something sliding side to side.”<sup>100</sup> When she laughs, her laugh is “a little wild”<sup>101</sup> and her voice “cracks.”<sup>102</sup> The characters are thrilled by these traits of her voice:

The wobble in her voice. And the way the sound came cornering out of the side of her mouth. It was scary-seductive, it made us think she might trail into some unsteady meander. And the pauses. We waited out the pauses, watching the match tremble when she lit another cigarette.<sup>103</sup>

In this section, I have attempted to subvert the conventional readings of *Underworld* that focus merely on the disembodied aspect of hearing and voice. The juxtaposition of the Texas Highway Killer’s broadcast voice and Eric, Marvin, and Bruce, and Sax’s voices subverts our conventional conceptualization of what is ‘natural’ and what is not. The contradictions embedded in the monstrosity of the voice obscures the boundary between the human and the prosthetic. When we consider the cross-overs and the speech impediments inherent in these characters’ voices, we find that there is an intrinsic connection between a technologically mediated voice and a seemingly ‘natural’ human voice. The idea of the prosthetic voice is equally disconcerting in the *Body Artist*. Mr. Tuttle, a supernatural figure, problematizes the authenticity of the ‘human’ voice, raising further questions regarding the intrinsic connection between humans and technology.

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<sup>99</sup> Connor, *Dumbstruck* 208.

<sup>100</sup> *Underworld* 434.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *Underworld* 435.

## The *Body Artist's* Ghostly Voices

In both *The Body Artist* and *White Noise*, voice plays a central role in depicting the characters and revealing the tension between a voice with a definite source and a voice with no particular origin. *White Noise* and *The Body Artist*, published seventeen years apart, show no evidence of an explicit connection. Hence, it is understandable that both texts are often discussed separately; *White Noise* is read as a postmodern text and *The Body Artist* as reminiscent of Beckett's texts, though critics do acknowledge the themes of cybernetics and sound technology that link *The Body Artist* to the rest of DeLillo's oeuvre. There is also an obvious similarity between both texts, namely the overarching theme of death. However, death and cybernetics are not the only two themes that link the texts, but also the idea of a prosthetic voice that is embodied in Mr. Tuttle and floating in Jack Gladney's first person narrative in the form of mantras and slogans. I will begin with analysing *The Body Artist* because there are several connections that can be made to *Underworld*.

One of the most disturbing themes in *The Body Artist* is the presence of death in life, impersonated by Mr. Tuttle. Though we are not certain of who or what exactly Mr. Tuttle is, we know that he is part of both the animate and inanimate world; he is a dead voice and a seemingly lively body. Critics often refer to the modernist poetics that characterize *The Body Artist*:

Gone are many of the hallmarks of DeLillo's previous work: no characters speaking essays to one another, little explicit examination of the effects of social, political, or cultural changes, no Kennedy Assassination, no cold war, no nuclear waste, no suspicious corporation.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Philip Nel, "Don DeLillo's Return to Form: The Modernist poetics of *The Body Artist*," *Contemporary Literature*, 43.4 (2002): 736.

Indeed, *The Body Artist* varies significantly in its scope, providing a narrower viewpoint of a woman's traumatic experience. There are no major over-arching political or historical contexts that affect the characters or plot. However, it is perhaps DeLillo's most significant work regarding voice. Mr. Tuttle's language seems to be a voice from another world, enabling a distant communication, and the narrator takes comfort in Mr. Tuttle's communication because it conveys "echoes of a dead man's memory."<sup>105</sup> A common reading of Mr. Tuttle's role is that he materializes the medium of a Dictaphone because of his ability to repeat the conversations of Lauren and Rey as though the conversations were recorded. However, it is also important to consider that Mr. Tuttle is a human-like figure and that the manner in which he repeats the conversations differs from a Dictaphone in that it is more intimate; I will examine this ambiguity further and will reflect on how this ambiguity subverts the conventional boundary between the human and the technological.

First, it is important to briefly consider this connection between the history of spirituality and telecommunication, especially given that Mr. Tuttle is communicating a dead man's voice. The story shows a significant link between the "ghost phenomenon"<sup>106</sup> and the "developing logic of technological communications."<sup>107</sup> This connection relates specifically to the role of the direct voice, "a voice which speaks independently of the medium's vocal organs."<sup>108</sup> During early direct voice sessions, trumpets were placed in the room to amplify the voice, coinciding with "technological means of amplification."<sup>109</sup> These direct voice sessions encompassed other substitutes for the trumpets, including the phonograph, microphone, and tape recorder. This history cites several instances where writers or psychologists have claimed to make contact with the dead through technological innovations

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<sup>105</sup> Nel 745.

<sup>106</sup> Connor, *Dumbstruck* 364

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Connor, *Dumbstruck* 365.



using a radio, microphone, or merging different ways of tape-recording “including providing input from a simple diode directly to the tape-recorder, with enhanced playback.”<sup>110</sup> For instance, a Latvian psychologist claimed that he could converse with voices that he supposed were of the dead. In the third stage of his experiments, “the tape-recording apparatus, and the quasi-technological ritual of the séance (gave) way to a wholly technological procedure.”<sup>111</sup>

This kind of procedure pertains to the kind of communication with the dead that takes place in *The Body Artist*. From the very beginning of the story, a disembodied sound creates an eerie atmosphere. Even before Lauren actually sees Mr. Tuttle, she senses his presence. She hears a noise and feels that someone or something is present in the house. The noise she hears envelops a space: “[It] carries an effect that was nearly intimate, like something’s here and breathing the same air we breathe and it moves the way we move. The noise had this quality, of a body shedding space, but there was no one there when they looked.”<sup>112</sup> This kind of sound is what Michel Chion refers to as acousmatic, “sounds one hears without seeing their originating cause.”<sup>113</sup> The term acousmatic originates from the French word “acousmatique,” used to refer to hearing a sound from behind a screen. Chion applied this term to cinematic space and sound, noting how acousmatic sound alters the context of a film. When one hears a sound from a screen before seeing the image that is the source of the sound, this creates an atmosphere of suspense. The description of the sound as a body shedding space also exemplifies the nature of cinematic acousmatic sound, a sound that envelops a cinematic space.<sup>114</sup> Thus, DeLillo creates a cinema-like context by building suspense with a prominent disembodied sound.

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<sup>110</sup> Connor *Dumbstruck* 375.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> DeLillo *Body Artist* 40.

<sup>113</sup> Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision Sound on Screen*, ed. and trans. C.Gorbman (New York: Columbia UP, 1994) 71.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

Not only does Mr. Tuttle reproduce Lauren's husband's voice, but he also reproduces Lauren's voice in her presence. The voice is not "an outright impersonation but she heard elements of her voice, the clipped delivery, the slight buzz deep in the throat, her pitch, her sound."<sup>115</sup> Hearing her own voice coming from him is disconcerting, but not because it is different from her own, but because it is too similar to hers.<sup>116</sup> This is also evident when Mr. Tuttle speaks in Rey's voice:

But it was Rey's voice she was hearing. The representation was close, the accent and dragged vowels, the intimate differences, the articulations produced in one vocal apparatus and not another, things she'd known in Rey's voice, and only Rey's.<sup>117</sup>

Laura di Prete addresses the relationship between trauma, repetition, and the phantom, an embodied voice. According to di Prete, "DeLillo's story of metamorphic bodies and voices reminds us of the extent to which subjectivity is necessarily articulated in relation to others, and of how this is particularly true within the boundaries of traumatic crisis."<sup>118</sup> Moreover, Prete draws attention to the "phantom as 'speaking body.'"<sup>119</sup> Prete suggests that the "transformed bodies, physical sensations, and corporeal performance"<sup>120</sup> are particularly telling when considering "what actual voices say."<sup>121</sup> In other words, Mr. Tuttle's gripping role is a result of being both an "embodied voice and an omnipresent 'speaking body.'"<sup>122</sup> Indeed, Mr. Tuttle's embodiment of these various voices is enthralling and bewilders Lauren. The ventriloquism that characterizes this voice is partly accountable for the mystery that surrounds Mr. Tuttle. Thus, whether it acts as a means of finding lost intimacy or coping with

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<sup>115</sup> Laura Di Prete, "Don DeLillo's *The Body Artist*: Performing the Body, Narrating Trauma," *Contemporary Literature* 46.3 (2005): 484.

<sup>116</sup> Prete 484.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Prete 509.

<sup>119</sup> Prete 500.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Prete 501.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

trauma, ventriloquism plays a significant part in the story, foregrounding the diverse roles of the displaced voice.

What we find in *The Body Artist* is a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, Mr. Tuttle produces an alien voice that is exterior; on the other hand, the voice duplicates the intimate details of Lauren and Rey's voices. Thus, DeLillo gives a human, embodied dimension to Mr. Tuttle's voice that prevents it from being wholly disconcerting. This is different from the merely mechanical effect of one's recorded voice:

A recorded voice that is supposed to be mine, but which I merely *hear*, and which has been cut off from all the rich, composite play of sensations involved in hearing my voice as I speak it, appears to be an abomination. It is not merely alien, but ugly."<sup>123</sup>

Thus, the experience Lauren has with hearing her own voice adds to the overall disturbing atmosphere. Yet, not only does this voice contribute to the eeriness that pervades *The Body Artist*, but it also reveals a "différence,"<sup>124</sup> which Tajiri defines as "the operation of differing which at one and the same time fissures and retards presence, submitting it simultaneously to primordial division and delay."<sup>125</sup> Tajiri uses "différence"<sup>126</sup> to show how the subject in Beckett's *The Unnamable* (1953) is "always differentiated from itself."<sup>127</sup> Hence, "the narrator's self cannot coincide with itself, and this causes him to feel that the other is speaking instead of him."<sup>128</sup> Tajiri explains the connection between this "exteriority"<sup>129</sup> and a prosthetic voice suggesting that *The Unnamable's* narrative voice is prosthetic because its source is from the "outside,"<sup>130</sup> similar to hearing our own voices coming from a tape

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<sup>123</sup> Connor 11.

<sup>124</sup> Tajiri 141.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Tajiri 142.

recorder or a machine.<sup>131</sup> Similar to Lenny, Eric, and Marvin, whose strange voices subvert the natural-prosthetic dichotomy, Lauren's voice challenges any categorical reading. Her voice changes after Rey's death and similar to the subject of *The Unnameable*, her voice alienates her from herself. When Lauren first answers the telephone after Rey's death, she uses a voice that is not hers, "a twisted tentative other's voice, to say hello, who is this, yes."<sup>132</sup> Not only is Lauren's voice prosthetic because she actually uses a telephone, but having changed the tone of her voice, she makes herself sound like someone else. This reflects the voice's already prosthetic nature, one that crosses the boundaries of familiarity, revealing an "external" other<sup>133</sup> within. At the end of the novella, where we are told of a significant change in Lauren's voice when she answers the telephone, she uses a different voice, one that does not belong to her<sup>134</sup>:

At first the voice she used on the telephone was nobody's, a generic neutered human, but then she started using his. It was his voice, a dry piping sound, hollow-bodied, like a bird humming on her tongue.<sup>135</sup>

Similar to Bruce's improvised voice, Lauren's voice also becomes a cross-over of her voice and Mr. Tuttle's. It is certainly telling that DeLillo chooses a human like character, Mr. Tuttle, as opposed to simply using a tape-recorder to create a haunting presence. Mr. Tuttle reflects the obscure line between the human and the technological; and as Lauren also uses a voice that is not her own, DeLillo foregrounds the fluidity and multiple-identities of the human voice. Mr. Tuttle and Lauren are not completely different, for there is something inherently prosthetic about the mutability of the human voice. Thus, it is useful to use Tajiri's

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<sup>131</sup> Tajiri 142.

<sup>132</sup> *The Body Artist* 36.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> DeLillo, *The Body Artist* 100.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

connection between the prosthetic and the idea of exteriority. Similar to the Beckettian use of exteriority in *The Unnamable*'s narrator's voice, DeLillo shows that there is already a quality of irregularity in the human voice that mirrors the technologies of sound reproduction.

A closer look at *The Body Artist* also reveals another dimension to prosthesis and technology. Not only does Mr. Tuttle resemble a tape-recorder, but he also reflects characteristics of wireless technology. In addition to reproducing both Lauren's and Reys' voices, Mr. Tuttle repeats the exact words of their past conversations. Mr. Tuttle's ability to replicate sound makes him a representation of a human-recorder, perceived by critics as yet another example of dehumanization in DeLillo's work. Yet, a closer look at the story reveals another dimension to Mr. Tuttle's character, linking him to technologies that go beyond merely a tape-recorder or Dictaphone. I will argue that Mr. Tuttle's 'uncanny' presence, his unusual use of language and his apparent real time communication with Rey, resonate with the transmissions of wireless communication.

The fact that Rey is actually dead is in sharp contrast with the life that Mr. Tuttle brings back to Rey. Lauren sees Mr. Tuttle as a cartoon head and body, but "he knew how to make her husband live through air to sounds, sounds to words."<sup>136</sup> When Mr. Tuttle speaks to Lauren in Rey's voice, Lauren sees it as "not some communication with the dead. It was Rey alive in the course of a talk he'd had with her."<sup>137</sup> Mr. Tuttle is not merely a tape-recorder, and when he does show evidence of an instantaneous communication he takes the story to another more intense level. Moreover, Mr. Tuttle's very nature constitutes a major ambiguity. Mr. Tuttle resembles a ghostly figure. Yet, he does have a body, a corporeality, and thus wavers between the material and the supernatural. When Lauren thinks about where Mr. Tuttle came from, "she amused herself by thinking he'd come from cyberspace, a man who'd

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<sup>136</sup> *The Body Artist* 62

<sup>137</sup> *The Body Artist* 61

emerged from her computer screen in the dead of night. He was from Kotka, in Finland.”<sup>138</sup> Indeed, Mr. Tuttle could have come from anywhere. The links that tie him to that place are invisible, and his presence in her life is pervasive. These invisible links make Mr. Tuttle’s form of communication similar to that of the wireless. The wireless, or *La Radia*,<sup>139</sup> is an appropriate metaphor for Futurism.<sup>140</sup>

Unlike the phonograph, telephone, or telegraph system, which require connecting wires or cables to maintain the communicative link, the wireless receives and transmits its signal through the air without any visible connecting links.<sup>141</sup>

Thus, while he certainly can be associated with a dictaphone, it is important to consider the supernatural element in his existence, that ties him to more instantaneous communication. Moreover, Mr. Tuttle exemplifies ‘mediums’ that were used in the past to connect with spirits in the ‘seances.’ Perhaps the best way to describe Mr. Tuttle is a materialized medium,<sup>142</sup> a corporeal being who materializes a process of communicating with the dead that would otherwise be intangible. An example of materializing mediums is best described as a body that is used as “a porous vehicle for the phenomena, which exuded from all orifices-nose, breast, ears, navel, vagina.<sup>143</sup> The ‘mediums’ “occupied the role of transmitter, in an analogous fashion to the wireless receiver, catching cosmic rays whose vibrations produced intelligible phantoms and presences.”<sup>144</sup>

When Mr. Tuttle begins to repeat what Rey says during his last night with Lauren, Lauren perceives this repetition as something more:

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<sup>138</sup> Joe Milutis, “Radiophonic Ontologies and the Avantgarde,” *TDR*, 40.3 (1996): 70.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Marina Warner, *Phantasmagoria : Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media in the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford UP : Oxford, 2006) 300.

<sup>143</sup> Warner 300

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

This is what the man was saying in the doorway, looking small and weak, beat down by something. It did not seem an act of memory. It was Rey's voice all right...It is happening now. This is what she thought.<sup>145</sup>

In this scene, Lauren perceives Mr. Tuttle as a 'live' transmission of voice. She lives this scene, not as a memory, or a past experience, but as a present happening. It becomes so real to her that she feels, "Rey is alive now in this man's mind."<sup>146</sup> The discrepancy that defines phonograph and radio communication, differentiates between Rey's voice as recorded, and Rey's voice as a radio transmission:

The phonograph had allowed us for the first time in history to hear the dead speak; now the radio was letting us speak to the dead in real time. Perhaps, our mechanical apparatuses for the multiplication, amplification and transmission of sound have begun to give a voice to the impersonal dead, to the dead world of matter. Is noise the medium of a new animism?<sup>147</sup>

By allowing what seems to be a real time communication with Rey, Mr. Tuttle enables an experience where, not only is sound transmitted, but is also felt, physically. The power of this voice is so great that it overcomes her body: "Her skin was electric. She saw herself crawling toward him. She feels something has separated, softly come unfixed, and she tries to pull him down to the floor with her."<sup>148</sup>

Mr. Tuttle's voice embodies yet another characteristic of a 'radio-body,' the possibility of a disturbance. In several instances in the novella, Mr. Tuttle's body shows the difficulty of speaking. He seems to struggle to speak. The agitation and vibrations that Mr. Tuttle experiences as he struggles to speak reflect the linguistic disturbances that were associated with the voices from the ether.

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<sup>145</sup> *The Body Artist* 87

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Connor "Noise."

<sup>148</sup> *The Body Artist* 88

He sat hunched speaking toward the device, sometimes into it, seemingly to it, with it, just he and it, and when he stopped cold between constructions, his mouth continued to vibrate slightly, a shadow movement that resembled an old person's tremor of reflex or agitation.<sup>149</sup>

Mr. Tuttle's embodiment and communication of a dead voice is part of a larger context where technology has obviously become prominent. Whether it was the internet that Lauren uses to watch a street in Finland, the telephone, the answering machine, or the tape recorder, technology is obviously an important part of this story. This may help explain a connection between the Mr. Tuttle's difficulty in communicating in world pervaded by the impediments of technological transmissions. Similar to the juxtaposition of the prosthetic and 'human voice' in *Underworld*, DeLillo juxtaposes two seemingly different characters to portray the essential similarity between them. There is something inherently prosthetic about the fluidity of Lauren's tone of voice; Mr. Tuttle's character merely enunciates the already monstrous nature of the 'human' voice.

### ***White Noise's Acoustic Narrative***

Thus far I have juxtaposed examples of the disembodied voice with examples of the embodied voice in *Underworld* and *The Body Artist* in an attempt to show the inherent connection between the two types of voices. DeLillo, far from asserting a boundary between what is considered a 'natural' voice and a prosthetic voice, portrays the strangeness of the technological voice as symbolic of the human voice's intrinsic instability. Similar to a voice manipulated by audio technology, DeLillo finds the human voice as always already accountable for a non-coincidence with one's self; and it is because the human voice is a

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<sup>149</sup>The Body Artist 65.



benign monster that it breaks down the dichotomy between what is natural and what is not. It is always on the threshold, never entirely interior or exterior, challenging any attempt to define it.

Maintaining a similar argument, I will now consider how voice figures in *White Noise*. However, there are a few differences to consider, including Jack's narrative voice and the aspect of voice's spatiality, that I will use to add another dimension to this reading. The radio is central to Jack's narrative voice; its presence in *White Noise* is often spoken about. It enhances the feeling of an uncanny presence and seems to be a continuous point of interest to the characters, relating the narrative voice to the concept of exteriority. In a conversation between Jack and his son Heinrich about the radio, it becomes evident that they hold conflicting views. "What is a radio?"<sup>150</sup> Jack responds to this with a logical explanation: "There's no mystery. Powerful transmitters send signals. They travel through the air, to be picked up by receivers."<sup>151</sup> Unconvinced, Heinrich questions this explanation: "They travel through the air. What, like birds? Why not magic? They travel through air in magic waves."<sup>152</sup> Jack's opinion that "there is no mystery"<sup>153</sup> is based upon what seems to be a logical explanation of how a radio actually works.

Though Gladney refuses to accept any uncanny description of disembodied voice, he is constantly aware of the ability of this voice to permeate his everyday life. In *White Noise*, the disembodied voice does not merely infiltrate Gladney's home, but it seems to communicate with Gladney's narrative voice; it constitutes a part of the dialogue usually not commented upon by Gladney. This is what is particularly telling about these intrusive radio and other disembodied voices; they do not seem completely external to the narrative voice

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<sup>150</sup> *White noise*, 148

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

nor are they explicitly a part of it. We are actually told by Gladney that the source of these voices are not Gladney himself. In a conversation with Babbette, Gladney says “The TV said: ‘Now we will put the little feelers on the butterfly.’”<sup>154</sup> Once again, Gladney does not comment on this voice. Though it is ‘external,’ from the television, it seems such an intrinsic part of the dialogue, a part of the narrative voice itself that makes it unnecessary to comment on it. Similar to the manner in which Mr. Tuttle communicates Rey’s voice, through what could be interpreted as wireless transmissions, Jack’s voice carries a story through such broadcasts. The narrative is constantly interrupted by a distant voice from a television or a radio: “Someone turned on the TV set at the end of the hall, and a woman’s voice said: ‘If it breaks easily into pieces, it is called shale. When wet, it smells like clay.’”<sup>155</sup> As this example shows, the person who turns on the television and the person who speaks the words is not relevant to Jack. What he cites is the actual voice from a distance, that he never fails to ignore, giving it significant presence in the narrative even when it seems out of context or simply intrusive. I will now focus on how DeLillo’s choice of a first person narrative, one disturbed by radio or television in the background or a distant person muttering random words, reflects wireless communication. At the end of one of Jack and Murray’s walks, Murray asks Jack, “A person spends his life saying good-bye to other people. How does he say good-bye to himself?”<sup>156</sup> Afterwards, Jack throws away various things, rummaging through various things at his house, “discarding used bars of soap (and) damp towels.”<sup>157</sup> The episode then suddenly drifts to a voice that cannot be directly attributed to Jack: “Please

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<sup>154</sup> *White Noise* 96.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> *White Noise* 294.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

Note. In several days, your new automated banking card will arrive in the mail. (...) Reveal your code to no one. Only your code allows you to enter the system.”<sup>158</sup>

This example merges Jack’s voice with what seems to be an external, automated voice. However, we are not told exactly where this voice is from, but are left to deduce that these are not Jack’s own words. Hence, Jack’s voice, like Mr. Tuttle’s, is both human and mechanical, representative of the character, but also of a technology that defines it as prosthetic. In *White Noise*, DeLillo uses the first- person narrative to illustrate the intrinsic connection between humans and technology. Narrative techniques have been influenced by the connection between technology and the séances:

The wireless had brought the acoustic presence of a person, living, but impalpable, into everyday experience [...] Techniques such as stream of consciousness in fiction and voice-over in film represented the perceived acoustic vitality of the ether. As in a photograph, somebody could be there and not there at the same time.<sup>159</sup>

There are significant differences between the narrative voice in Beckett’s *Unnamable* and *White Noise*, namely the narrator’s ability in *The Unnamable* to comment upon his own voice, or to hear himself speak,<sup>160</sup> and the names that are ascribed to these voices. However, both narratives represent the idea of a “mechanically reproduced voice,”<sup>161</sup> one that “is dislodged from its origin.”<sup>162</sup>

Devices such as the tape recorder and telephone remove a voice from its origin and create distance or exteriority in the voice, which is normally assumed to be fully present to the subject in the ‘logocentric’ tradition of Western thought.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> *White Noise* 295

<sup>159</sup> Warner 273.

<sup>160</sup> Tajiri 142.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

The relationship between wireless technology and the narrative is also evident in sets of words that appear, ambiguously, and briefly. *White Noise*, overall a first person narrative by Jack Gladney, is disrupted by “mantras,” “slogans,” or words that seem to float into the text, interrupting what would otherwise be a steady first person narrative. In “Lust Removed from Nature,” Michael Valdez Moses refers to such “mantras” and “advertising slogans”: “DeLillo himself does not place these consumerist mantras in quotation marks, and he steadfastly refuses to identify their source. (It is clear that these incursions cannot be directly credited to Jack Gladney’s narrative voice.”<sup>164</sup> However, it is equally possible to assume that these floating words are neither ‘internal’ nor external’, they are a part of the narrative voice, but not originating from within that voice. Jack seems to act as a ‘transmitter’ communicating words from another realm.

Such an analysis may, understandably, lead to the conclusion that DeLillo depicts voice as disembodied. Certainly, the apparently sourceless mantras and the distant amplified voices exemplify the technological advancements that have separated the body from the voice. Additionally, critics have acknowledged the loss of speech, or as Laura Barrett argues, “speech has all but vanished in the novel’s last chapter.”<sup>165</sup> According to Barrett, spoken language cannot enable a “communication with the dead,”<sup>166</sup> while “the language of waves and radiation” holds such a “promise.”<sup>167</sup> The mystical and transcendental is often attributed to this “language of waves and radiation” by DeLillo himself: “There’s something nearly mystical about certain words and phrases that float through our lives.”<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Michael Valdez Moses, “Lust Removed from Nature,” *Critical Essays on White Noise*, (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1991) 64.

<sup>165</sup> Laura Barrett, “How the Dead Speak to the Living: Intertextuality and the Postmodern Sublime in *White Noise*,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 25.2 (2001-2002): 113.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Adam Begley, “Don DeLillo: The Art of Fiction.” *Paris Review*, 135 (1993).

Yet, the presence of the mystical in *White Noise* is not equivalent to an absence of materiality, for Jack's narrative is constantly engaged in bodily descriptions; whether it is Jack's description of Murray's manner of speech, "the more you talk the sneakier you look,"<sup>169</sup> or "his grin beginning to take on a self-satisfied look, reflecting some inner calculation,"<sup>170</sup> there seems to be a tension between such corporeal definitions of the body and Jack's statements or experiences that imply an obsolescence of the body. When Jack and Babette share their fears of death, Jack says: "I have no body. I'm only a mind or a self, alone in a vast space."<sup>171</sup> Considering the meticulous descriptions of other characters' facial expressions, one is aware of the importance of corporeality, even as characters deny it. Yet, critics often dismiss this by suggesting that Jack is the modernist in the novel, focused on the material aspect of embodiment. According to such an interpretation of the text, the body is a figure of the past. The postmodern present and future lie in the external buzz of white noise. DeLillo criticism has extensively addressed parallels between technology and death. Kavadlo's essay on *White Noise* offers a slightly different approach, where he acknowledges the potentially life changing role of the body's mortality; he argues that Jack "having realized that death is more palpable than a screen full of data and as concrete as a boy nearly run over by a car [...] may be ready to change."<sup>172</sup>

Taking a cue from Kavadlo, I will argue that DeLillo also depicts voice as "more palpable"<sup>173</sup> than a sound detached from a body. To examine how materiality relates to the voice in the novel, I will begin with Jack's attachment to Hitler studies and the German language. He is often perceived as trying to hide in the shadow of Hitler studies, especially

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<sup>169</sup> *White Noise* 80.

<sup>170</sup> *White Noise* 80.

<sup>171</sup> *White Noise* 198.

<sup>172</sup> Kavadlo 24.

<sup>173</sup> Kavadlo 24.

given that he is “attracted to Hitler’s looming legacy, the sheer excess.”<sup>174</sup> Moreover, Jack attempts to compare himself to Hitler’s own experience with German:

Wasn’t Hitler’s own struggle to express himself in German the crucial subtext of his massive ranting autobiography (...) Grammar and syntax. The man may have felt himself imprisoned in more ways than one.”<sup>175</sup>

As the following examples will show, DeLillo uses the German language to foreground the corporeality of voice. DeLillo’s text wavers between embodiment and disembodiment; this is not merely a case of Jack’s modernist view or the particular attention he pays to other characters’ bodies. Through depicting these states where characters experience an internal monstrosity or a “foreign body within the body,” DeLillo seems to suggest the body’s presence as unavoidable. The aura of a simulated world, with its varieties, its mysteries, its ability to displace voice, does not outdo the body’s already natural capacity to fragment an individual and to enable an internal experience of multiplicity. This is especially evident in Mr. Dunlop, Jack’s German language teacher.

Though Dunlop’s role in *White Noise* seems less important than others, he is the Lenny Bruce of the novel. The comical, yet striking manner in which he is described, is another significant reminder of embodied voice and the parallels between the human body and telecommunication. Amid a world of disembodied voice and fluid communication is an obstruction, embedded in the physical and lexical images of the encounters with Dunlop. When Jack, as chair of the Hitler department, decides he should finally learn German and “confront the German tongue,”<sup>176</sup> Murray recommends Mr. Dunlop. DeLillo’s sentence structure and the focus he places upon the tongue echoes Joyce’s use of body organs as

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<sup>174</sup> Kavadlo 24

<sup>175</sup> *White Noise*

<sup>176</sup> *White Noise* 80.

grammatical subjects. We find lexical onomatopoeia that ascertains the very vivid description of the physical and monstrous nature of this tongue. More importantly, Jack describes the German tongue as he would a character, and gives it the precedence of a grammatical subject. Like the various examples of lips “beyond the reach of a mastering self”<sup>177</sup> in *Ulysses*, the German tongue is a monstrous subject.

Jack’s main problem with German is pronunciation. The intensity and difficulty associated with pronouncing German words, makes German a suitable language to exemplify embodied voice. When Dunlop attempts to teach Jack how to pronounce words, it is very intimidating, especially when he uses his hand to “adjust”<sup>178</sup> Jack’s tongue, an act of “haunting intimacy.”<sup>179</sup> It is also reminiscent of earlier forms of teaching language to the deaf, where the tongue was seen as a possible audible supplement to physical gestures.

One telling parallel between this German tongue and earlier fiction, is Edgar Allen Poe’s short story “Valdemar’s Tongue.” In Poe’s story, the narrator, a mesmerist, hypnotises Valdemar, a man who is near death. At one point where Valdemar is in his “mesmeric trance,” the narrator describes a monstrous image of Valdemar’s mouth, where his open mouth is “widely extended (...) disclosing in full view the swollen and blackened tongue.”<sup>180</sup> Vibrating abruptly and rapidly, the tongue begins to speak to the narrator. Adam Frank suggests an insightful reading of Valdemar’s tongue as a manifestation of electromagnetic telegraphy. This “figure,” the tongue, is “estrang[e]d] ...to render telegraphy’s acoustic experiences as a manipulative, violent touch.”<sup>181</sup>

What is particularly relevant about Frank’s reading of Valdemar’s tongue is the connection he makes between Poe’s portrayal of this vibrating tongue and ‘disgust’.

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> *White Noise* 70.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Adam Frank, “Valdemar’s Tongue, Poe’s Telegraphy,” *ELH* 72.3 (2005): 652.

<sup>181</sup> Frank 637.

According to Frank, “disgust foregrounds the indexicality of telegraphic communication by coordinating sound (as well as sight, in depictions of Valdemar's voice and face) to a forceful touch.”

Similarly, the presence of disgust in DeLillo seems to make the auditory strangely tactile. What is even more memorable to the reader than Mr. Dunlop's eccentric character is the very monstrous image of the tongue, “[f]leshy, warped, spit-spraying, purplish and cruel.”<sup>182</sup> DeLillo's alienating portrayal of the German tongue reflects the extent to which the body itself exhibits the disconcerting effects of technologically mediated or disembodied voice:

When he switched from English to German, it was as though a cord had been twisted in his larynx. An abrupt emotion entered his voice, a scrape and gargle that sounded like the stirring of some beast's ambition. He gaped at me and gestured, he croaked, he verged on strangulation. Sounds came spewing from the base of his tongue, harsh noises damp with passion.

Not only does this example draw the reader's attention to an essential organ in sound production, it simultaneously reflects the peculiarity of the human body. When this “switch” between languages occurs and Dunlop's larynx is portrayed as an instrument, it creates a defamiliarizing effect; the larynx, also known as the “voice box” seems less natural and more prosthetic. It is almost as though Dunlop has a prosthetic voice-box, one inserted in his throat to give him the ability to speak; but, we as readers are not given any indication that this is actually the case. Instead, it is made clear that “it was as though,” further emphasizing the naturalness of this prosthetic quality of Dunlop's voice. Despite references to the ‘scrape’, ‘gargle’, and ‘chord’, DeLillo does not project Dunlop's character as simply mechanical. The voice, “damp with passion,” is equally human.

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<sup>182</sup> Frank 657.



It is important to note Jack's failure to learn the German language leaves him intimidated and weakened at the conference. He feels "feeble in their presence, death prone, listening to them produce their guttural sounds, their words, their heavy metal." Unlike the general attitude towards speech as signifying mortality, in this example, the German's speech is powerful; it is Jack's inability to say anything but "mutter a random monosyllable, rock with empty laughter," that leaves him at risk. The body's multiplicity, its ability to encompass a variety of voices, does not mean it is beyond limitations. Learning a new language is similar to attempts to develop speech technologies, to help those who have lost their speech. Jack's attempts to mimic Dunlop, to mirror his facial expressions, do not lead him to a fluency in German. Instead, with such proximity to the nature of the German language, he is only capable of glimpsing what it would actually be like to speak with such intensity and concreteness, but never actually reaches a state where he is capable of doing so. Perhaps Jack's real problem is his misguided understanding of what 'natural' human speech should be like. It is also the current and on-going problem of trying to make technology more 'natural,' as reflected in company ads that claim to have the best prosthetic voice devices, with the more 'natural' human voice, something less robotic. Humans have created prosthetic voices, like the one that speaks to Steffie on the telephone, but, simultaneously, are always in search for ways to make the voice more 'human.' In searching for this 'natural' human voice, we may mistakenly be led to believe that there is something purely human that defines our own.

It is useful to look at a moment in the history of the séances to illustrate how technology can be utilized as a means of returning to the body. The connection between the séances and *White Noise* serves as a significant explanation for the hovering presence of disembodied voice. Yet, even in the history of the séances, communication with the dead was

“recorporealized.” According to Connor, in the history of the séances, as the séances began to exhibit the “ghostliness”<sup>183</sup> of the technologically disembodied voice, there was a corresponding attempt to recorporealize the voice.<sup>184</sup>

In the twentieth-century, the threat to the voice’s corporeality led spiritualists to utilizing techniques that would “give voice back to the body and the body back to the voice.”<sup>185</sup> Thus, the very spiritualism that made use of such technologies, even adding to their “ghostliness” was also asserting the “materiality, the manipulability, the *technicality* of the unseen.”<sup>186</sup> It is this simultaneity that can explain voice in *White Noise*, both the ghostliness and materiality of voice, and the recognition that one does not necessarily eliminate the other.

Even in some of the potentially subliminal moments in *White Noise*, the body is present; the language used recorporealizes what would otherwise seem to be a completely disembodied state.

When Jack is “lost” in Wilder’s crying, the description of his “loss” incorporates the body’s response to Wilder’s “large and pure” crying.

When Jack describes the crying, he begins with the disembodied image of the sound as “wave on wave.”<sup>187</sup> However, this sound becomes a form of touch as it “washed over”<sup>188</sup> Jack like rain. He “entered it in a sense. (He) let it fall and tumble across (his) face and chest.”<sup>189</sup> Wilder’s pervasive crying constructs a space that surrounds Jack: “I entered it, fell into it, letting I enfold and cover me.”<sup>190</sup> This is similar to the description of Lauren in *The Body*

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<sup>183</sup> Connor 392.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> *White Noise* 78.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

*Artist*: “She wanted to feel the sea tang on her face and the flow of time in her body, to tell her who she was.”<sup>191</sup> Kavadlo argues that “(i)n keeping, DeLillo concludes the novella with a call to the body, a call that Win Everett and (perhaps) Jack Gladney never hear,”<sup>192</sup> though he does acknowledge in an earlier chapter that Jack’s encounter with Mink, where he sees blood and a real near death experience, indicates that Jack “may be ready to change.”<sup>193</sup>

While I agree that, indeed, the novel gives the possibility of change, though it does not end on a note of a “call to the body,” I would add that Wilder’s crying is also a “call to the body,” often treated merely as a transcendental cry or a return to a pre-linguistic state; Wilder’s crying is more than this. It is a call that shows the technological nature of the sound of crying as it engulfs Jack in its own space. Wilder’s crying is similar to the noise that Lauren hears in her house. The noise is ‘intimate’ and occupies a ‘space.’ It becomes a “bubble,” like a sound through headphones: “headphones create a mobile and continually changing architecture that follows the listener, wrapping him or her in a private bubble.”<sup>194</sup> DeLillo could have easily described this “bubble” without including the body’s material response to Wilder’s crying; however, the intensity of this experience emanates from the interaction between the body and sound that materializes sound. Even DeLillo’s depiction of penetrating sound, that I have compared to the experience of headphones, establishes the impossibility of infiltrating the body, without actually “breaking” into it; sound becomes touch, and Jack embodies a sensational experience that denies technology any chance of bypassing the body.

In *White Noise*, generally, we find a juxtaposition of the embodied and disembodied sound or voice, as opposed to a binary opposition. As Kavadlo notes, “DeLillo suggests that

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<sup>191</sup> *Body Artist* 70.

<sup>192</sup> Kavadlo 152.

<sup>193</sup> Kavadlo 39.

<sup>194</sup> “From Stethoscopes to Headphones: An Acoustic Spatialization of Subjectivity,” *Leonardo Music Journal* 17 (2007): 57.

we must understand the relationship and overlap between dichotomies if we want to perceive the world in full.”<sup>195</sup> Mink’s character defines this “overlap” as “the embodiment of white noise.”<sup>1</sup> When Jack imagines Mink, he always sees him as a composite, several interwoven bodies. Mink is described as “[g]ray-bodied, staticky, unfinished” with “the edges of his body flared with random distortions.”<sup>196</sup> The intensity of white noise is at its peak when Jack imagines Mink with Babbette:

I experienced aural torment. Heard them in their purling foreplay, the love babble and buzzing flesh. Heard the sloppings and smackings, the swash of wet mouths, gloom moved in around the gray-sheeted bed, a circle slowly closing.

Panasonic.<sup>197</sup>

The words “aural torment”<sup>198</sup> immediately signify an experience that would often be associated with the sense of touch or the physical. Instead, of a pain inflicted by someone else’s body, Jack refers to an acoustic suffering. As Jack imagines Babbette and Mink, words such “aural torment,”<sup>199</sup> “sloppings and and smackings”<sup>200</sup> may seem to be over-stated, or even comic, alluding to a media saturated world that shapes the language used to imagine and describe sex. Their dependence on pornography to initiate sex “overwhelms Jack and Babbette, draining the eroticism from their existence.”<sup>201</sup> Yet, even these exaggerated moments are not completely simulated, and we do, as readers sense the body’s presence. Wilcox describes this passage as representative of a “‘proteinic’ world of information.”<sup>202</sup> Gray is portrayed as a “televised image, a representative and embodiment of a postmodern

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<sup>195</sup> Kavadlo 152.

<sup>196</sup> *White Noise* 241.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Paul A. Contor, “Adolf, We Hardly Knew You,” *New Essays on White Noise*, 42.

<sup>202</sup> Leonard Wilcox, “Baudrillard, DeLillo’s *White Noise*, and the End of the Heroic Narrative,” *Don DeLillo’s White Noise*, ed. Harold Bloom (Broomall, PA: Chelsea House, 2003) 109.

informational world of networks and circuits.”<sup>203</sup> Certainly, the image of Gray corresponds to a televised image. However, there is a significant tension between the lexical onomatopoeia and this proteinic world. The coincidence of the phonetic and semantic properties of this statement entrenches the reader in the physical.

This is reminiscent of Joyce’s “Sirens,” where we find words such as “jingle,” “tink,” and “smack”.<sup>204</sup> The experience of lexical onomatopoeia is one of “*heightened meaning*.”<sup>205</sup> An example that Attridge uses that shows an intense physical image with a strong connection between the phonetic and the semantic is “thick syrupy liquor for his lips”. A reader’s interpretation of this image is affected by the intensely physical connotations of the “tautologically double adjective”<sup>206</sup> and the sexual implications of the lips in this context.<sup>207</sup> Similarly, the tautological verbs, “sloppings, smackings, swash” and the adjective “wet” emphasize the physicality of this image. Attridge suggests that the significance of lexical onomatopoeia does not lay in any direct correspondence between the phones and the words or actions implied; conversely, rather than focusing on the “referent,” the reader is made aware of the linguistic process, or “the materiality of language *as it does its work of bringing meaning into being*.”<sup>208</sup> Considering DeLillo’s own experimental use of language, this argument regarding linguistic onomatopoeia is telling. While this image eventually becomes “Panasonic,” as their mingling bodies gradually embody white noise, such tautological verbs and images, such as buzzing flesh, incorporate the body’s materiality. Thus, there is more to this image than an apparent loss of the body or networks and circuits.

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<sup>203</sup> Wilcox 109.

<sup>204</sup> Derek Attridge, *Peculiar Language: Literature as Difference from the Renaissance to James Joyce* (London: Routledge, 2004; 1988) 148.

<sup>205</sup> Attridge 150.

<sup>206</sup> Attridge 152.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Attridge 154.

Perhaps the most adept and thorough analysis of language and white noise in DeLillo's work is David Cowart's *Don DeLillo: The Physics of Language*. Cowart devotes a chapter to *White Noise*, where he addresses acoustics in light of Michel Serres's theory of multiplicity. In accordance with this theory, "the great tide of multiplicity"<sup>209</sup> of white noise is subversive to the "concepts" that Jack uses to distance himself from the fear of death.<sup>210</sup> White noise is unsettling in this respect, for it is not a "sum," or a sound; thus, we are not capable of synchronizing or conceptualizing this noise.<sup>211</sup> Indeed, white noise is an "all pervasive sound"<sup>212</sup> an indefinable buzz. However, which such repeated references to this external, overbearing noise, the body becomes merely a receptor, as the human is easily manipulated and affected by this external noise. Yet, a closer look at DeLillo's work necessitates a reconsideration of this defined relationship between the body and white noise. Additionally, the external multiplicity seems foreign to a body that does not portray such daunting diversity. This is too narrow a take on the question of the body, that leaves us with an overstated contrast between the human body and the technologically mediated voices that pervade the narrative.

To examine, the voice's monstrosity, I will use the title of Rée's chapter "A Voice of your own?" as a departure point. The question mark, a challenge to the assumption that we should, of course, have a voice of our own, is precisely what needs to be asked in this context; with criticism foregrounding disembodied voice as a postmodern form of dividing the individual, it seems to imply that at some point the voice was intrinsically unitary, a "stable"<sup>213</sup> characteristic of its speaker. Rée clearly argues the impossibility of this unitary

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<sup>209</sup> Cowart 83.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Cowart 84.

<sup>212</sup> Michel Serres quoted in *Don DeLillo: the Physics of Language*, 83.

<sup>213</sup> Jonathan Rée, *I See a Voice: Deafness, Language and the Senses—A Philosophical History* (NY: Flamingo, 2000) 70.

voice; he describes relaxed conversation style as “unfathomably various.”<sup>214</sup> Rée refers specifically to the example of oral story-tellers who imitate the voices of characters, arguing that “none of us speaks with just one voice, in short: not because we have a choice of two or three or ten, but because our voice does not contain any stable unities that can be counted on at all.”<sup>215</sup>

Babette exemplifies this while she is at the camp; she alters her voice when reading the front page-story “Life After Death Guaranteed with Bonus Coupons.”<sup>1</sup> Speaking in the voice of Dr.Chatterjee, “a warm and mellow Indian-accented English, with clipped phrasing”<sup>216</sup> and Patti “as a child-hero in a contemporary movie,”<sup>217</sup> Babette’s diverse voices show the human voice’s capacity to embody an other or others.

Thus, even at the very basic level of impersonating others, the voice resembles a multiplicity. This multiplicity is embodied, for we witness its speaker, and the voices emanate from his/her mouth, a realistic example of the more mysterious Mr. Tuttle who embodies Ray and Lauren’s voices. While the relationship between Mr. Tuttle and the dictaphone are far more explicit than what seems to be a commonplace example of a character imitating other voices, Babette’s story-telling voice simply reminds us of the already prosthetic and strange qualities of our own voice. Not only are our voices strange, but the vocal organs that produce these voices also represent this bodily multiplicity. Steffie is often described as repeating words or forming words she hears on television or in conversations. Basing his analysis on mimetic theory, Mathew Packer reads such repetitions as “social imitating in media culture.”<sup>218</sup> Jack’s narrative captures moments, where characters imitate “models” provided

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<sup>214</sup> Rée 70.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> *White Noise* 144.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Mathew J.Packer, ““At the Dead Center of Things” in Don DeLillo’s *White Noise* : Mimesis, Violence, and Religious Awe,” *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* (2005): 656.

by the media, that would otherwise be overlooked. When Steffie talks in her sleep, Jack watches her and likens the talk to a chant: “She uttered two clearly audible words, familiar and elusive at the same time, words that seemed to have a ritual meaning, part of a verbal spell or ecstatic chant. *Toyota CelicCa.*” Packer argues that this ecstatic chant reveals the unconscious as Marshall McLuhan defines it, as a ““a direct creation of print [and media] technology.”<sup>219</sup> Thus, according to Packer, DeLillo suggests that the “intrinsic self”<sup>219</sup> is a myth.

After the family returns home after spending time in a supermarket where the family indulges in purchasing gifts, where Jack is “inclined to be sweepingly generous,”<sup>220</sup> Jack, in another moment of observation, “watche(s) Steffie in front of the TV set. She moved her lips, attempting to match the words as they were spoken.”<sup>221</sup> Steffie’s body seems to be enhancing her experience, allowing a greater involvement of the senses. McLuhan’s interpretation of sensory interplay is as essential to DeLillo’s work as the idea of bodily extensions. When McLuhan discusses the telephone, he attributes peoples’ inclination to “doodle” while speaking on the telephone to the desire for a more complete sensory experience: “(s)ince the telephone offers a very poor auditory image, we strengthen and complete it by the use of all the other senses.”<sup>222</sup> A feeling of wholeness can only be restored through incorporating the other senses. We also find this desire to transform a word’s intangible sound to something that one can savour, when Heinrich pronounces the word Nyodine Derivative; Heinrich pronounces it with an “Unseemly relish, taking morbid delight in every sound.”<sup>223</sup> The vocabulary used to describe Heinrich’s manner shows several telling contradictions;

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<sup>219</sup> Packer 655.

<sup>220</sup> *White Noise* 84.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Marshal McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA: John Hopkins UP, 1996) 268

<sup>223</sup> *White Noise* 130



Heinrich's pleasure is actually quite gruesome to Jack. The words unseemly and morbid portray this speech as a kind of monstrous act; this is often the case in *White Noise*, speech changes the characters disposition.

This monstrosity is somehow related to the idea of the intrinsic in *White Noise*. While I agree that DeLillo does subvert the concept of the "intrinsic," Packer's approach seems to overlook the body, by focusing merely on the unconscious. Jack describes Steffie's tendency to repeat words that she hears, our attention is drawn to her lips or mouth. When she hears police sirens, Jack "watche(s) Steffie's lips form the sequence: *wow wow wow wow*."<sup>224</sup> "Steffie sees him watching her and "smile(s) in a certain way (...) as though gently startled out of some absent-minded pleasure."<sup>1</sup> The obvious non-lexical onomatopoeia in "*wow wow wow wow*". It is as though Steffie's lips are acting on their own, similar to the manner in which she speaks in her sleep. The reference to Steffie's lips, not to Steffie, reflects a Joycean manner of giving the body's organs a level of control, again exposing a bodily otherness, where voice, even in its embodied state, is the product of vocalic organs that do not seem to be a part of us, something that is not often the case in the English language:

The English language allows very little independence to the organs of the body: most verbs of conscious behaviour require a grammatical subject implying an undivided, masterful, efficient self of which the organ is mere slave or satellite.

When Heinrich, in his challenging tone, asks Steffie, "Did you ever really look at your eye?"<sup>225</sup> his question encompasses the critical attitude towards corporeality in DeLillo's novels. With so many major, overt themes, we never "really look" closely at other characters or instances that seem relatively minor. When critics do address incidents, such as Steffie's

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<sup>224</sup> *White Noise* 112.

<sup>225</sup> *White noise* 158

*Toyota Celia* or Wilder's crying, it is, yet again, to ascertain the already prevalent dominant approaches to the novel. Again, it is essential to acknowledge Kavadlo's illuminating reading of the texts that separates itself from the general oeuvre of DeLillo criticism; however, this study has not finalized our understanding of corporeality. In this chapter, I have drawn attention to the possibilities of sound theories in enriching our understanding of DeLillo. DeLillo, like Heinrich, suggests that "(t)here's this whole world right inside our own body."<sup>226</sup> Voice is, perhaps, a gateway to this world; DeLillo's texts suggest that postmodern alienation is not foreign to us, for we are bodies that embody multiplicity; as Connor suggests, our voices are never really our own.

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<sup>226</sup> *White Noise* 158

## Chapter 4

### Embodiment in Slow Motion:

#### *Cosmopolis, Falling Man, Point Omega*

*Cosmopolis* and *Falling Man* are often discussed together as fiction that exemplifies DeLillo's perspective after September 11. While both stories have different plots, they are similar in their approach to medical technology. It is this similarity that provides an opportunity for a different kind of analysis that is not only based on the tragedy of September 11. In *Cosmopolis*, the multi-billionaire Eric Packer experiences a dramatic day while his limousine moves across Manhattan. As Eric encounters a rapper's funeral and an anti-globalist protest, he contemplates his existence. The journey which begins because Eric wants a haircut on the West Side, ends in Eric awaiting his inevitable death. A man who works for Eric and monitors his every move eventually becomes his murderer. Throughout this journey we are given details of Eric's obsession with his well-being. He is surrounded with medical technology as well as screens to monitor the stock exchange. His body and his finances seem paramount to anything else.

In *Falling Man*, Keith is traumatized by his near-death experience on September 11. Though he survives the tragedy, a sense of alienation pervades his experiences with medical technology and practitioners. The three main characters, Keith, Lianne, and Lianne's mother Nina, are all in some way connected to medicine. Nina is dependent on prescribed medication, and Keith has to go to the hospital after being wounded. Meanwhile Lianne feels that she must get a medical-check up and is then sceptical of the results. Unlike DeLillo's previous novels, *Cosmopolis* received mixed reviews. For example, in a review for *The New Yorker*, John Updike described the novel as "physically cool, as sleek and silver-touched and

palely pure as a white stretch limo, which is in fact the action's main venue.”<sup>1</sup> Updike contrasts *Cosmopolis*'s unrealistic themes and scenes with the realism of the supermarket in *White Noise*. He suggests that in *White Noise* a reader can easily relate to the space and nature of the supermarket's atmosphere. However, according to Updike, this is not the case in *Cosmopolis*:

In “Cosmopolis,” implausibility reigns unchecked, mounting to a phantasmagoric funeral parade down Ninth Avenue for the Sufi rapper Burtha Fez; on parade are “the mayor and police commissioner in sober profile,” a dozen congressmen, “faces from film and TV,” foreign dignitaries, “figures of world religion in their robes, cowls, kimonos, sandals and soutanes,” break-dancers, nuns in full habit, and whirling dervishes.<sup>2</sup>

Regardless of the implausibility of such scenes, DeLillo's often deliberate exaggeration only emphasizes the futuristic cyber-capitalist theme and absurdity of the market. It does not in any way hinder our ability to become familiar with the text or to relate to its many themes, in particular medicine. On the contrary, the overstated images only enunciate the New York setting and the twenty-first century individual, enabling a much broader scope of interpretation.

Similar to the readings of *Cosmopolis*, several critics who addressed *Falling Man* have noted what is lacking in the novel, namely its limitations compared to *Underworld*. For instance, in his review for the *New York Times*, Michiko Kakutani describes the novel with several reservations:

Instead of capturing the impact of 9/11 on the country or New York or a spectrum of survivors or even a couple of interesting individuals, instead of illuminating the

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<sup>1</sup> John Updike, “One-Way Street: A new novel by Don DeLillo.” *The New Yorker*. March 31, 2003 web, June 5, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

zeitgeist in which 9/11 occurred or the shell-shocked world it left in its wake, Mr. DeLillo leaves us with two paltry images: one of a performance artist re-enacting the fall of bodies from the burning World Trade Center, and one of a self-absorbed man, who came through the fire and ash of that day and decided to spend his foreseeable future playing stupid card games in the Nevada desert.<sup>3</sup>

The novel focuses on a certain character and is not as eventful as other DeLillo novels. However, perhaps what is generally lacking in DeLillo criticism is an attempt to interpret the two novels without comparing them to some of DeLillo's more acclaimed texts, such as *White Noise* and *Underworld*. Additionally, the two novels are especially telling when considering the theme of medical technology. Critics have overlooked the prominence of medicine in DeLillo's literature; there certainly have been references to medicine or medical technologies, but critics have not yet given a thorough analysis of DeLillo's perspective on medicine. When considering the concept of embodiment, advanced medical technologies make DeLillo's attempt to foreground the body's corporeality even more problematic. Not only have these technologies transformed the body into codes and information, virtual diagnosis makes it possible to conduct a full diagnosis through computers, overlooking the physical examinations that had previously been indispensable. DeLillo's main concern in both novels is to examine characters' attitudes toward this substitution of humans with computers; even in the midst of the futuristic settings and the luxuries that the characters can afford, they continue to feel alienated from these technologies.

The characters are constantly engaged in the struggle between the disembodied threat of medical technology and the inescapable materiality of bodily pain. Drawing upon

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<sup>3</sup> Michiko Kakutani, "A Man a Woman, a Day of Terror," rev. of *Falling Man*, by Don DeLillo. *New York Times* (9 May 2007).

Sartre's work, I will address the relationship between medical imaging technologies and the objectification of the body and the extent to which these technologies affect the perception of the characters. Since medical representation in DeLillo, especially in terms of Baudrillard's perspective, has been thoroughly examined, I will focus instead on how *Cosmopolis* and *Falling Man* can be read as a dialogue with Sartre's theorisation of the lived-body. Throughout this thesis, I have engaged with perspectives on embodiment that critics have avoided, perhaps because these perspectives are phenomenological, giving emphasis to the corporeality of the body; it is also perhaps for this reason that critics have overlooked Sartre. Thus, I find that there is a need to briefly justify the use of Sartre in this chapter.

In Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1943), Sartre offers a complex definition of 'being,' distinguishing between various ontological levels. It is important to note that Sartre's ontological levels do not reflect a Cartesian split of body and soul; the levels characterize different modes of being, namely "being-in-itself,"<sup>4</sup> "being-for-itself,"<sup>5</sup> and "being-for-others."<sup>6</sup> Generally, Sartre distinguishes between 'being' as objective and 'existence' as a subjective state. Similar to Heidegger's concept that the body is defined through its "being-in-the-world,"<sup>7</sup> Sartre examines the relationship between the human body and its surroundings; these surroundings include objects, solid objects that lack a consciousness, and other human beings in "the midst of the world."<sup>8</sup> It is important to mention here that this idea of being in the world is also related to Merleau-Ponty's idea that we experience our consciousness through our bodies and that the flesh of the body and the flesh of the world are the same.

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<sup>4</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (1943; London: Routledge, 2003) 115.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

The second ontological dimension, the body-for-the-other, is the body as it is perceived by the Other.<sup>9</sup> Sartre establishes a connection between the two modes of being that distinguishes between being aware and being unaware of perception. When one is aware of being perceived by the Other, this creates a subject versus object dichotomy, where we view the Other as a “subject for whom [one is] the object.”<sup>10</sup> When one meets the Other’s look, the meeting brings about a new meaning to one’s ontological mode of being:

The shock of the encounter with the Other is for me a revelation in emptiness of the existence of my body outside as an in-itself for the Other. Thus my body is not given merely as that which is purely and simply lived; rather this ‘lived experience’ becomes- in and through the contingent, absolute fact of the Other’s existence- extended outside in a dimension of flight which escapes me. My body’s depth of being is for me this perpetual ‘outside’ of my most intimate ‘inside.’<sup>11</sup>

For Sartre, the sudden objectification of the body that occurs when one encounters the Other redefines the body; the body is no longer confined to one’s point of view or the meaning that one attributes to the body. The body becomes the body in the midst of the world. Thus, the Other’s look alienates one from his body as the body becomes “a tool-among-tools and sense-organ-apprehended-by-sense-organs, and this is accompanied by an alienating destruction and a concrete collapse of [one’s] world.”<sup>12</sup>

In addition to feeling objectified as a result of the encounter with the Other, our knowledge of our bodies is also defined by others. This is especially evident when considering the body’s internal organs that we have not and will not see and are known to us only through descriptions or images:

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<sup>9</sup> Sartre 353.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Sartre 352.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

For the body which I have just described is not my body such as it is *for me*. I have never seen and never shall see my brain nor my endocrine glands. But because I who am a man have seen the cadavers of men dissected, because I have read articles on physiology, I conclude that my body is constituted exactly like all those which have been shown to me on the dissection table or of which I have seen colored drawings on books.<sup>13</sup>

Sartre further explains how our knowledge of our bodies is influenced by our physicians. According to Sartre, “so far as the physicians have had any experience with my body, it was with my body in the *midst of the world* and as it is for others.”<sup>14</sup> His definition of the body in the midst of the world includes viewing one’s body through medical imaging technology, such as the image of vertebrae in a radiology.<sup>15</sup> He describes how he objectified his body while having a radiology, viewing his body “as a *this* among other *thisis*.”<sup>16</sup>

Though Sartre has given a thorough examination of the lived body, he is not often the critic associated with the theorization of the body. Katherine J. Morris addresses the general neglect of Sartre’s role in developing the theory of embodiment. To illustrate this, Morris refers to an example where a philosopher excludes Sartre, but labels La Mettrie, Diderot, Nietzsche and Foucault as leaders in “the bodily dimensions of human life,”<sup>17</sup> and Merleau-Ponty as “the patron saint of the body.”<sup>18</sup> Morris cites this neglect of Sartre as the main reason for writing her book, emphasizing that the significance of certain aspects of Sartre’s work must be acknowledged:

If Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of the body is deeper than Sartre’s in some

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<sup>13</sup> Sartre 303.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Katherine J. Morris, ed. *Sartre on the Body*, Philosophers in Depth (London: Palgrave, 2010) 4.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



respects (just for instance in his thematization of habits- relatively durable dispositions which have become ‘sedimented’ in the body through the repetition of actions), Sartre’s is far deeper in others (for instance, in his focus on the body’s lived awareness of being under the other’s objectifying gaze.)<sup>19</sup>

It is this awareness of the objectifying gaze that makes Sartre especially relevant to DeLillo’s fiction. Sartre’s ontological modes of being are significant to Packer who, I will argue, attempts to comprehend his being through the conflicting states of “being-in-itself” versus “being-for-itself.” Russell Scott Valentino argues that Packer experiences life both from the inside and the outside of his body. To distinguish between both experiences, he states that “on the one hand, Packer lives a life of thought divorced from body.”<sup>20</sup> However, Packer also “tests his body’s reality throughout the work, as if in compensation somehow for a tendency to find life outside it.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, when Packer intentionally experiences bodily pain, it is an attempt to create a balance between body and thought. Valentino analyses the significance of the crystal in Packer’s watch, commenting on Packer’s dubious use of technology. The crystal on his watch is at first a screen that he uses for finances and later becomes an electron camera where he sees himself in the future, a dead body on the floor. He argues that this example foregrounds how “the split between technologically mediated mind and the physical grounding of body must be seen as fundamental to Packer’s, and the book’s, exploration of meaning and mortality, a recurrent theme in DeLillo’s opus.”<sup>22</sup>

Valentino makes a valid point regarding Packer’s quest for a technologically mediated world beyond the physical body, a quest which he then seems to counter with pain. However, Packer does not experience a simple dichotomy of consciousness versus the body; instead, he

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Russell Scott Valentino, “From Virtue to Virtual: DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis* and the Corruption of the Absent Body,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 53.1(2007): 146.

<sup>21</sup> Valentino 147.

<sup>22</sup> Valentino 146.

experiences his body in the midst of his surroundings. Sartre describes the “problem of the body,”<sup>23</sup> a point that is especially relevant to Packer’s dilemma, differentiating between how the body is understood from the outside as opposed to its own inner intuition:

The problem of the body and its relations with consciousness is often obscured by the fact that while the body is from the start posited as a certain thing having its own laws and capable of being defined from outside, consciousness is then reached by the type of inner intuition which is peculiar to it. Actually if after grasping ‘my’ consciousness in its absolute interiority and by a series of reflective acts, I then seek to unite it with a certain living object composed of a nervous system, a brain, glands, digestive, respiratory, and circulatory organs whose very matter is capable of being analyzed chemically into atoms of hydrogen, carbon, nitrogen, phosphorous, etc. Then I am going to encounter insurmountable difficulties.<sup>24</sup>

According to Sartre, these difficulties stem from the fact that the world has defined the body for us. Since we have not seen our own brain or endocrine glands, we know what they look like from drawings or articles that explain to us the nature of our bodies.

In *Cosmopolis*, when Eric watches gulls wobbling downriver, he notes that “they had large strong hearts.”<sup>25</sup> He knows this because he was “interested once and had mastered the teeming details of bird anatomy.”<sup>26</sup> He learned that birds have hollow bones. As he watches the birds for a while longer, he starts “thinking into it, trying to know the bird, feeling the sturdy earnest beat of the scavenger’s ravenous heart.”<sup>27</sup> Though this does not refer to human anatomy, this example, nevertheless, coincides with Sartre’s ideas; there is a difference between knowing a body because one learns about it, and knowing the body as an intuitive, corporeal experience; the gull has a large strong heart, but that is not the same as feeling the

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<sup>23</sup> Sartre 303.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> *Cosmopolis* 7.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

beat of that heart. The learning experience is in the midst of the world while the latter is purely bodily, in-itself.

Not only is Packer ahead of his time, he is also a thinker, and his trip across Manhattan is a kind of self-exploration where he ponders the various modes of being. Packer experiences a significant internal conflict as he attempts, but fails, to reach a state where he is consciousness separated from his body. He also fails to be wholly body, or a “being-in-itself,” without consciousness. This conflict is exemplified when Dr. Nevius does Packer’s physical check-up and Packer begins to experience an overwhelming pain:

The pain was local but seemed to absorb everything around it, organs, objects, street sounds, words. It was a point of hellish perception that was steady-state, unchanging in degree, and not a point at all but some bundled other brain, a counter-consciousness, but not that either, located at the base of his bladder. He operated from within. He could think and speak of other things but only within the pain. He was living in the gland, in the scalding fact of his biology.<sup>28</sup>

During this encounter with Dr. Nevius, Packer seems close to attaining a state where he is a “being-in-itself”; however, even in this state of extreme pain, he does not overcome his consciousness. In this passage, DeLillo’s dialogue with Sartre surfaces. Packer’s pain engages all his senses to the extent that he believes that there is another “brain or a counter-consciousness.”<sup>29</sup> However, we are immediately told that it is not a counter-consciousness. Although he feels that he is operating from within, he still thinks and speaks of other things, from within the pain. He analyses his pain. Thus, he cannot merely ‘be’ his pain.

This passage is quite telling because it reflects the difficulty that Sartre suggests arises when a human attempts to define him or herself as a “being-in-itself,” an ontological level

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<sup>28</sup> *Cosmopolis* 50.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

that is unattainable for a conscious being. According to Sartre, one's body as a "being-in-itself"<sup>30</sup> is simply the body as it is, or in Sartre's words, "I exist my body."<sup>31</sup> Sartre argues that man is never what 'he is' because "he exists as a consciousness of being."<sup>32</sup> To illustrate this, he considers the example of a waiter at a café. The waiter's mannerisms and gestures reflect "a kind of automaton while carrying his tray with the recklessness of a tight-rope-walker by putting it in a perpetually unstable, perpetually broken equilibrium, which he re-establishes by a light movement of the arm and hand."<sup>33</sup> Sartre defines these actions as mechanisms and emphasizes that the waiter is "playing."<sup>34</sup> This means that the waiter's persona is a representation; the waiter cannot simply 'be' a waiter like a solid object such as a glass is a glass. The waiter cannot exist in a mode of being-in-itself, but he can only "play at being him."<sup>35</sup> Thus, because the waiter is a conscious being, "he is a representation for others and for [himself] which means that he can only be [a waiter] in representation."<sup>36</sup> Only a solid object can be defined as a "being-in-itself."<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, only a conscious being can be defined as a "being-for-itself."<sup>38</sup> Sartre defines the "being-for-itself"<sup>39</sup> as the "nihilation of-being-in-itself."<sup>40</sup> Thus, Sartre's framework is especially relevant to Packer's situation, because it enables us to understand how Packer's struggle unfolds; and as further examples will show, we also begin to comprehend the implications this has on Packer's embodiment.

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<sup>30</sup> Sartre 60.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

As Packer watches Burtha Fez's funeral, he is struck by the image of the devishes dancing and whirling to Fez's music. He thinks of them as "spinning out of their bodies [...] toward the end of all possessions."<sup>41</sup> As he thinks more about these movements, he considers a completely immaterial state, the possibility of the dancers whirling until their flesh disappears. Toward the end of the novel, the narrator tells us that he had "always wanted to become quantum dust, transcending his body mass, the soft tissue over the bones, the muscle and fat."<sup>42</sup> By transcending these body parts, he would be capable of living "outside the given limits, in a chip, on a disk, as data, in whirl, in radiant spin, a consciousness saved from void."<sup>43</sup> As he ponders this idea of disembodiment, Eric thinks of it as "the natural next step."<sup>44</sup> At first he thinks it would not actually happen. However, he then thinks it is actually already happening, "an evolutionary advance that needed only the practical mapping of the nervous system into digital memory."<sup>45</sup> It is not surprising that Packer would think this way, given that he is constantly surrounded by medical technologies that monitor his health and transform his bodily functions into dots and graphs on a screen. Moreover, he is part of a culture that is obsessed with the limitations of the body's materiality. It is from the midst of this culture that his struggle emerges.

I will now reflect on the implications of this culture in the novel's context. Self-help books, spiritual products, mantras, and advertisements emphasize that stress is a condition that needs to be healed and that the body needs to be relieved of its pain.<sup>46</sup> We must be guided by the marketing principles of this capitalist commercialisation of de-stressing in

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<sup>41</sup> *Cosmopolis* 138.

<sup>42</sup> *Cosmopolis* 206

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Cosmopolis* 207.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Jeremy Carrette and Richard King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* (Routledge: London, 2005).

order to feel balanced.<sup>47</sup> In *Cosmopolis*, the old Chinese man giving a woman acupuncture massage, Packer's attempts to meditate, and the Sufi rapper's funeral, are all examples of such commercialised spirituality. According to Jeremy Karrette and Richard King, "from feng shui to holistic medicine, from aromatherapy candles to yoga weekends, from Christian mystics to New Age gurus, spirituality is big business."<sup>48</sup> The idea of personal development, found in literature of the mind, body, and spirit, has become increasingly popular.<sup>49</sup> This is an idea that is certainly pertinent to *Cosmopolis*. As Eric's limousine moves across Manhattan on his journey to get a hair-cut, his last day shows his interest in his body and the market; the limousine is equipped with the latest technologies to monitor his body's functions and the money market, particularly the rise of the Yen. Eric is obsessed with his body and all its functions, constantly monitoring it and often searching for meaning in unnecessary details such as an asymmetrical prostate. Similarly, he insists on finding meaning and a pattern to an inexplicable rise in the Yen, though there appears to be no reason.

A close analysis of these similarities reveals the extent to which Eric's character exemplifies a culture of hypochondria, where an individual is obsessed with well-being and the body, though this obsession is unreasonable. According to Connor, "hypochondria names a spectrum of conditions characterised by excessive and anxious concern for one's health, almost always augmented by the conviction that one is suffering from an undiagnosed illness or illnesses."<sup>50</sup> Connor refers to Sartre's theorization of illness in *Being and Nothingness* to provide an analysis of hypochondria. He makes an insightful connection between Sartre's depiction of illness as a "problem of how it is that we both have and are our bodies,"<sup>51</sup> and uses Sartre's definition of illness to describe hypochondria as a mergence of the two modes

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<sup>47</sup> Carrette 1.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Steven Connor "Hypochondria and the Arts of Illness" < <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/english/skc/hypo/hypo.pdf>>

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

of being, the “body-for-itself”<sup>52</sup> or the “for-itself”<sup>53</sup> of the body. This means that when I am ill, my body experiences this illness as mine but also as a “being-an-object-for the others.”<sup>54</sup> In other words, “one has an illness which means that one is always more than or other than the illness; but one also is it in the sense that one is always required to have chosen the manner of one’s comportment to it, chosen, or at least produced the manner of the subjection to it.”<sup>55</sup> In this section, I will argue that Eric is a hypochondriac, focusing on DeLillo’s use of language and narrative structure to highlight this side of Eric’s character. I will also use Connor’s analysis of Sartre to show that Eric’s hypochondria means that he experiences his body as ‘his’ but also as a “body-for-the-other.”

Money and health are two essential and correlated aspects of Eric’s life. When DeLillo introduces Eric in the first few pages, Eric is portrayed not just as a multi-billionaire tycoon, but as an individual that anyone can relate to, struggling to sleep. The novel begins with a description of Eric’s lack of sleep.<sup>56</sup> We are then told of Eric’s knowledge of alternative means, such as meditation, to deal with this sleeplessness; he tries to sleep standing up, but isn’t “nearly adept enough, monk enough to manage this.”<sup>57</sup> Then he bypasses sleep and “round[s] into a counterpoise, a moonless calm in which every force is balanced by another.”<sup>58</sup> However, this is described as “the briefest of easings, a small pause in the stir of restless identities.”<sup>59</sup> Additionally, Eric tries sedatives and hypnotics, but neither helps him solve his problem. Thus, DeLillo immediately draws our attention to a culture where a health problem has various potential solutions, both conventional and alternative.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> *Cosmopolis* 5.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> *Cosmopolis* 6.

While the previous description of Eric's sleepless night may simply depict a character struggling to cope with a condition common to modern individuals, DeLillo does not allow us to merely conclude that Eric's concern for his health is always reasonable. As Eric walks through his apartment the next morning, we are told that he rides his elevator to the marble lobby.<sup>60</sup> Then we are, quite comically and unexpectedly, informed that "his prostate [is] asymmetrical."<sup>61</sup> DeLillo repeatedly inserts this sentence throughout the narrative, and it seems out of place and useless; Eric's obsession with his asymmetrical prostate represents his overall excessive concern with his health, a concern that is unnecessary. Eric's doctor, Ingram, tells him that there is nothing particular behind his asymmetrical prostate and that there is no need to explain it. It is just there and does not reflect any serious problem. It is simply an imperfection. However, throughout the novel Eric refuses to take this lack of explanation as an answer. His insistence on a meaning to his asymmetrical prostate mirrors his search for a pattern to explain an unexpected, overnight rise of the Yen; he is repeatedly told that there is no meaning or pattern behind either.

When Eric's financial advisor, Michael Chin, warns Eric of the risk of borrowing enormous sums of an increasing currency, the Yen, Eric insists that the Yen will not go any higher and that he is capable of reading a pattern in the charts. However, Michael perceives the rise as inexplicable and beyond any charted pattern. Michael's response reiterates Ingram's refusal to provide any sort of explanation behind the bodily imperfections that Eric spots:

I know that smile, Michael.

I think the yen. I mean there's reason to believe we may be leveraging too rashly.

It's going to turn our way.

Yes. I know. It always has.

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<sup>60</sup> *Cosmopolis* 8

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*



The rashness you think you see.

What is happening doesn't chart.

It charts. You have to search a little harder. Don't trust standard models. Think outside the limits. The yen is making a statement. Read it. Then leap.<sup>62</sup>

Eric insists that there is a way to chart the Yen, even though his financial advisor insists that it is beyond charting. When Eric tells Michael not to trust standard models, the statement echoes Eric's rejection of conventional medicine and the doctor's standard response to Eric's queries. Even later in the novel, Eric feels the urge to detect a pattern that he believes no one else has managed to detect; Eric views this pattern as "latent in nature itself, a leap of pictorial language that went beyond the standard models of technical analysis and out-predicted even the arcane charting of his own followers in the field."<sup>63</sup> To Eric, there has to be a way "to explain the yen."<sup>64</sup>

Eric's obsessive search for meaning behind his asymmetrical prostate and the rise of the Yen can perhaps be partly explained by the highly technological limousine that provides Eric with equipment to continuously monitor his health and changes in the market. In his limousine, Eric is subject to the gaze<sup>65</sup> of a nurse and two armed guards "on constant watch at three monitors in a windowless room at the office."<sup>66</sup> Thus, it is not surprising that a character with such an interest in his health would become so obsessed in finding meaning in an asymmetrical prostate.

It is important to note the similarities between the screens, with information on currencies and stocks, and the screens that monitor Eric's bodily functions. However, what is even more important is the language used to describe these technologies. For instance, when

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<sup>62</sup> *Cosmopolis* 21.

<sup>63</sup> *Cosmopolis* 63.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Cosmopolis* 15.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

Eric looks at the medley of market data on the screens, they are described as “flowing symbols and alpine charts”<sup>67</sup> and “polychrome numbers pulsing.”<sup>68</sup> As Eric reads the change in currency on the screen, the numbers glide horizontally and the bar charts pump up and down. There is something strikingly corporeal about the words used to describe the market data. The words “pumping,”<sup>69</sup> “pulsing,”<sup>70</sup> and “gliding”<sup>71</sup> all seem to depict a body’s functions. Moreover, the city as a whole is described as throbbing. This description of the market is mirrored in Eric’s echocardiogram where Eric’s heart throbs forcefully on-screen. The image is described as one of distance and immensity “beating in the blood plum raptures of a galaxy in formation.”<sup>72</sup> By describing the bar charts and numbers in a corporeal manner, DeLillo emphasizes further the connection between Eric’s reading of the body and tracking the Yen.

Not only does Eric feel the urge to explain the body and the market, but he also exhibits a state of hyperconsciousness, constantly feeling that he is “operate[ing] from within the scalding fact of his biology.”<sup>73</sup> He seems continuously in a state of hyperconsciousness; everything that occurs in his body has to have a particular reason. Not even a sneeze can pass without an in-depth analysis and reasoning of its cause and a possible pattern, since he always sneezes twice. At one point, after pondering the World Bank and the president of the United State’s address, Eric feels a “sneeze begin to develop in his immune system.” He sneezes, but then he feels a “sense of incompleteness”<sup>74</sup>:

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<sup>67</sup> *Cosmopolis* 13.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Cosmopolis* 44.

<sup>73</sup> *Cosmopolis* 140.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

He realized that he always sneezed twice, or so it seemed in retrospect. He waited and it came, rewardingly, the second sneeze. What causes people to sneeze? A protective reflex of the nasal mucous membranes, to expel invasive materials.”<sup>75</sup>

The description of sneezing using words such as “protective”<sup>76</sup> and “invasive”<sup>77</sup> exaggerates the significance of the sneeze. Though sneezing certainly does create this protective function, DeLillo could have used other synonyms to describe sneezing; however, DeLillo portrays Eric as a character whose hyperconsciousness prevents him from alienating himself from the alienation from his body.<sup>78</sup> The consequence of this is usually an overreaction to the body’s functions. Sneezing is not simply a momentary act that can be overlooked; it is the body giving a sign that must be deciphered. As a typical hypochondriac, Eric feels the need to magnify his symptoms. The exaggerated image of the sneeze developing in his immune system is exactly how a hypochondriac would explain an illness or system, in specific detail. In this example, Eric portrays the conflict between Sartre’s being-for-itself and being-for-the-other; the manner in which Eric interprets his sneeze differs substantially from the simpler perception of an outsider. It is also a significant subversion of the inside versus outside dichotomy; Eric feels that what comes from the inside of his body, “the stuff he sneezes,”<sup>79</sup> defines who he is. The division between the body’s inside and outside is challenged by body fluids. According to Elizabeth Grosz, “body fluids attest to the permeability of the body, its necessary dependence on an outside, its liability to collapse into this outside.”<sup>80</sup> Moreover, this dependence on an outside affects self-identity; body fluids influence self-identity because they disappoint a subject’s aspiration towards autonomy. It is not possible to have a self-

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Connor, “Hypochondria.”

<sup>79</sup> *Cosmopolis* 207.

<sup>80</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1994) 194.

identity that is distant from what lurks within the body; body fluids “attest to a certain irreducible ‘dirt’ or disgust, a horror of the unknown or the unspecifiable that permeates, lurks, lingers, and at times leaks out of the body, a testimony of the fraudulence or impossibility of the ‘clean’ or ‘proper’.”<sup>81</sup> Body fluids recur as images in several scenes in the novel. Earlier in the novel, Eric smells his bodily secretions on his handkerchief. The handkerchief is described as “soured by his own secretions of the testes and seminal vesicles and various other glands, collected earlier in the day when he’d used the square of cloth to clean himself after one or another expulsion of fluid.”<sup>82</sup>

As Connor suggests, the hypochondriac cannot prevent him/herself from searching for meaning in every bodily function. Every function becomes a message:

Their [the hypochondriacs’] lives become an agony, not of repressed desire, nor of alienation from their bodies, but rather of hyperconsciousness. They are not so much alienated from their bodies, as alienated from the alienation from their bodies, which can no longer be trusted with any of their autonomic functions, or allowed the innocence of being without meaning. Their lives become an epistemological ordeal, as they labour to read and convey to the world the imperfectly-articulated messages emanating from their bodies.<sup>83</sup>

However, to claim that Eric only reads the negative signs emanating from his body does not suffice. Eric, a typical hypochondriac, also reads the more healthy signs of his body, where his body conveys a sense of liveliness, even though these moments are fleeting. For instance, after leaving his limousine and clashing with anti-globalist protestors on the street, Eric reads his body’s murmurs as a sign of strength:

He felt great. He held his clenched fist in the other hand. It felt great, it stung, it was quick and hot. His body whispered to him. It hummed with the action,

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<sup>81</sup> Grosz 193.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Connor, “Hypochondria” 18.

the charge at the photographers, the punches he'd thrown, the bloodsurge, the heartbeat, the great strewn beauty of garbage cans toppling. He was brass-balled again.<sup>84</sup>

Eric's body whispers and hums. It is often the case in *Cosmopolis* that DeLillo repeats words or uses synonyms to reiterate an idea. Additionally, body parts are given detailed descriptions to emphasize the extent to which Eric relates to his body, as is exemplified here in the urgency and strength of the clenched fist. The abrupt phrases and corporeal images reflect how DeLillo uses language to convey this highly corporeal experience. Though this does not initially seem to be a medical perspective, it is another example of the hypochondriac's incessant search for well-being. When the description of Eric feeling brass-balled again is analysed in this context, it shows how for a moment Eric feels a sense of well-being that is based on being able to read and understand his body. He needs to continuously feel this sense of liveliness to feel well, a condition that is not possible when one is constantly in a state of critiquing the most minute details of the body.

Unlike many of DeLillo's more ambiguous themes, the question of hypochondria and the extent to which DeLillo finds fault in this state of hyperconsciousness is made clear by the end of the novel. When Eric meets Benno Levin, the man who murders him, he feels compelled to share the information about his prostate with Benno:

He said, "My prostate is asymmetrical."

His voice was barely audible. There was a pause that lasted half a minute. He felt the subject regard him carefully, the other. There was a sense of warmth, of human involvement.

"So is mine," Benno whispered.

They looked at each other. There was another pause.

What does it mean?

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<sup>84</sup> *Cosmopolis* 144.

Benno nodded for a while. He was happy to sit there nodding.

“Nothing. It means nothing,” he said. “It’s harmless. A harmless variation. Nothing to worry about. Your age, why worry?”

Eric didn’t think he’d ever known such relief, hearing these words from a man who shared his condition. He felt a sweep of well-being. An old woe gone, the kind of half-smothered knowledge that haunts the idlest thought.<sup>85</sup>

Moreover, Benno explains to Eric what the problem is with Eric’s attempt to analyze the Yen. Benno tells Eric that his analysis is “horribly and sadistically precise.”<sup>86</sup> However, Benno also says that Eric forgot “the importance of the lopsided, the thing that’s skewed a little.”<sup>87</sup> Benno argues that Eric’s failure to understand that imperfection is ‘natural’ led him to this dilemma:

You were looking for balance, beautiful balance, equal parts, equal sides. I know this. I know you. But you should have been tracking the yen in its ticks and quirks. The little quirk. The misshape [...] That’s where the answer was, in your body, in your prostate.”<sup>88</sup>

Not only does Benno confirm the connection between tracking the Yen and perceiving the body, he also highlights the dilemma that arises when one has too much authority and knowledge. Eric, who definitely has more access to technology than his employee and murderer Benno, nevertheless fails to comprehend something that is simple for Benno. DeLillo suggests that access to technology and medical knowledge may seem liberating, but at times is actually limiting, especially when one fails to see what is beyond precision and perfection. Unlike Pynchon’s characters who do not seem to contemplate the effect of modern technology, and instead seem constantly under the control of an ‘invisible’

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<sup>85</sup> *Cosmopolis* 199.

<sup>86</sup> *Cosmopolis* 200.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

force, some of DeLillo's characters realize the extent to which technology has altered their perception. Benno is aware of how Eric's obsession with medical technology has led him to this conflict between his body as a "body-for-itself"<sup>89</sup> versus a "body-for-the-other."<sup>90</sup> Although the doctor explains to Eric that the asymmetrical prostate is of no significance, Eric is not satisfied with this. He is relieved to finally hear Benno say that it is a 'harmless variation,' because Benno shares the same condition. The doctor objectifies Eric's body; thus, Eric feels as though he is a body-for-the other. However, Benno, who also has an asymmetrical prostate, shares Eric's subjective experience, a body-for-itself.

Moreover, apart from Benno's reassuring words, Packer can only depend on his pain. The following quote is perhaps the most telling example of Packer's need to experience the materiality of his body, as it is, without anyone else defining it for him:

[The pain] was crucial to his distinctiveness, too vital to be bypassed and not susceptible, he didn't think, to computer emulation. The things that made him who he was could hardly be identified much less converted to data, the things that lived and milled in his body, everywhere, random, riotous, billions of trillions, in the neurons and peptides, the throbbing temple vein, in the veer of his libidinous intellect. So much come and gone, this is who he was, the lost taste of milk licked from his mother's breast, the stuff he sneezes when he sneezes, this is him, and how a person becomes the reflection he sees in a dusty window when he walks by. He'd come to know himself, untranslatably, through his pain.<sup>91</sup>

The most significant word in this quote is "untranslatably."<sup>92</sup> It is the word that summarizes Packer's longing for a bodily narrative that he can comprehend, as opposed to one that is

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<sup>89</sup> Sartre 120.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> *Cosmopolis* 207.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

imposed upon him. Packer desires a state where he can simply be “the reflection he sees in a dusty window.”<sup>93</sup>

Another significant work to draw upon when considering Packer’s conflict is Michel Foucault’s *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archeology of Medical Perception* (1963). In *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault draws attention to points in history where paradigm shifts occurred in the doctor-patient relationship. What is particularly relevant to both novels is Foucault’s term ‘*le regard*,’ also referred to as ‘the gaze.’ The term ‘*le regard*’ refers to how physicians do not actually interact with the patient as an individual, but instead overlook the patient’s subjectivity by focusing on the object, the disease or body part being examined. Thus the patient is secondary to his disease:

The doctor's gaze is directed initially not towards that concrete body, that visible whole, that positive plenitude that faces him—the patient—but towards intervals in nature, lacunae, distances, in which there appear, like negatives, the signs that differentiate one disease from another, the true from the false, the legitimate from the bastard, the malign from the benign.<sup>94</sup>

Perhaps the urge to experience his body, away from the others’ gaze, comes from the daunting feeling of being constantly watched. . A telling example of this is the movie scene where Eric takes part in a street full of nude bodies and cameras. Eric experiences the awkwardness of the scene, viewing himself as a “pearly froth of animal fat in some industrial waste.”<sup>95</sup> In this memorable scene, DeLillo transforms a street in Manhattan into a clinical space where humans are merely bodies, objects of the Foucauldian gaze. Such images exemplify DeLillo’s innovative approach to space and medicine, expanding the parameters of the clinic beyond the solid confines of a hospital building. The medical gaze becomes a

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<sup>93</sup> Foucault 240.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 174.



normal way of perceiving the body; one does not need to be in a hospital to inspect the body or worry about its condition.

### **The Doctor-Patient Relationship**

In addition to dealing with a culture of hypochondria, the doctor-patient relationship is another aspect of medicine that leads Packer to ponder his 'Sartrean' mode of being; Packer and his doctor differ in their understanding of Packer's body, reflecting a struggle that is deeply rooted in the developments of medical history. In the eighteenth century, when patients consulted a doctor they were required to provide a personal history, informing the doctors of various details regarding their life and health. As opposed to being an introduction to the consultation or background information, often the case in the present, this dialogue between the patient and the doctor formed the basis of the consultation. By explaining all details of their lifestyles, patients "confidently enunciated their own diagnosis."<sup>96</sup> However, in the nineteenth century, physical examination, previously viewed as invasive, became a central part of medicine and the patients' expectations.<sup>97</sup> Additionally, the use of tools, such as the stethoscope became essential to the examination. These tools and the doctors' senses became "the hallmark of nineteenth-century diagnostic medicine, and the basis of its accomplishments."<sup>98</sup> The doctor, previously someone who listened to patients' accounts and made judgments on the basis of subjective experiences, became a "detective, seeking physical

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<sup>96</sup> Roy Porter, "The Rise of Physical Examination," *Medicine and the Five Senses*, ed. W.F. Bynum (Cambridge UP: Cambridge, 1993) 182.

<sup>97</sup> Porter 183.

<sup>98</sup> Stanley Reiser, "Technology and the senses in twentieth-century medicine," *Medicine and the Five Senses*. 263.

evidence of particular disorders.”<sup>99</sup> This also meant that the patients’ body had become the field of investigation.<sup>100</sup>

In the late nineteenth-century after Wilhelm Röntgen discovered the x-ray, a new way of portraying disease as an image, imaging technologies became a means of bringing objectivity to examinations that were previously based on the senses. A telling example of utilizing technologies that overcame the limitations of the senses is the electrocardiograph; According to Porter, “neither the hand which felt its beat, nor the eye which observed it through the skin, nor the ear which detected its sounds through the stethoscope could provide clinicians with the view its electrical activity could, when engraved graphically on a moving paper strip.”<sup>101</sup> In the beginning of the twentieth century, statistics showed a decrease in the number of physicians in America as medical technologies created new professions, such as the X-ray technician;<sup>102</sup> thus “as the twentieth century began, one person in three in American health care was a physician; by 1980, this ratio was one in thirteen.”<sup>103</sup> The medical technologies could offer a standardization that the varied “sensory-derived evidence”<sup>104</sup> from physicians could not.<sup>105</sup>

When Ingram does Eric’s medical check-up, DeLillo creates an image where the physician’s profession seems outdated; his skills and status are lost amid the surrounding technology. As Ingram examines Eric’s chest with a stethoscope, Eric wonders “why stethoscopes were still in use.”<sup>106</sup> Stethoscopes are then described as “lost tools of antiquity, quaint as blood-sucking worms.”<sup>107</sup> Ingram’s use of the stethoscope is in sharp contrast to the

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Reiser 266.

<sup>102</sup> Reiser 267-268.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> *Cosmopolis* 43.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

more direct contact later when Ingram “examine[s] the prostate for signs [...] the finger slyly prodding the surface of the gland through the rectal wall.”<sup>108</sup> In the early nineteenth-century, the stethoscope was viewed as a suitable solution for the patients’ concerns that physical examination was too intrusive.<sup>109</sup> Thus, the stethoscope was a comfortable way to diagnose a patient. However, Eric is not concerned or offended when Ingram closely examines his body, even as he sits across from his chief of finance, Jane Melman. While “facing his chief of finance,”<sup>110</sup> Ingram asks Eric “to drop his pants and shorts and to bend over the near end of the table, legs apart.”<sup>111</sup> DeLillo portrays Eric as a patient who is relaxed about being exposed, suggesting a significant change in perspective regarding the body.

Katherine Young’s analysis of frames and boundaries in medicine is particularly useful here. According to Young, the body is comprised of boundaries, boundaries that expose and conceal; thus, “over the course of a medical examination, some of these boundaries are peeled away to permit a close inspection of parts of the body.”<sup>112</sup> While certain boundaries are removed, they are replaced with other boundaries. For example, patients are given the privacy of being examined inside a room; however, the presence of the physician inside this space means that it does not really compensate for the patients having to take off their clothes.<sup>113</sup> In *Cosmopolis*, we see these boundaries in the interaction between Ingram and Eric, but the boundaries are not clearly defined; they are in a closed space, but the limousine is certainly not the most private place to remove his clothes, and there are two people within his personal boundary, the physician and Jane. These boundaries are a reminder of the nineteenth century doctor investigating the body. In the nineteenth century, “

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<sup>108</sup> *Cosmopolis* 47.

<sup>109</sup> Malcolm Nicolson, “Introduction of percussion and stethoscopy to Edinburgh,” *Medicine and the five senses* 152.

<sup>110</sup> *Cosmopolis* 46.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Katharine Young, *Presence in the Flesh: The Body in Medicine* (Harvard UP: Cambridge:MA, 1997) 11.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

doctors probed, listened and looked into the body-like explorers, self-reliant, seeking treasures.”<sup>114</sup>

Eric objectifies his own body and other bodies, which is perhaps why Eric ridicules the doctor. Eric himself is knowledgeable about his body and expects more from the doctor. As Catherine Belling argues, one of the reasons we are all hypochondriacs relates directly to the objectification of the body in Western culture. According to Belling, “we are all-now-here more or less hypochondriac, to the extent that contemporary Western culture tends to evaluate bodies as objects of bio-scientific knowledge.”<sup>115</sup>

Once again, this relates to Foucault’s ‘*le regard*,’ especially with regards to the objectivity that is involved in the medical process. According to Foucault, modern medicine treats a patient as an object of study:

In order to be able to offer each of our patients a course of treatment perfectly adapted to his illness and to himself, we try to obtain a complete, objective idea of his case; we gather together in a file of his own all the information we have about him. We observe him in the same way that we observe the stars or a laboratory experiment.<sup>116</sup>

Foucault also observes that this medical gaze can be internalised by the patient or members of a society where the body becomes objectified. We start to perceive our own bodies and others as objects of medical study. This is exemplified in *Cosmopolis*. A particularly striking example of how Eric internalises the medical gaze is how Eric examines Jane as Ingram gives him a medical-check up. Eric stares at Jane’s face:

From his stooped position, Eric looked directly into Jane’s face. He liked doing this, which surprised him. In the office she was an edgy presence, sceptical, adversarial, aloof, with a gift for sustained complaint.[...] she did not recede from his gaze. She

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<sup>114</sup> Reiser 263.

<sup>115</sup> Catherine Belling, “Hypochondriac Hermeneutics: Medicine and the Anxiety of Interpretation,” *Literature and Medicine* 52 (2007)

<sup>116</sup> Foucault xvi.

made complete eye contact. Her clavicle showed knobby above the droop of her tank top. He wanted to lick the sweat off the inside of her wrist. She was wrists and shinbones and unbalmed lips.<sup>117</sup>

Jane's body is fragmented, implying Eric's medical gaze and highlighting a modern perspective of dividing the body in order to analyse it. Eric does not view Jane as a whole body but as wrists and shinbones and lips. Not only does this image reflect the medical gaze, but it also shows how perception has been affected by medical imaging technologies. Historically, a fragmented image implied nostalgia, a longing for a utopian wholeness.<sup>118</sup> X-rays, CAT, MRI and PET scans are all examples of how medical technology has objectified and fragmented the body to provide precise diagnosis of particular body parts. Diagnostic imaging deconstructs the body, portraying it as "piecemeal and irreconciled, described in terms of "cuts" and "slices"."<sup>119</sup> The body is viewed as "pieces, viewed as relics and synecdoches, constitut[ing] deconstructed images of humans."<sup>120</sup> When Eric views Jane's body parts as representative of her body as a whole, DeLillo suggests that imaging technologies have affected not only the way we perceive our bodies, but also others' as objects of medical study. This is a theme that also recurs in *Falling Man* when Keith's son x-rays the inside of his father's clavicle with his eye, showing how humans internalise medical technologies, by focusing on specific body parts, thereby fragmenting the body.

Moreover, Eric's internalised medical gaze and access to medical technology and knowledge compromise the doctor's role; Eric views the doctor as archaic, though indispensable. Despite Eric's daily medical check-up, Eric critiques the doctor's conventional methods, and once again DeLillo uses language to reflect Ingram's outdated character. Eric generally judges the

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<sup>117</sup> *Cosmopolis* 47

<sup>118</sup> Koan-Jeff Baysa, "Diving Fragments, Reconciling the Body" *CPW.ORG* 2003  
<[http://www.cpw.org/exhibitions/2003/divining\\_lightning/divining/gallery\\_fragments\\_2003.html](http://www.cpw.org/exhibitions/2003/divining_lightning/divining/gallery_fragments_2003.html)>

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

appropriateness of devices and names according to their language; the doctor becomes similar to a technology that Eric criticizes for being out of place and old-fashioned.

DeLillo depicts Eric as a character with an interest in both technology and the language that describes it. The very technology that seems highly advanced at present quickly becomes a technology of the past, as it is replaced with another superior technology. Through an eventful day in Eric's life, also his last day, we come to know Eric as a critic of technology, dissatisfied with words such as "automated teller machine" and even its acronym ATM. Eric views the term as "aged and burdened by its own historical memory."<sup>121</sup> In this particular example, DeLillo shows how language encompasses the world, even when it is perceived as limiting. The term "worked at cross-purposes, unable to escape the influence of fuddled human personnel and jerky moving parts."<sup>122</sup> According to Cowart, this description of ATM shows that "our words, like our devices, are subject to time's erosions."<sup>123</sup>

Eric judges the doctor in a similar manner to the way he views aged and burdened vocabulary; Eric notes the redundancy of the doctor's language. Ingram cannot say something new and his "words [are] arranged in the same tedious sequence, a thousand times before."<sup>124</sup> While Cowart certainly provides an insightful perspective on vestigial language in *Cosmopolis*, language is not limited to vocabulary or acronyms. Even mannerisms and speech are included in Eric's critique of what is considered modern and what is not. Moreover, as Peter Boxall suggests with regards to temporality in *Cosmopolis*, the novel ends in "the space of a lag, in the yawning interval in which time, in this empty decade, seeks to catch up with

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<sup>121</sup> *Cosmopolis* 54.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> Cowart 76.

<sup>124</sup> *Cosmopolis* 44.

itself, in which the body struggles to keep up with the future that is being made by cybercapital.”<sup>125</sup>

If, as Belling suggests, we are all hypochondriacs, particularly in a Western society, then it is not surprising that even patients such as Eric, the mutli-billionare, would resort to alternative means when conventional ones fail to satisfy them. Part of being distinct and accomplished is being healthy. The manner in which the body is maintained reflects that “the very pursuit of health and the cultivation of lifestyles are themselves caught up in various (class-related) struggles for social recognition or ‘distinction.’”<sup>126</sup> When Eric meets Kendra Hays, a woman he has an affair with, they “mock-boxed for about a second and a half.”<sup>127</sup> Kendra asks Eric if he works out. In a few sentences, the characters show how important it is to have the right percentage of body fat:

“You work out,” she said.

“Six percent body fat.”

“Used to be my number. Then I got lazy.”

“What are you doing about it?”

“Hit the machine in the morning. Run in the park at night.”<sup>128</sup>

Thus, health becomes part of one’s lifestyle, and lifestyle is generally a major issue across DeLillo’s fiction. Not only do all the wealthy citizens in *Cosmopolis* ride limousines, but part of this lifestyle, like choosing a car, is maintaining a healthy body. This has enabled the commercialization of alternative medicine; similar to purchasing clothes, food, or vehicles, one feels the need to pay for services to heal the body. What is of particular

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<sup>125</sup> Peter Boxall, *Don DeLillo and the Possibility of Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2006) 232.

<sup>126</sup> “The Future World of Health Care” Monitor Group, *Innovation-management* < [http://www.innovation-management.com/downloads/Future\\_of\\_Healthcare.pdf](http://www.innovation-management.com/downloads/Future_of_Healthcare.pdf)> .

<sup>127</sup> *Cosmopolis* 111.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

relevance to *Cosmopolis* is the idea of managing the practice of medicine “using a business model.”<sup>129</sup>

A scene in the novel that makes this particularly evident is the image of a crowded street with an Old Chinese man doing acupoint massage and a “cockney” selling children’s books. Eric thinks of the two as the same. The old man works a “woman’s back and temples as she sat on a bench, her face pressed to a raised cushion attached to a makeshift frame.”<sup>130</sup> A sign next to them says, “relief from fatigue and panic.”<sup>131</sup> Meanwhile, the cockney says, “I don’t ask you where you get your money, don’t ask me where I get my books.”<sup>132</sup> The old Chinese man, like the man selling his books from an unknown source, lacks authenticity. The makeshift bench and the sign seem to commercialise an Asian tradition to make it suitable for the New Yorker. The origins of these therapeutic practices are substituted for by a more marketable cliché, “relief from stress and panic.”

The commercialization of spirituality is not a recent phenomenon; it has its roots in the New Age Movement of the 1980s that promoted universal and spiritual truths in accordance with the core ideas of capitalism. This movement publicized its beliefs by commodifying spirituality, making it more familiar to the average consumer engaged in the buying and selling of a capitalist marketplace. An example of this is the New Age Movements’ commercialization of Native American spirituality.

Euro-Americans claiming to be knowledgeable in medicine have benefited from Native-American-related publications and workshops. White entrepreneurs have sold “Native American sacred objects”<sup>133</sup> to a mostly non-Indian market. The New Age movements’

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<sup>129</sup> “The Future World of Health Care” Monitor Group, *Innovation-management* < [http://www.innovation-management.com/downloads/Future\\_of\\_Healthcare.pdf](http://www.innovation-management.com/downloads/Future_of_Healthcare.pdf) > .

<sup>130</sup> *Cosmopolis* 83

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> Carrette 214



commercialization of such aspects of Native American culture came as a reaction to the white affluent suburban and urban middle-aged baby boomers who felt distanced from culture and tradition.<sup>134</sup>

In a chapter on the privatisation of the Asian wisdom tradition, Karrette and King describe how the West has changed the meaning of practices such as yoga. Yoga has changed “from a set of renunciatory practices for attaining liberation from the cycle of rebirths either into a psychologised ‘spirituality of the self’ on the one hand or into a secularised system of therapy, physical exercise and/or mood-enhancement on the other.”<sup>135</sup> This is precisely what occurs in *Cosmopolis*; meanings change and the spiritual is secularized. DeLillo’s use of language highlights this redefinition. When DeLillo describes Eric’s workout routines, he refers to the curls and bench presses as “eat[ing] away the days tumults and compulsions.”<sup>136</sup> This idea of de-stressing becomes a sort of mantra throughout, resonating the same idea. The ultimate goal of any practice is to de-stress, to relieve, or to rid the self of panic and chaos. Medicine is no longer limited to a visit to the doctor.

It is certainly not a coincidence that DeLillo permeates the most tangible aspects of Eric Packer’s life with spiritual nuances, particularly those that are related to alternative medicine; Eric’s two private elevators in his forty-eight room apartment reflect Eric’s wealth and status and symbolize the possessions of a multi-billionaire, capitalist tycoon. Yet, these elevators, one programmed with Satie’s piano pieces and the other with Sufi music, are equally spiritual. They do not merely provide a practical service but a service that resembles a commodification of spirituality. Eric Packer not only ‘shops’ for an elevator, but also shops for one that enhances his experience; stepping into his elevator is equivalent to an

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<sup>134</sup> Carrette 114

<sup>135</sup> Carrette 114-115

<sup>136</sup> *Cosmopolis* 7.

aromatherapy session or meditation, reflecting how capitalism is infused with a form of spirituality that pervades the novel.

Spiritual and Asian traditions provide an alternative means for healing the body. It is important to note that in this context the use of the term spirituality is only a reference to the way these traditions are perceived and they do not undermine embodiment. As will also be evident in *Falling Man*, when Keith performs exercises to heal his wrist, exercises that are similar to the ones used in Asian spiritual traditions, the spiritual concept is no longer of importance. What is important is merely to heal, to maintain and improve the body. These experiences are corporeal, only branded spiritual by a culture that 'sells' them.

That fact that Asian spiritual traditions have had an impact on people and medical practices across the world draws attention to the importance of globalisation. Medical knowledge and treatments are not limited to what one learns from his or her specific culture; globalisation means a global culture, one where ideas may come from any corner of the world and have a significant impact on local cultures. If this is the case, the question is, how does Sartre's idea of the-body-for-the-other relate to this globalisation of medical knowledge and treatment?

To answer the question, I will refer to another example regarding globalisation and health. In the section entitled *The Confessions of Benno Levin*, Benno tells the story of how he chose to murder Eric after he was no longer perceived as useful in Eric's company. What is striking about this section is how even Benno, who accuses Eric of failing to accept bodily imperfections, himself speaks as a hypochondriac. This section is structured as a narrative of Benno telling his story; however, it is frequently interrupted by Benno's self-diagnosing and by his justification of his condition. One can argue that the most important reason to include

this section, Benno's first-person narrative, is to show the extent to which Benno and Eric are similar.

Benno plays a central role in this novel particularly in exposing Eric's faults, as mentioned earlier with regards to the Yen, but also because Benno is the character that feels a global connection in health and illness. He complains of various diseases that he believes he has contracted through the internet: "Allow me to speak. I'm susceptible to global strains of illness. I have occasions of *susto*, which is soul loss, more or less, from the Carribean, which I contracted originally on the Internet some time before my wife took her child and left, carried down the stairs by her illegal immigrant brothers."<sup>137</sup>

With access to knowledge and interaction with the rest of the world, Benno feels that even disease is global. Moreover, Benno believes that his imagination can lead to real illness:

What does anyone imagine? A hundred things a minute. Whether I imagine a thing or not, it's real to me. I have syndromes where they're real, from Malaysia for example. The things I imagine become facts. They have the time and space of facts."<sup>138</sup>

Of course Benno's statements are based on his imagination and should not be taken literally. However, even this imagination is telling; DeLillo foregrounds technology's role in omitting boundaries; this omission leaves people vulnerable to ideas that come from beyond their locale. According to Carrette and King, capitalist spiritualities are "the subordination and exploitation of religious themes and motifs to promote an individualist and corporate-oriented pursuit of profit for its own sake."<sup>139</sup> Moreover, globalisation means that these capitalist spiritualities can transcend boundaries:

Capitalist spiritualities are emerging in response to the rise of global finance capitalism. Like the individualist or consumerist spiritualities upon which they have

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<sup>137</sup> *Cosmopolis* 168.

<sup>138</sup> *Cosmopolis* 192

<sup>139</sup> Carrette 20.

fed, they are ‘postmodern’ in the sense that, grounded in an information age and the transfer of electronic data across national boundaries, they tend to disavow explicit association with traditional religions, promoting instead a highly eclectic, disengaged and detraditionalised spirituality.<sup>140</sup>

Benno perceives his health as a condition of engagement with the world as a whole. It is precisely the “transfer of electronic data across national boundaries”<sup>141</sup> that gives Benno this feeling. When he refers to his syndrome of agitated behaviour, he states that this is defined in Haiti and East Africa as “delirious gusts in translation.”<sup>142</sup> He then adds, “In the world today everything is shared. What kind of misery is it that can’t be shared?”<sup>143</sup>

In Jean-Francois Lyotard’s essay “Can Thought Go on Without a Body” in *The Inhuman* (1988), Lyotard clearly argues against this possibility. According to Lyotard, not only is it not possible to achieve thought without a body, but humans should not even hope for such a state of a “software with a hardware that is independent of the conditions of life on earth.”<sup>144</sup> Moreover, Lyotard defines the body as a “material ensemble [that] hinders the separability of this intelligence, hinders its exile and therefore survival.”<sup>145</sup> Thus, eliminating the body essentially means eliminating thought altogether.

Reflecting Lyotard’s idea, DeLillo seems to imply that if thought continues without the body, it is no longer human thought, for there are restrictions, such as “suffering”<sup>146</sup> and “mortality,”<sup>147</sup> that can only be experienced through the body and that are integral to the formation of human thought. Lyotard questions the possibility that a disembodied

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<sup>140</sup> *Cosmopolis* 167.

<sup>141</sup> King 27.

<sup>142</sup> *Cosmopolis* 152

<sup>143</sup> *Cosmopolis* 60

<sup>144</sup> Jean Francois Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby. (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1988) 13.

<sup>145</sup> Lyotard 22.

<sup>146</sup> Lyotard 20.

<sup>147</sup> Lyotard 23.

“thinking”<sup>148</sup> or “representing machines”<sup>149</sup> would be capable of suffering. Similarly, Gerald Edelman refuses the possibility of a “Cartesian dream of disembodied intelligence”<sup>150</sup> and argues that “without a body, there are no minds.”<sup>151</sup> . Thus, although medical technologies seem to undermine the significance of the body as flesh, DeLillo suggests that this is only limited to the medical field, and does not imply that humans lose the experience of corporeality. The graphs and diagrams on a screen disembody only to make the body readable for medical practitioners; this, however, does not change the actual materiality of the body.

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### ***Falling Man: Trauma and Representation***

While there are many similarities between *Cosmopolis* and *Falling Man*, the aspect of ‘trauma’ in *Falling Man* adds another significant dimension to medicine and the body. In this section, I will address the relationship between trauma and DeLillo’s depiction of September 11, focusing on how the main characters attempt to cope with their experience.<sup>152</sup> A general definition of trauma is the “response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur.”<sup>153</sup> Thus, trauma is not only a sudden change in the order of things, but it is also a rupture “in the meaning-giving apparatus that is responsible for this order.”<sup>154</sup> The trauma of September 11 lays, not only in the immensity of the tragedy, but also in how difficult it was, and perhaps still is, to fully define and understand what happened. According to Jacques Derrida, “[w]hat is terrible about

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<sup>148</sup> Lyotard 19.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Gerald M. Edelman *Neural Darwinism. The Theory of Neuronal Group Selection* (New York: Basic Books, 1987) qtd. in Bono: 183.

<sup>151</sup> Edelman 183.

<sup>152</sup> The next section will examine the character “Falling Man” in detail, making the connection to DeLillo’s essay “In the Ruins of the Future.”

<sup>153</sup> Spiegelman 6.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

‘September 11,’ what remains ‘infinite’ in this wound, is that we do not *know* what it is and so do not know how to describe, identify, and even name it.”<sup>155</sup> Derrida’s view is reflected in a brochure for an exhibition, “Aftermath: Photography in the Wake of September 11.”<sup>156</sup> The first lines of this brochure state that “the events of September 11, 2001, were so overwhelming, so devastating in their impact, that more than four months after the fact, we are still struggling to explain and comprehend their meaning.”<sup>157</sup> The struggle to attain some sort of meaning is at the core of *Falling Man*.

However, it would be too simplistic to assert that *Falling Man* is a conventional text about trauma. I agree with Sten Cvek that “while trauma is a fundamental concept for the understanding of the novel, it is important to stress that *Falling Man* also insists on the openness and unfamiliarity of the national historical moment, and consistently refuses to painlessly work through the traumatic event by enclosing it in a definite narrative account.”<sup>158</sup> Other critics, such as Richard Gray find that *Falling Man* is limited in its approach to trauma. Keith’s addiction to the poker game as a form of refuge and Lianne’s willing suspension of disbelief add “next to nothing of our understanding of the trauma at the heart of the action.”<sup>159</sup> Moreover, Gray argues that such examples evade trauma through “suppressing its urgency and disguising its difference by inserting it in a series of familiar tropes.”<sup>160</sup> While Gray’s argument is valid when addressing such examples, the characters’ encounters with medical practitioners and technology exemplify far more insightful paradoxes that foreground the body’s corporeality.

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<sup>155</sup> Derrida in Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003) 113.

<sup>156</sup> *Trauma at Home* 124.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> Sven Cvek, “Killing Politics: The Art of Recovery in *Falling Man*,” *Studia Romantica et Anglica*, *liv* (2009): 342.

<sup>159</sup> Richard Gray, “Open Doors, Closed Minds: American Prose Writing at a Time of Crisis,” *American Literary History* 21.1 (2009): 132.

<sup>160</sup> Gray 132.

*Falling Man* begins with an image of September 11 as Keith Neudecker walks out of the rubble in a state of bewilderment:

It was not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night. He was walking north through rubble and mud and there were people running past holding towels to their faces or jackets over their heads. They had handkerchiefs pressed to their mouths. They had shoes in their hands, a woman with a shoe in each hand, running past him. They ran and fell, some of them, confused and ungainly, with debris coming down around them, and there were people taking shelter under cars.<sup>161</sup>

The first paragraph of the novel establishes several notable characteristics of a tragic event. Not only is there a gloominess that hovers upon the area, but there is also a spatial change when a limited street suddenly seems boundless. There is a sense of overwhelming chaos and confusion. The narrator describes the scene from Keith's perspective; Keith walks around watching others, but not actually comprehending the event. Though he is in the midst of the scene, things are "still distant and still."<sup>162</sup> Keith is a traumatised subject, physically part of the scene but simultaneously distanced by the inability to find meaning. He tries to tell himself that he is alive, "but the idea [is] too obscure to take hold."<sup>163</sup>

Throughout the novel, characters seem alienated from the tragedy. It is too immense for them to comprehend. In the midst of this confusion, there seems to be one source of comfort, namely the lived body. The characters seek refuge in corporeal experiences, making connections between the events and their bodies. To begin this analysis, it is useful to consider the example when Lianne watches footage of the planes and the experience is defined in relation to her body:

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<sup>161</sup> *Falling Man* 3.

<sup>162</sup> *Falling Man* 3.

<sup>163</sup> *Falling Man* 6.

Every time she saw a videotape of the planes she moved a finger toward the power button on the remote. Then she kept on watching. The second plane coming out of that ice blue sky, this was the footage that entered the body, that seemed to run beneath her skin, the fleeting sprint that carried lives and histories, theirs and hers, everyone's, into some distance, out beyond the towers.”<sup>164</sup>

In this example, DeLillo eliminates the barrier between the abstract representation of the image and the corporeal body; the phrase “run beneath her skin,” is especially telling. There is an inextricable relationship between the tragedy and Lianne’s body. This relationship will be examined further in this section.

In another similar example, Lianne needs bodily intimacy in order to feel present and alive. The following passage contains many references to the body, a corporeal entity that is capable of affirming existence:

This was the man who would not submit to her need for probing intimacy, overintimacy, the urge to ask, examine, delve, draw things out, trade secrets, tell everything. It was a need that had the body in it, hands, feet, genitals, scummy odors, clotted dirt, even if it was all talk or sleepy murmur. She wanted to absorb everything, childlike, the dust of stray sensation, whatever she could breathe in from other people's pores. She used to think she was other people. Other people have truer lives.”<sup>165</sup>

When such passages are read in contrast to Lianne and Keiths’ experience with medical technology, it becomes evident that there is something relatively familiar and comforting about the body. This section will examine this conflict between the obscurity of the tragedy, especially as projected in medical representations, and the body’s corporeal experience. According to Cathy Caruth, there is a certain paradox in traumatic experience since the “most

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<sup>164</sup> *Falling Man* 134.

<sup>165</sup> *Falling Man* 105.



direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it.”<sup>166</sup> In Robert Luckhurst’s *The Trauma Question*, Luckhurst focuses mostly on the “sequele”,<sup>167</sup> the strange effects that proceed a traumatic event. Luckhurst makes a specific reference to DeLillo’s narrator in *Falling Man* when the narrator describes the post-traumatic phase as “the days after”<sup>168</sup> and a time where everything is “measured by after.”<sup>169</sup> According to Luckhurst, there is a Freudian paradox in the strange temporality of traumatic memory. Trauma is not experienced at the time of an event; instead, it is realised through “the symptoms and flashbacks and delayed attempts at understanding.”<sup>170</sup> Thus, since trauma is not “experienced as it occurs,”<sup>171</sup> it becomes a crisis of representation. It is only evident as a connection to another place and another time.<sup>172</sup>

This crisis of representation is certainly evident in *Falling Man* particularly when considering the conflict between Keith’s corporeal experiences versus the alienating experience at the hospital. When DeLillo initially describes Keith’s experience, as it occurs, the images are highly corporeal. Keith has glass in his hair and his face described as “marbled bolls of blood and light.”<sup>173</sup> When he arrives at Lianne’s house, he is covered in blood. The amount of blood cannot be explained by the cuts and abrasions on his skin, which makes Lianne realise that “[i]t was not his blood.”<sup>174</sup>

These images are strikingly different from the characters’ experiences later in the novel. In the beginning of the novel, there is a certain materiality that is undeniable, a materiality that evades representation. Characters such as Keith and Lianne actually

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<sup>166</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996) 91-2.

<sup>167</sup> Robert Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London: Routledge, 2008) 5.

<sup>168</sup> *Falling Man* 138.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> Luckhurst 5.

<sup>171</sup> Caruth “Introduction to Psychoanalysis, Trauma and Culture” *American Imago* 48.1 (1991) 7.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> *Falling Man* 3.

<sup>174</sup> *Falling Man* 7.

experience this tragedy, corporeally, as it happens. As Orly Lubin suggests, when addressing the body and September eleven, the dust of bones and the pieces of flesh were “never exposed to the apparatus of representation.”<sup>175</sup>

However, when Keith goes to the hospital for a medical check-up, his experience at the hospital conflicts with his own lived experience of the tragedy.<sup>176</sup> Suddenly, he is immersed in a world of representation; medical imaging technologies and medical jargon create an alienating effect. Similar to the manner in which Eric’s body in *Cosmopolis* is subject to the clinical gaze, once Keith enters the hospital, he is no longer the subject witnessing an event, but the object of the gaze. He is quickly rushed through physical examinations, becoming nothing more to the doctors than an object, a body:

Doctors in scrubs and paper masks checked his airway and took blood-pressure readings. They were interested in potentially fatal reactions to injury, hemorrhage, dehydration. They looked for diminished blood flow to tissues. They studied the contusions on his body and peered into his eyes and ears. Someone gave him an EKG. Through the open door he saw IV racks go floating past. They tested his hand grip and took X rays. They told him things he could not absorb about a ligament or cartilage, a tear or a sprain.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Orly Lubin “Masked Power: An Encounter with the Social Body in the Flesh” *Trauma at Home after 9/11*, ed. Judith Greenberg (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2003) 130.

<sup>176</sup> Cvek’s argument is also relevant to embodiment. Cvek claims that *Falling Man* is not about interpreting the tragedy, but about how the body is affected by it: “To an important extent, *Falling Man* is a novel about bodies: about how they fall, fail, become photosensitive surfaces for recording memories, how they come into violent contact with other bodies (as in the “organic shrapnel” phenomenon, cf. DeLillo 2007: 16), about how they are penetrated by images. Instead of attempting to offer explanations or interpretations of the event, DeLillo focuses on how the event registers on the bodies of the novel’s protagonists. These are above all bodies that are infiltrated by alien elements—images, other bodies—and become porous, malleable and permeable. In one sense, the fate of individual bodies is in *Falling Man* a metaphor for the intrusion of otherness into the national body politic, here registered in literal ways on the bodies of citizens.” 342.

<sup>177</sup> *Falling Man* 15

What is particularly interesting in this passage is DeLillo's repeated use of 'they' and his use of 'someone'. When referring to practitioners in the novel, DeLillo mostly refrains from giving them a name or even a specific specialism or title. The dialogue in the hospital is between Keith and 'them'. Moreover, the dialogue does not reflect an understanding on either side; Keith does not understand what the doctors have to say and the doctors distance themselves from Keith as a person and reduce him to an object of study. This is characteristic of the modern *le regard* which detaches the physician from the patient "emotionally, linguistically, and morally."<sup>178</sup>

Another example of this is when a doctor introduces the term "organic shrapnel" to Keith. First, the doctor takes pieces of glass out of Keith's face using a pick-up. Then he offers Keith some information about suicide bombing. The doctor explains that the fragments found in survivors' bodies are sometimes "caused by small fragments, tiny, fragments of the suicide bombers' body."<sup>179</sup> When a suicide bombing occurs and the bomber's body is "blown to bits, literally bits and pieces,"<sup>180</sup> the pieces fly out with incredible speed that they get trapped in nearby peoples' bodies.<sup>181</sup> However, the doctor quickly adds, "this is something I don't think you have."<sup>182</sup> Later in the novel, Keith thinks of "something out of nowhere, a phrase, *organic shrapnel*."<sup>183</sup> Though the phrase seems familiar, it means nothing to him.<sup>184</sup> When the doctor defines organic shrapnel to Keith, Keith is distanced from its meaning. It does not mean anything to him, as a being-for-itself. It is not something he can

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<sup>178</sup> Leigh E. Rich, "The Afterbirth of the Clinic: a Foucauldian perspective on 'House M.D.' and American medicine in the 21st century" *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 51.2 (2008): 225.

<sup>179</sup> *Falling Man* 16

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> *Falling Man* 66.

<sup>184</sup> *Falling Man* 66.

feel, something that he can understand through his body. The term is only meaningful when he is a being-for-the-other, an object for the doctor to scrutinize.<sup>185</sup>

The hospital's alienating atmosphere is perhaps most evident in the sound test. One of the medical check-ups Keith undergoes tests his ability to differentiate between various sounds:

He lay on a narrow table within the closed unit. There was a pillow under his knees and a pair of track lights overhead and he tried to listen to the music. Inside the powerful noise of the scanner he fixed his attention on the instrument, separating one set from another, strings, woodwinds, brass. The noise was a violent staccato knocking, a metallic clamour that made him feel he was deep inside the core of a science-fiction city about to come undone.<sup>186</sup>

The image of Keith's "helpless confinement"<sup>187</sup> in this science fiction like medical test foregrounds the extent to which the hospital is a place of representation, not only of images, but also of sound. Once Keith is ready for his sound test, his interaction is mainly with the surrounding devices as opposed to a human doctor. The doctor becomes only a voice on a speaker instructing him. He hears her in his headset "saying that the next sequence of noise would last three minutes."<sup>188</sup> First, DeLillo uses the phrase 'her voice' to describe the voice on the headset; we know there is a female practitioner speaking to Keith. However, at the end of the sound test, the practitioner is no longer described as a person, but only a voice.

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<sup>185</sup> It is worth mentioning here that the term "organic shrapnel" garnered significant attention in Pynchon reviews and criticism. An especially interesting example is the connection that Juan Gómez makes between organic shrapnel and the narrative itself. Gomez suggests that the fragmented structure of the novel, evident in its chapter and sections, represents the pieces of shrapnel. Moreover, "the characters in *Falling Man* are also a kind of organic shrapnel because though they have survived physically intact, they have been emotionally and psychologically rent by the explosions," "Falling Man," *IKA* 16.29 (2011): 149-154. For another discussion of the term and narrative form after September 11, see Rachel G. Smith, "Organic Shrapnel: Affect and Aesthetics in September 11," *American Literature* 82.1 (2011): 153- 174.

<sup>186</sup> *Falling Man* 18.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*

Keith hears “the voice in his headset saying that the next sequence of noise would last seven minutes.”<sup>189</sup>

Later in the novel Lianne, feeling unwell, decides to see a doctor. When Keith asks her about the findings, she says “the findings were unremarkable.”<sup>190</sup> The term ‘unremarkable’ is the term used in the medical report. Initially, Lianne says that she loves the word and that the findings give her a great sense of relief. However, in the same conversation with Keith, she tells him that she cannot believe the findings; Lianne loves the term “normal morphology”<sup>191</sup> used in the medical report, but cannot believe that it refers to her.<sup>192</sup> She attributes this concern to “a question of scepticism.”<sup>193</sup> Yet, DeLillo seems to imply more than scepticism. Her lived body does not coincide with this unremarkable body on paper. While the findings should be credible, they do not define her bodily experience; instead, the findings define the body-for-the-other. According to Petra Kuppens, medical images result in this sense of destabilization. As a result of being surrounded by medical images and different medical narratives, “our senses have become unreliable in relation to our bodies.”<sup>194</sup> In other words, “Western biological science, with its visualizing power, sometimes tells different stories about our insides than the narratives that common sense can make knowable.”<sup>195</sup>

Thus far I have attempted to highlight DeLillo’s perspective on the hospital as a place of representation. Medical findings do not necessarily coincide with how the patient feels about him or herself. When medical practitioners re-write the body to make it intelligible for the medical field, whether through graphs, anatomical models, or medical jargon, this does

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<sup>189</sup> *Falling Man* 18.

<sup>190</sup> *Falling Man* 206.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> Petra Kuppens, *The Scar of Visibility: Medical Performances and Contemporary Art* (MN: U of Minnesota P, 2007) 33.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

not necessarily imply that the body is intelligible for the patient as well. Another reason that the body is understood differently by doctor and patient relates to the nature of the insides of our bodies. Simply because we learn that a particular organ resides in a certain area inside the body does not necessarily mean that we can perceive this organ through our senses. According to the phenomenologist Drew Leder, “unlike the completed perception of the proprioceptive body, our inner body is marked by regional gaps, organs that although crucial for sustaining life, cannot be somesthetically perceived.”<sup>196</sup>

Another aspect that is important to consider is physical injury. DeLillo also seems to suggest that the physical injury caused during a traumatic event further complicates the relationship between the patient and medical practitioners and technology. This is particularly evident in how Keith copes with his own injury. The word trauma originates from the Greek word meaning wound. When the word was first used, it was defined as a “bodily injury caused by an external agent.”<sup>197</sup> Trauma is a rupture of a boundary, particularly if the material boundary of the skin is breached. In Steven Connor’s *The Book of Skin*, Connor describes the skin as “the visible object of many different forms of imaginary or actual assault.”<sup>198</sup>

When Keith treats his injured hand, “(i)t was not the MRI and not the surgery that brought him closer to well-being. It was the modest home program, the counting of seconds, the ice he applied following each set of exercises.<sup>199</sup> Keith considers the hand exercises, or the ‘gentle fist’ as the “true countermeasures to the damage he’d suffered in the town, in the descending chaos.”<sup>200</sup> His injury is minor, but it is not the torn cartilage that causes him to focus on the exercises. His injury is a reminder of the traumatic event that he experienced;

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<sup>196</sup> Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1990) 43.

<sup>197</sup> Luckhurst 2.

<sup>198</sup> Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin* (London: Reaktion, 2004) 50.

<sup>199</sup> *Falling Man* 40.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*

healing his hand places him in the midst of the chaos, “the levitation of ceilings and floors, the voices choking in smoke.”<sup>201</sup>

Keith’s injury reflects the extent to which trauma “is a piercing or breach of a border that puts inside and outside into a strange communication.”<sup>202</sup> The physical injury on the inside of Keith’s body is connected to his need to come to terms with an external reality, September eleven . The surgery does not help him to achieve a sense of well-being; instead, the exercises that involve deep concentration are far more helpful. DeLillo shows how a medical exercise is altered by the patient into a kind of meditation. It is similar to the movements in certain martial arts such as Tai Chi, where the bodily movements are supposed to relax the muscles and enhance flexibility. Martial arts are aimed at restoring a balance between the body and mind, improving the psychological as well as the physical states of the person. Tai chi and other martial arts have been incorporated in hospitals across the world.

What is particularly important to note about the therapeutic effect of Keith’s fist exercise is that it allows a bodily narrative that counters the hospital’s representation. This embodied manner of healing enables the body to “talk.”<sup>203</sup> According to Roberta Culbertson, this is the greatest form of comfort, the body healing itself. When addressing traumatic memory, Culbertson suggests that the problem is not just a matter of narrating a past experience, but of where this narration should emanate from. Thus, “the question is not only ‘what is there to say,’ but ‘who is there to talk?’”<sup>204</sup> The answer to this question may be found “in the course of the body’s own healing of itself, of which speaking is a part.”<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> *Falling Man* 40.

<sup>202</sup> Luckhurst 3.

<sup>203</sup> Roberta Culbertson “Embodied Memory, Transcendence, and Telling: Recounting Trauma, Re-establishing the Self” *New Literary History* 26.1: (1995) 176.

<sup>204</sup> Culbertson 176.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*

DeLillo foregrounds the importance of physical therapy; this is evident in the contrast between Keith's gentle fist exercises and, Keith's mother-in-law, Nina's addiction to pain medication. Nina is constantly lost in "a round of medications, a mystical wheel, the ritualistic design of the hours and days in tablets and capsules, in colors, shapes and numbers."<sup>206</sup> In a conversation with Lianne, Nina speaks about strange dreams, denying that they are in any way related to pain medication. However, Lianne and the reader know that Nina's dreams are influenced by her medication:

"I almost feel I can open my eyes and see what I'm dreaming. Makes no sense, does it?"

The dream is not so much in my mind as all around me."

"It's the pain medication. You're taking too much, for no reason."

"You're not using the physical therapy."

"This must mean I'm not taking the medication."

"That's not funny. One of those drugs you take is habit-forming. At least one."<sup>207</sup>

DeLillo portrays the adverse effects of medication, or those effects that are unexpected. Before Keith's surgery, when the doctor injects him with a heavy sedative, the sedative is supposed to contain a memory suppressant. However, Keith still sees images of his friend Rumsey in his chair, meaning that the memory is "not suppressed or the substance hadn't taken effect yet, a dream, a waking image, whatever it was, Rumsey in the smoke, things coming down."<sup>208</sup> There is a significant connection between drugs and technology; essentially, drugs are a technology. According to Scott Bukatman, some early researchers into hallucinogenic drugs were equally interested in other mind expansion techniques, such as

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<sup>206</sup> *Falling Man* 48.

<sup>207</sup> *Falling Man* 144.

<sup>208</sup> *Falling Man* 22.



parapsychology and ‘electronic computing machines,’<sup>209</sup> leading to an awareness of the similarities between hallucinogenics and technology, to the extent that the computer was named the “LSD of the 1980s.”<sup>210</sup>

DeLillo’s reference to drugs usually relates to his perspective on technology as a whole; even at a time of rapid and revolutionary changes, the advancements do not always reflect a harmonious relationship between the individual and technology. At times, technology does not necessarily satisfy human’s expectations. If one were to consider that drugs are a form of technology, then drugs in DeLillo’s fiction are a prominent example of technology disappointing humans. For instance, in *White Noise*, Babette takes the drug, Dylar, in order to suppress her fear of death. However, she tells Jack that although she took almost all of her pills, the fear is still there. For Nina, the pain medication is supposed to relieve the pain after surgery; the medication leads her to a trance-like state, one that worries her daughter. Lianne can no longer recognize Nina and fears that one day she may be in a similar situation.

In Freud’s *Civilizations and its Discontents* (1961), Freud addresses this idea of what man expects from technology; humans have attained what Freud refers to as a “likeness to God”<sup>211</sup> by advancing to an extent that they have reached what was once considered a distant, ideal image. However, this is still not satisfactory enough:

Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic God. When he puts on all his auxiliary organs he is truly magnificent; but those organs have not grown on to him and they still give him much trouble at times.<sup>212</sup>

In this section of his essay, Freud focuses specifically on technologies that enable man

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<sup>209</sup> Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Fiction* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke UP, 1993) 139.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (1929; Norton: New York, 2010) 68.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

to overcome the limits of their senses, such as the lense and the telephone. Yet, this idea of a lack of harmony between the human and the technological, when a technology causes trouble at times, can also be applied to DeLillo's general perspective on drugs. Even drugs as a technology have very similar effects to the prosthetic technologies that surround us. In the examples of Babette, Nina, and Keith, we find characters who are aware that the drug they are using is not exactly fulfilling its purpose.

Thus, while the hospital and medication's role in the characters' lives seem indispensable, they are also problematic. At a time of trauma when characters need some comfort and hope to find meaning to explain what happened, the hospital only distances them further from meaning by being an apparatus of representation. These representations lead characters to attempts to heal their bodies in their own ways, such as Keith's personalised physical therapy, or to being sceptical of medical results, as is evident in Lianne's case. In both cases, the patients responses are a result of a feeling of alienation, a feeling that is not satisfactory for a modern individual that wants to know and understand the body.

### **The Falling Man and *24 Hour Psycho***

Thus far, I have focused on how trauma affects the characters' responses to medical technology. The body becomes a kind of defence mechanism against the otherwise abstract medical experience. Medical jargon, x-rays, and other imaging technologies add to the void that results from the September 11 tragedy; the tragedy is immense and is beyond simple comprehension. The question of how to represent September 11 through literature was a daunting question that many authors, including DeLillo, had to confront. It is necessary to

pause here and to consider why a literary response to September 11 was considered a difficult, if not impossible, task. A major part of this thesis is the aspect of visual perception, and September 11 had a strong impact on the manner in which DeLillo portrays vision in his post-September 11 fiction. In this concluding section, I will discuss this aspect in relation to the *Falling Man* and *24 Hour Psycho*. The narrative structure and language that frames both objects of perception is especially telling. As Gray argues, “if there was one thing writers agreed about in response to 9/11, it was the failure of language; the terrorist attacks made the tools of their trade seem absurd.”<sup>213</sup> My concern in this section is to address how DeLillo uses embodiment, especially as portrayed in the *Falling Man*’s performances, to cope with the failure of language.

It is important to note that DeLillo’s essay, “In the Ruins of the Future,” foregrounds the limitations of language in responding to the tragedy:

The event itself has no purchase on the mercies of analogy or simile. We have to take the shock and horror as it is. But living language is not diminished. The writer wants to understand what this day has done to us. Is it too soon? We seem pressed for time, all of us. Time is scarcer now. There is a sense of compression, plans made hurriedly, time forced and distorted. But language is inseparable from the world that provokes it. The writer begins in the towers, trying to imagine the moment, desperately. Before politics, before history and religion, there is the primal terror. People falling from the towers hand in hand. This is part of the counter-narrative, hands and spirits joining, human beauty in the crush of meshed steel. In its desertion of every basis for comparison, the event asserts its singularity. There is something empty in the sky. The writer tries to give memory, tenderness, and meaning to all that howling space.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Richard Gray, *After the Fall: American Literature since 9/11* (Blackwell: Oxford, 2011) 1.

<sup>214</sup> “In the Ruins of the Future: Reflections on Terror and Loss in the Shadow of September,” *Harper’s* (2001): 34.

DeLillo's assertion that the tragedy cannot be reduced to figures of speech and must be taken as it is, is immediately challenged by his own claim that living language remains. Thus, the question becomes how to find a way to use this language to portray an incomprehensible tragedy. Critics have analysed how DeLillo gives meaning to that hollow space. DeLillo asserts that "the event has changed the grain of the most routine moment [and] that we may find that the ruins of the towers is implicit in other things."<sup>215</sup> Marco Abel is especially successful in connecting this change in the grain of the moment to the narrative structure of *Falling Man*. Abel argues that the act of seeing, in itself, becomes the subject of September 11 fiction:

DeLillo's style of response does not occur in a vacuum. Rather, his narrative encounter with 9/11 actualizes a mode of seeing the world that the French cineaste André Bazin once conceptualized in terms of an ontophenomenological theory of cinema. Bazin advocates a film aesthetic mainly relying on the long-shot, deep focus cinematography characteristics of the neorealist *mise-en-scène*. [...] For DeLillo the problem with representation is a matter of speed: representation is always too fast, positioning itself as a cause when it is merely an effect of a series of forces acting on one another. Representations are apparatuses of capture that assign sense to an event in accordance with the type of forces that produce these representations. Consequently, for DeLillo as well as Bazin, the critical task is to render visible the acts of seeing that generate specific representations, not to declare, mourn, deny, or judge the (im)possibility of representing or attaining the real.<sup>216</sup>

There are several significant points made in Abel's passage that are relevant to this argument. First, the question of "speed" is essential to embodiment in *Falling Man*, a

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Marco Abel, "Don DeLillo's 'In the Ruins of the Future,' *Literature, Images, and the Rhetoric of Seeing 9/11*," *PMLA* 118.5 (2003): 1237.

narrative that is often described as slowed-down.<sup>217</sup> It is valid to assert that Bazin's technique of *mise-en-scène* is reflected in DeLillo's narrative given that the 'slowing down' occurs by paying close attention to a particular scene. The Falling Man is an especially significant example of a character whose performance, and the objectification of this performance by Lianne, slows down the narrative. Thus, as Abel argues, it is not merely the object of visual experience that is significant, but the act of vision itself; this is a point that is also relevant to Pynchon's later novel *Point Omega* and will be discussed further. Before addressing the specific examples that reflect this slowing down of narrative, it is important to note that the narrative structure as a whole is focused on repetition. As mentioned previously, trauma is accountable for the pace of the novel: "Trauma makes time stand still; one arrested moment stands in metonymically for the whole horror."<sup>218</sup> The pace is framed in repetition; however, "every repetition is different; each unleashes something new, unexpected, unspeakable."<sup>219</sup>

Appearing suddenly and suspended over a horrified audience, the performance artist, Falling Man, is a significant character in the novel. What is significant about the character is not his individuality; he is not introduced as an individual with a specific name and identity, nor does he have a role apart from his stylized poses in mid air. Yet, in what appears to be a minor role, I will argue that the Falling Man epitomizes the objectification of the body by resembling the impact of medicine on perception. Although my aim in this section is to draw a connection between medical perception and the Falling Man, it is not in any way an attempt to overlook the story behind this image. The Falling Man in the novel re-enacts the falling of a man from the twin towers on September 11. The man was captured in a photograph taken

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<sup>217</sup> Boxall argues that when Keith recalls the levitation of ceilings and floors while doing his wrist exercises, the memory is "recreated but in slow motion, in a gestural meditation that works back to the event, that holds the event open, feeling for the possibilities of gentle convergence, in the violent coming together of plane and building." *Terrorism, Media, and The Ethics of Fiction* 181.

<sup>218</sup> Kauffman 4.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

by Richard Drew for the Associated Press, and the photograph received a lot of attention. After being used by the Associated Press, it was also printed in many newspapers in America and the world. Aaron Mauro describes the controversy that surrounded the publication of this image:

Due to the ensuing public outrage directed toward editors for what was deemed an obscene representation of a man's death, many newspapers were forced to issue apologies and refrain from publishing the image or images like it. Although the photograph continues to appear in other contexts—most notably in Tom Junod's 2003 *Esquire* article simply called "The Falling Man" and the 2006 documentary *9/11: The Falling Man* directed by Henry Singer—the image remains highly taboo within the mainstream media and continues to evoke questions regarding the limits of representation and history: is it possible to accommodate the brief emergence in the print media of such an image within official history? If this photograph attains the status of official history, how will it be possible to understand this image as an aesthetic object alongside the horrifying certainty of this man's death?<sup>220</sup>

The Falling Man certainly embodies a traumatic moment. To take this analysis further, the Falling Man also exemplifies what Luckhurst refers to as an "intrusive image."<sup>221</sup> He appears suddenly performing shocking poses. The image of a man falling instantly brings to mind the victims of September 11, a tragic moment in the past that suddenly becomes present. His performance is similar to an unbidden flashback "that abolishes time and reimmerses [the spectator] in the visual field of the inaugurating traumatic instant."<sup>222</sup>

However, there is more to the Falling Man than being an unbidden flashback.<sup>223</sup> The description of the Falling Man reflects a significant connection between the performance arts

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<sup>220</sup> Aaron Mauro, "The Languishing of the Falling Man: Don DeLillo and Jonathan Safran Foer's Photographic History of 9/11," *MSF* 57.3 (2011): 587.

<sup>221</sup> Luckhurst 148.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>223</sup> Boxall comments on the effect that the suspension of the body has on the narrative: "The narrative attention to bodily detail, to the angles that bodies make to floor and ceiling, produces a kind of suspension in the

and the manner in which modern medicine attempts to rewrite the body. The Falling Man is symbolic of the internalised medical gaze; his body is a “puppetry of human desperation”<sup>224</sup> that holds the “gaze of the world.”<sup>225</sup> His impact is very similar to the effect that body exhibitions of anatomical models has on spectators.

A medical doctor and researcher, Gunther von Hagens, created a large exhibition of plastinated human corpses, entitled *Körperwelten*, Body Worlds. According to von Hagens, one of the purposes of this exhibition is to present the inside of the body in an attempt to make the spectator aware of his or her physical nature.<sup>226</sup> When Koppers visited the exhibition, she described her experience as an oscillation between different registers that the body before her signified: “a corpse, a dead person, a map, a signifier that signified [her] own body or some conception of the ‘general’ body.”<sup>227</sup>

I find it important to read the Falling Man’s performance through these different registers. For Lianne, the most difficult part of being near the Falling Man is the stillness of his body. Moreover, the Falling Man makes her aware of her own body. On the one hand, the Falling Man resembles the specific death of the September eleven victims who were forced to jump from the towers; on the other hand, the Falling Man signifies a body, a ‘general’ body that Lianne and other spectators can relate to. The Falling Man is essentially a motionless body open to the gaze:

Traffic was barely moving now. There were people shouting up at him, outraged at the spectacle [...] a body’s last fleet breath and what it held. It held the gaze of the world, she thought. There was an awful openness of it, something we’d not seen, the

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narrative, a restorative lightness made from slowness, from mantric repetition, from counting out seconds, and ritual movements. It recalls that Beckettian mathematical concentration on bodily placement in DeLillo’s earlier fiction,” *Terrorism, Media, and the Ethics of Fiction* 181.

<sup>224</sup> *Falling Man* 168.

<sup>225</sup> *Falling Man* 167.

<sup>226</sup> Gunther von Hagens, “Körperwelten: Fascination beneath the Surface” *Heidelberg Institute for Plastination* 2001 (31-32).

<sup>227</sup> Koppers 36.

single falling figure that trails a collective dread, body come down among us all. And now, she thought, this little theater piece, disturbing enough to stop traffic and send her back into the terminal.<sup>228</sup>

Lianne notices another man equally intrigued by the spectacle. The man who was watching the Falling Man “seemed to be in a pose of his own, attached to his spot for half a lifetime, one papery hand clutching his bicycle wheel.”<sup>229</sup> The man was “seeing something elaborately different from what he encountered step by step in the ordinary run of hours.”<sup>230</sup> The Falling Man has a significant effect on Lianne as well. After seeing this suspended body, Lianne becomes more aware of her own body. When Lianne starts running directly after this encounter, she feels exhausted and breathes heavily, although the narrator tells us that when she runs in the mornings she never feels this drained and wasted.<sup>231</sup> Thus, DeLillo seems to suggest that seeing a body in certain striking circumstances may lead to a heightened awareness of one’s own body. By presenting us with characters that are highly aware of their corporeality as well as the importance of surrounding medical technology, DeLillo certainly depicts the world we live in. With increasing access to medical knowledge through various means, particularly the internet, we are no longer distanced from ‘knowing’ about ourselves, even without consulting a practitioner.

Thus, Boxall’s reading of *Falling Man* can be expanded to encompass medical perception. The “suspension of the narrative,”<sup>232</sup> is one that invites a Foucauldian gaze. This is not a body that one merely sees in passing. This is a body that must be observed. It is a body subject to close inspection, the medical gaze of the world:

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<sup>228</sup> *Falling Man* 168

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> *Falling Man* 169.

<sup>232</sup> Boxall, *Terrorism, Media* 181.



The jolting end of the fall left him upside-down, secured to the harness, twenty feet above the pavement. The jolt, the sort of midair impact and bounce, the recoil, and now the stillness, arms at his sides, one leg bent at the knee. There was something awful about the stylized pose, body and limbs, his signature stroke. But the worst of it was the stillness itself and her nearness to the man, her position here, with no one closer to him than she was. She could have spoken to him but that was another plane of being, beyond reach. He remained motionless, with the train still running in a blur in her mind and the echoing deluge of sound falling about him, blood rushing to his head, away from hers.<sup>233</sup>

Though both *Cosmopolis* and *Falling Man* include various examples of instances where the individual becomes disembodied, DeLillo does not imply that disembodiment is the future. DeLillo presents ‘medical’ attempts to disembody the individual, only to show that in fact this disembodiment is not possible. DeLillo refuses the idea that medical technology can actually disembody; the hospital is certainly a place for representation and imaging technologies do present us with representations of our bodies. However, the body does not lose its corporeality. The body, with its own cognition, subverts any attempt to shred its materiality, for pain and bodily secretions defy representation. Any dream of attaining a disembodied state is challenged by the inside of the body, particularly considering that what is inside and invisible can easily permeate the skin and collapse the boundaries between the inside and the outside. DeLillo’s fiction suggests that these boundaries lead us to mistakenly believe that the body is knowable and predictable, only until what lays beneath the surface collapses these deceptive borders.

Finally, *Point Omega*, DeLillo’s most recent text, epitomizes the idea that perception is embodied. Unlike Michiko Kakutani who argues that DeLillo’s ingenious style in *Point Omega* cannot compensate for the “author’s uncharacteristically simplistic portrait of its

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<sup>233</sup> *Falling Man* 169.

hero,”<sup>234</sup> I find that DeLillo’s Beckettian prose, that Kakutani also acknowledges, is intentionally crafted to provide a kind of dénouement to DeLillo’s works.<sup>235</sup> However, it is not surprising for critics to address DeLillo’s shorter works with such reservations; an example of this is DeLillo’s *The Day Room* (1987) which was criticized by Frank Rich, the American award-winning *New York Times* columnist, who argued that the play seemed to be “‘One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest’ as it might be rewritten by a pretentious undergraduate who has just completed the midterm, if not all the required reading, for a survey course in the works of Pirandello, Beckett and Stoppard.”<sup>236</sup> While I disagree with Rich and Kakutani’s negative criticism of DeLillo’s shorter fiction, *Point Omega*’s language, style, and scope is certainly far less complex than *Underworld* or even *White Noise*.<sup>237</sup>

In *Point Omega*, DeLillo enhances his perspective on vision by framing the novel in a film experience and depicting characters that are conscious of the objectification of vision in a manner that surpasses any of the characters in his previous novels. The prelude and coda are set in a 2006 video gallery in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The gallery shows Douglas Gordon’s experimental film *24 hour Psycho* (1960). Gordon removes the soundtrack from Hitchcock’s *Psycho* and creates a twenty-four hour film from the original 109-minute film. Gordon’s film, while boring some of the audience, invites others to question the act of ‘watching.’ In other words, the experiment “transforms Hitchcock’s movie into a kind of video sculpture to be walked around, studied, mulled over, even as that sculpture

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<sup>234</sup> Michiko Kakutani, rev. of *Point Omega* by Don DeLillo, 2 March 2010, *New York Times Online*.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Frank Rich, “Theater: Don DeLillo’s ‘Day Room,’” 21 Dec 1987, *The New York Times*, web.

<sup>237</sup> Richard Grey includes *Point Omega* in his analysis of American literature since 9/11. He makes an insightful point regarding the change in the structure and form of language: “What was remarkable, and arguably unique, about the response of American writers to the crisis of 9/11 was that it reignited their interest in a paradox that lies at the heart of writing at least since the time of Romanticism: the speaking of silence, the search for verbal forms that reach beyond the condition of words, the telling of a tale that cannot yet must be told.” *After the Fall: American Literature since 9/11* (Blackwell: Oxford, 2011) 14.

explores the nature of the cinematic experience and perception.”<sup>238</sup> It is precisely this transformation that allows a prolonged and close viewing of the film. For instance, the famous shower scene, originally 45 seconds, takes a whole hour in Gordon’s version.

DeLillo has acknowledged the importance of time and memory in *24-hour Psycho*, and critics have addressed these topics in reviews and articles on the novel. While both aspects, time and memory, are significant, vision is an aspect that is especially important. Commenting on his experience at the museum gallery, DeLillo said he “went back four times, and by the third time [he] knew this was something [he] had to write about.”<sup>239</sup> DeLillo also noted that he was alone most of the time with the exception of a guard and a few people who came and left quickly.<sup>240</sup> He found the film particularly interesting when considering “the idea of time and motion and the question of what we see, what we miss when we look at things in a conventional manner.”<sup>241</sup> Throughout his fiction, DeLillo has questioned the claimed excellence of the sense of sight, an idea that is deeply rooted in history; Ancient Greek philosophers, including Aristotle, considered sight to be the most excellent and noble of the senses. However, it did not take long for scientists to note the limitations of sight and opt for technologies that could enhance the eye’s capacity. Foregrounding visual and medical technologies, DeLillo has explored, not only the limitations of sight, but also the human desire to see beyond the surface, to delve within depths that require more than the conventional manner of seeing.

In the previous sections, I attempted to draw attention to how the body in *Falling Man* becomes subject to the gaze of the world, and in turn, medical perception moves beyond the hospital. Characters internalize that mode of seeing, a mode that is foregrounded by what

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<sup>238</sup>DeLillo in Rich.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

Boxall refers to as the suspension of narrative. In *Point Omega*, a similar mode of seeing is present. The collapse between the boundaries of inside and outside becomes increasingly evident as the whole narrative becomes cinematic and the line between human and cinematic perception is obscured. In other words, slow-motion, a technique associated with cinema, is integrated with the most mundane moments of the characters' lives. All bodily actions seem slowed down. This, again, relates DeLillo to Beckett's work. Russel Smith argues that Beckett portrays a relentless sequence of ordinary moments in which any transcendent moment or possibility of attaining closure is substituted with another moment or eliminated altogether.<sup>242</sup> Beckett makes us perceive the passing of time "in all its painful, meaningless dullness."<sup>243</sup> DeLillo portrays time in precisely the same manner, a series of ordinary and often meaningless moments; however, these are the moments that constitute life. For instance, when Finley gives Elster a haircut, the haircut is narrated in minute detail. The narrator lists the movements and actions of the haircut, allowing the reader to pause at what would otherwise be an ordinary moment. The narrator becomes a camera zooming-in to magnify Elster's head movements- turning, repositioning, and tilting, as Finley's scissors continue cutting, combing out and cutting.

What we find in these moments is that DeLillo exhausts the act by continuous repetition. Deleuze defines the four ways of exhausting the possible as, "forming exhaustive series of things, drying up the flow of voices, extenuating potentialities of space, and dissipating the power of the image."<sup>244</sup> In *Point Omega*, we find other examples of these ways of exhaustion. For instance, there are examples of exhaustive series and characters exhausting language and falling into silence. Though the series are not as long as the ones

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<sup>242</sup> Russel Smith, "Beckett's Endlessness: Rewriting Modernity and the Postmodern Sublime," *After Beckett* (London: Rodopi, 2004) 413.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Deleuze 161.

found in Beckett, they nevertheless reflect the idea of an exhausted person who is, as Deleuze describes, “obliged to replace his plans with tables and programs that are devoid of all meaning.”<sup>245</sup> However, they are also, similar to the example of Elster’s haircut, a means of slowing-down the narrative and drawing attention to bodily movement. When Finley randomly picks up two hand weights several times in the novel, the description reflects an exhaustion:

How long have they been there? How did they get there? Who used them? He started using them now, lifting and breathing, lifting and gasping, one arm, then other, up and down, sounding like a man in the midst of controlled strangulation, autocratically asphyxiating.<sup>246</sup>

The exhaustion reflected in this example functions on two levels, the corporeal and the combinatorial.<sup>247</sup> The words “strangulation,” “breathing,” “gasping,” and “autocratic asphyxiation” reflect the deep involvement of the body, while the word ‘control’ highlights the attempt to have power over the body. Moreover, in the midst of the body’s exhaustion, Finley attempts to exhaust the possible ways of weightlifting, while incorporating the body’s response- “up and down, lifting and breathing, lifting and gasping.”<sup>248</sup> In another example, Finley lifts the handweights “one at a time, then both at once, twenty reps one way, ten the other, lifting and counting, on and on.”<sup>249</sup> Finley’s life in the desert begins to be based on these series:

What did I do? I filled the styrofoam cooler with bags of ice and bottles of water and took aimless drives, listening to tapes of blues singers. I wrote a letter to my wife and then tried to decide whether to send it or tear it up or wait a couple of days and then

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<sup>245</sup> Deleuze 154.

<sup>246</sup> *Point Omega* 65

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

rewrite it and send it or tear it up. I tossed banana peels off the deck for animals to eat and I stopped counting the days since I'd arrived, somewhere around twenty-two.<sup>250</sup>

Finally, in another example, Finley's focus on his surrounding landscape also slows down the narrative. He observes his surroundings while driving; he notices the details of the landscape and spends "long moments looking." Finley describes the sky as "stretched taught between cliff edges, it was narrowed and lowered, that was the strange thing, the sky right there, scale the rocks and you can touch it."<sup>251</sup> The description reflects the weight and materiality that slow motion brings to an image; it is perhaps best described as the opposite of Baudrillard's experience as he speeds through the American desert; Baudrillard argues that "driving like this produces a kind of invisibility, transparency, or transversality in things, simply by emptying them out."<sup>252</sup> DeLillo, on the other hand, gives weight to the sky by giving it the properties of a tangible object that can be stretched, taught, and touched. Thus, DeLillo incorporates the effect of the cinematic slow-motion, allowing an interplay of the senses of sight and touch. While Pynchon uses lighting to frame his characters in cinematic contexts, DeLillo uses language to slow down the narrative, framing the characters in a slow-motion discourse.

I have given these examples to shed light the structure of the narrative. As mentioned previously, every ordinary moment is prolonged; this extension of the moment seems to occur so that we as readers, in DeLillo's words, "can delve" into this moment. It is necessary to pause here and ask a question; what does this tell us embodied vision? To answer this question, it is necessary to note that, in the novel, DeLillo addresses the connection between consciousness and vision, focusing particularly on how a human's ability to be conscious of

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<sup>250</sup> *Point Omega* 66.

<sup>251</sup> *Point Omega* 92.

<sup>252</sup> Baudrillard, *America* (1986; Verso: New York, 1998) 17.

the act of seeing affects his/her subjectivity. In this section, I will examine this connection between consciousness and sight, drawing upon recent theories on the pathologisation of vision. To begin this analysis, I will briefly consider Vivian Sobchack's essay "The Act of Being with One's Own Eyes," where Sobchack attempts to define the constitution and location of the viewing subject in the act of viewing.<sup>253</sup>

Without an act of viewing and a subject who knows itself reflexively as the locus and origin of viewing as an act, there could be no film and no 'film experience.' Thus, a description of the film experience as an experience of signification and communication calls for a reflexive turn away from the film as 'object' and toward the act of viewing and its existential implication of a body-subject: the viewer.<sup>254</sup>

In *Point Omega*, the characters exemplify this subjectivity; they are subjects who are aware of their act of viewing and thus objectify perception itself. In the prelude "Anonymity," we are introduced to an anonymous character that can be defined as a competent visual performer, who objectifies his act of vision. Sobchack describes humans as competent visual performers because they are "capable of seeing not only as *subjects* of consciousness but also of making our own acts of vision *objects* of consciousness."<sup>255</sup> The character who is watching is also being watched and is conscious of both acts simultaneously. As this anonymous man watches *24 hour Psycho*, he finds that the slightest camera motion creates a significant change in the image; he realizes that it is only the "closest watching that yielded this perception."<sup>256</sup> The viewer is aware that the nature of the film requires absolute attention, due to the film's "merciless pacing."<sup>257</sup> As he watches, he finds that "the less there

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<sup>253</sup> Sobchack, *Address of the Eye* 51.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Sobchack, *Address of the Eye* 52.

<sup>256</sup> *Point Omega* 5.

was to see, the harder he looked, the more he saw.”<sup>258</sup> He then thinks that this is the point of watching, “to see what’s here, finally, to look and to know you’re looking, to feel time passing, to be alive in what is happening in the smallest registers of motion.”<sup>259</sup> The man’s analysis of his visual experience echoes the surrealists’ perception of photography as a tool of revelation. When Lew and the Chums of Chance begin to examine their surroundings more closely, embodying the techniques of photographic surrealism, their field of vision starts to reveal figures and dimensions that were previously invisible. In *Point Omega*, nothing as monstrous as *Against the Day*’s serpent-like creature emerges through a viewing instrument; however, the novel provides the same emphasis on the possibilities that emerge from close watching that are found in Pynchon’s far more complex work.

The importance of looking closely is foregrounded in the man’s perception of the shower scene; the viewer knows that the shower scene was a brief one in the original movie, but the prolonged scene in Gordon’s version lacks “the suspense or dread or the urgent pulsing screech owl sound.”<sup>260</sup> However, the slow-motion intensifies the impact of the shower curtain rings spinning on the rod, “a moment lost at normal speed.”<sup>261</sup> The four curtain rings spin slowly over the fallen figure of Janet Leigh, “a stray poem above the hellish death, and then the bloody water curling and cresting at the shower drain, minute by minute, and eventually swirling down.”<sup>262</sup> The slow-motion reveals the limitations of everyday seeing; the man realizes that “it takes close attention, work, and pious effort, to see what you are looking at.”<sup>263</sup> This realization is mesmerizing, particularly when he ponders “the depths that were possible in the slowing of motion, the things to see, the depths of things so easy to

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<sup>260</sup> *Point Omega* 6.

<sup>261</sup> *Point Omega* 9.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> *Point Omega* 13.



miss in the shallow habit of seeing.”<sup>264</sup> As the man engages with the film’s slow-motion, he experiences the world through the ‘I’ of the viewing subject, a subject with a consciousness that is aware of its own act of seeing. This is especially evident when the man is highly conscious of his situation as a viewer:

The film made him feel like someone watching a film. The meaning of this escaped him. He kept feeling things whose meaning escaped him. Bu this wasn’t truly film, was it, in the strict sense. It was videotape. But it was also film. In the broader meaning he was watching a film, a movie, a more or less moving picture.<sup>265</sup>

Throughout the novel, the repeated references to the experience of watching resonates Sobchack’s concept of the objectification of vision.<sup>266</sup> One can read this as a significant development in the characters across DeLillo’s oeuvre. The skeptical and often confused Jack Gladney and the more analytical Eric Packer are preceded by characters who become increasingly conscious of their phenomenological experiences and more capable of evaluating these experiences.

In addition to being conscious of the objectification of vision, DeLillo portrays consciousness as embodied, interacting through movement in the world. Though the prelude is only fifteen pages, and takes place in the space of a gallery, this space and action suffices to reflect the characters’ bodily engagement with the world, as embodied consciousness.<sup>267</sup> Sobchack argues that the condition of being conscious of the world is being a consciousness in it and sharing the materiality that gives consciousness its objects and its subjective being. This means that the theoretical and static categories of time and space associated with a transcendental consciousness are in contrast to the material, dynamic, and meaningful

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<sup>264</sup> *Point Omega* 11.

<sup>265</sup> *Point Omega* 11.

<sup>266</sup> Sobchack 59.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*

categories that define the existential consciousness.<sup>268</sup> The embodied consciousness requires movement in the world, a desire that is satisfied by the lived-body's power of movement.<sup>269</sup> Thus, the body's finitude and situation and power of movement transforms the abstractions of time and space, "informing them with the weight of choice and the thickness of movement, with *value* and *dimension*."<sup>270</sup> As noted previously, when man watches Perkins turning his head, he could "count the gradation in the movement of the head."<sup>271</sup> Perkin's body movement reflects the thickness of movement, movement that is so concrete that it is countable. Moreover, as the man watches *24 Hour Psycho*, he moves around the screen, experiencing the film from different angles. First, he approaches the screen and stands "about a foot away, seeing snatches and staticky fragments, flurries of trembling light."<sup>272</sup> He then walks around the screen several times and walks backwards looking at the screen. Since the gallery was empty, "he was able to stand at various angles and points of separation."<sup>273</sup> Movement is necessary because, according to Sobchack, consciousness is not a transcendental structure. Additionally, according to Mary Rose Barral, "consciousness is a way of being; to be conscious is to communicate with the world and with others, to be with and not merely alongside things or others as exterior objects."<sup>274</sup> Thus, our manner of sensing our body is inextricably related to the "condition which situates the body-subject as well as the related exterior objects in a certain place and at a certain time."<sup>275</sup>

Moreover, the significance of the body is enhanced by the slow motion. Though the pace is unrealistically slow, the man feels that the film is paradoxically real:

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<sup>268</sup> Sobchack, *Address of the Eye* 59.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> *Point Omega* 6.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Mary Rose Barral in Sobchack *The Address of the Eye* 64.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

It felt real, the pace was paradoxically real, bodies moving musically, barely moving, twelve-tone, things barely happening, cause and effect so drastically drawn apart that it seemed real to him, the way all the things in the physical world that we don't understand are said to be real.<sup>276</sup>

Perhaps what makes the film feel real to him is the thickness of movement; the movie seems real to the extent that he that he believes he could see himself with the actor's eyes, "or did the actor's eyes seem to be searching him out?"<sup>277</sup> Clearly the emphasis on 'seeing' in the novel is of great importance; however, it is not merely the 'seeing' that is important, but that the characters are conscious of the act of seeing. DeLillo uses the objectification of vision to reflect another theme that is prominent across his fiction, namely the interplay of the senses. According to Benjamin Bigelow, the film experience is tactile, "it hit[s] the spectator like a bullet, it happen[s] to him, thus acquiring a tactile quality."<sup>278</sup> In *The Cinematic Body*, Steven Shaviro argues that the relationship between vision and gunfire is "more than just a metaphor."<sup>279</sup> Shaviro, similar to Sobchack, finds that critics have reduced the cinematic experience to the sense of sight, neglecting the basic tactility and viscosity of the experience.<sup>280</sup> Cinema creates effects within the viewer as opposed to simply showing phantasmic reflections. Thus, the viewer is "drawn into the fragmented materiality and 'depth without depth' of the image."<sup>281</sup>

DeLillo's choice of words implies an interplay of the senses which highlights the tactile quality of the man's visual experience. As the man enters the dark gallery to view the

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<sup>276</sup> *Point Omega* 15.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

<sup>278</sup> Bigelow 14.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Shaviro 14.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

film, he “wants to bathe in the tempo, in the near static rhythm of the image.”<sup>282</sup> The word “bathe,”<sup>283</sup> used to imply immersion, also reflects an embodied experience, one where the man’s whole body reacts to the viewing. The man wonders if the woman next to him could sense the drama of the sense through his body. He tries to “believe that the tension in his body alerted her to the drama of the scene.”<sup>284</sup> He believes that she would “sense it, next to him.”<sup>285</sup> The connection between vision and immersion becomes even clearer as the man ponders the definition of “complete immersion.”<sup>286</sup> He realizes that it means that he “wants the film to move even more slowly, requiring deeper involvement of eye and mind, always that, the thing he sees tunneling into the blood, the dense sensation, sharing consciousness with him.”<sup>287</sup> The man equates slow-motion with deep, corporeal involvement with the moving image. DeLillo materializes the act of vision, allowing the object of vision to become a thing felt in the blood. Moreover, the man engages with the film as though the film were a lived-body itself, “thinking” and “spilling” into him, and sharing his consciousness:

Such second thoughts go on and on and the situation intensified the process, being here, watching and thinking for hours, standing and watching, thinking into the film, into himself. Or was the film thinking into him, spilling through him like some kind of runaway brain fluid?

Once again, Sobchack’s criticism is illuminating in this context; DeLillo presents film as a ‘being,’ in itself, corporeally engaging with the viewer. According to Sobchack, a film possesses its own being in that it behaves. It is different from the hole or vacancy in temporality of a still photograph, because its movement creates dimension to the flat space of

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<sup>282</sup> *Point Omega* 115.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

a still photograph. Thus, there is no abstraction of point of view, instead, “there is a specific and mobile engagement of embodied and enworlded subjects/objects.”<sup>288</sup> Sobchack describes this perspective as a trend in film-theory; theorists describe the cinematic experience as so powerful and transforming that it leads us to thinking of film as “itself constituting a kind of body.”<sup>289</sup> Thus, the description of film sharing consciousness with the man and spilling through him reflects DeLillo’s portrayal of the intensity of the experience, but also of film itself representing a kind of body.

The film experience is often foregrounded in postmodern fiction as a way of defining how cinematic technology affects human perception. Previously, I discussed how cinematic techniques become embedded in Pynchon’s fiction as characters morph even when no cinematic context is explicitly mentioned. By incorporating such techniques in the text, Pynchon not only portrays body modifications that resemble digital imaging techniques, but also the blurred boundary between what is ‘cinematic’ and what is real. *Point Omega* adds another dimension to this blurred boundary by questioning the ‘physical’ boundary of the cinema screen; at times, as the character engages with the film, the screen is forgotten and it seems that there is no boundary between the character and the actors on film. There are several direct references to the screen; for instance, the man focuses his eyes and feels that he wants to guard the screen. The children next to the man are described as “three bright objects, ages maybe eight to ten, gathering light from the screen, where lurid death was being scratched out in microseconds.”<sup>290</sup>

More importantly, the man starts to think of ways of controlling what is behind the screen, “imagining all motion stopping on the screen, the image beginning to shudder and

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<sup>288</sup> Sobchack, *Address of the Eye* 62.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> *Point Omega* 105.

fade.”<sup>291</sup> He wants things to happen even more slowly and finally separates himself from the wall and “waits to be assimilated, pore by pore, to dissolve into the figure of Norman Bates, who will come into the house and walk up the stairs in subliminal time, two frames per second, and then toward the door of Mother’s Room.”<sup>292</sup> Suddenly the man and Norman Bates, the movie’s central character, become one, and the man, or Norman Bates, sits next to his mother in her room. In the final lines of the novel, the screen has completely dissolved and the man has at least imaginary control over what was once behind the screen.

According to Connor, the technological development of the cinema screen may have more than the simple function of the *fascinum*, “to capture and make safe the power of the oral eye.”<sup>293</sup> Connor argues that there may be something more disturbing about the future of these screens; for example, screen developments such as the touch screens and screens activated by eye-movement “make looking and wishing into a kind of touching.”<sup>294</sup> Thus, Connor imagines a future where we will have moved into such intimate contact with our screens that “we will have taken them in to us, so that they lie sunk beneath our surface.”<sup>295</sup> In *Point Omega*, DeLillo seems to be anticipating a similar future, where the screen which initially served as capturing and making the eye safe, “will have eaten us up.”<sup>296</sup> This is especially similar to Pynchon’s perspective in *Against the Day* and *Gravity’s Rainbow*; in both novels, technology pervades the characters and the characters embody technology.

To conclude this section, it is necessary to make one final connection between *Point Omega*, *Falling Man*, and *Cosmopolis*. Abel suggests that after September 11, DeLillo’s focus turns to vision itself, and this is clear in all three texts. As discussed previously, Freud

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<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Connor “Screens.”

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

asserts that medical imaging technology fragments the body, an assertion that is especially relevant to the example where Eric scans Jane's body with his gaze. What becomes evident is that Eric internalizes the perspective of medical imaging technology. Moreover, in *Falling Man*, Lianne's gaze fragments the Falling Man's body, another instance where the act of seeing subjects the body to medical investigation. This fragmentation is mirrored in the slow-motion technique of *Point Omega* as every moment is prolonged in a manner that exhausts the body and its functions. Through the language's minute details and repetition, our attention is drawn, not only to the characters' objects of perception, but more importantly to the objectification of vision. We are lead to infer that the characters of the three novels have moved the medical gaze beyond the confines of the hospital. Cinematic techniques and medical technology are inextricably interwoven with human perception; in other words, for DeLillo, everything is connected.

## CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I attempted to foreground the importance of the body in Pynchon and DeLillo's fiction. Pynchon and DeLillo can be read through phenomenological perspectives that relate their work to Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, and Sobchack; yet, these critics have not been examined in the existing body of criticism. Instead of avoiding technology or the concept of disembodiment altogether, as several critics have chosen to do, I acknowledge that the way back to sensory perception in the work of both authors can only be attained through a redefinition of the connection between the human and the technological. There is no doubt that the spiritual and the disembodied have a prominent place in the novels; however, I suggest that these references may initially appear to overshadow a far more embodied view of the body. Thus, as my thesis has tried to show, it is necessary to juxtapose these instances with other corporeal examples to form a more comprehensive understanding of the authors.

For Pynchon, the body is not an autonomous, stable entity that separates us from the world; its capacity for change and its inherent monstrosity subverts the divide between the interior and the exterior. Moreover, this implies that the technologies that are often seen as an opposition to the human, exhibiting an otherness, are actually inherently connected to the human body; thus, the body is already prosthetic. Even the modern technique of digital morphing is simply a mirror to the body's fluidity. If Blicero and Katje are examples of effortless shape-shifting, then Esther and Godolphin are reminders that beneath the effortless transformations is a body in pain.

Moreover, Pynchon and DeLillo's interest in the embodied nature of perception is evident in the particular attention that is given to the senses. For Pynchon and DeLillo, the senses of sight and hearing, often associated with immateriality and detachment from the world, are in fact gateways to the world, challenging the subject-object divide that separates



the body from the perceived object. Pynchon uses surrealism to explore this connection, drawing attention to how the fallible nature of the corporeal eye affects the characters' perception and obscures the boundary between empirical and imaginative vision. Additionally, to foreground the materiality of visual perception, Pynchon examines techniques such as bilocation and light refraction to off-set the seemingly inhuman and impassive gaze of the camera. While Pynchon uses this aesthetic approach to vision and visual technology, DeLillo is more interested in how medical technology reconfigures the body and how this impacts the characters' sensory perception. Reading *Cosmopolis* and *Falling Man* as a dialogue with Sartre, I suggest that in the midst of the technologically-mediated society and its alienating effects, the characters attempt to comprehend their ontological modes of being. Through these attempts, DeLillo foregrounds the significance of embodiment.

Focusing on voice and hearing in DeLillo's fiction, I find that DeLillo suggests that there is an inherent connection between the mechanisms of voice production and hearing and vibroacoustic technologies. While critics have repeatedly noted the difference between the 'human' voice and the 'prosthetic' voice in DeLillo's fiction, they have not considered the possibility that both are intrinsically connected. I argue that the instability of the human voice in *Underworld*, *The Body Artist*, and *White Noise* means that it is already prosthetic and makes the boundary between the human and the technological problematic. Moreover, by examining the tangible effect that the sound of voice has on the characters, I suggest that hearing is highly corporeal. DeLillo's *Point Omega* highlights most of these aspect of embodiment. By using a slow-motion narrative that emphasizes the thickness of movement, DeLillo portrays consciousness as always embodied.

Pynchon and DeLillo support a significant perspective on the body that involves a chaos and a unity of the senses. Rejecting all binary oppositions that divide the subject from the world or separate one sense from the other, the body is the characters' means of engaging with the world, and similar to Merleau-Ponty's theorization of the body, the body is integral to perception. By emphasizing this point in the thesis, I have shown that the body, throughout DeLillo and Pynchon's fiction, plays a prominent role. While recent criticism has certainly acknowledged the significance of embodiment in DeLillo's fiction, critics who explore the issue have focused more on the descriptions of the body and how they relate to the thematic concerns of the texts, as opposed to how the texts reflect the basic components of phenomenology. Even when critics seem closer to examining phenomenological theory, such as Abel's insightful essay, theorists such as Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Sobchack, and Connor are not properly integrated into their discussions. Moreover, since DeLillo and Pynchon are often referred to as postmodern, this means that the work regarding postmodernism itself needs to be reconsidered. I have attempted to consider this angle of postmodernism in terms of the specific nature of Pynchon and DeLillo's influential fictions but I would also suggest that this methodology must be applied further: it may be the only way to redeem the betrayed body.

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